

# The Berwick Civic Society

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Website: [www.berwickcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.berwickcivicsociety.org.uk)

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BERWICK-UPON-TWEED  
CIVIC SOCIETY



# WINTER NEWSLETTER

2022



**Tea for the HOD's mascot,  
Bari Bear in The Main Guard**

## Contents

From the Chairman . . . . .	1
Hon. Secretary's Report . . . . .	2
Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary's Report. . . . .	3
Planning and development news. . . . .	4
Ness Gate Hotel . . . . .	5
Recent talks and events: reports . . . . .	6
Future talks and events: programme. . . . .	13
More than “an elegant accomplishment” . . . . .	22
School awards . . . . .	inside back cover
In Memoriam . . . . .	inside back cover

**Cover Photo by Tommy McLeod**

## School Awards



*Zoreen with Charlotte Craze*

During the summer our School Awards were presented to pupils who have given a great deal to community in progress well in their studies.

On Thursday, 30th June, Anne Humphrey and Zoreen Hill attended a lovely Longridge Towers School Founders Day and Prize Giving. Charlotte Craze received our Award.

Then on Monday, 18th July. Zoreen was joined by Sandra Gann to present our Prize to Tallulah Clarke at Berwick Academy on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, 20th July, Layton Laws was awarded at Engage, the excellent alternative-education provider.

All the recipients were charming young people who really deserved their recognition and seemed set for successful futures.

## In Memoriam

### Professor Michael Wright

We were very saddened by the sudden death of Professor Michael Wright in the summer. This was the result of head injuries sustained when he fell, walking.

Michael had become an important part of the local community with key roles in Berwick's Literary Festival and other societies and choirs.

This was after a distinguished career in higher education with his Christian faith being central to his entire life. Amongst other prestigious appointments, he had been Principal of Christ Church College, Canterbury and Assistant Principal of Napier University, Edinburgh. He was posthumously honoured by the Archbishop of Canterbury with the cross of St Augustine.

Michael had been a long-standing member of The Civic Society and was a regular steward in The Main Guard. He also took part in one of our 'Question Time' sessions.

To his widow Pamela and family, we extend much sympathy.

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Hello Members,

This has been a momentous year for the Country with the death of our much-loved monarch, Queen Elizabeth II on the 8th September and the succession of King Charles III.

The Civic Society has marked these events at The Main Guard with the lowering and raising of the flag - this was conducted, as usual, by Scoutmaster, Paul Marshall to whom we are very grateful.

Prior to her death, there was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and on 26th May we held a celebratory party in The Main Guard which was very successful and well attended. Guests included The Mayor, Cllr Mike Greener and his civic party - also the High Sheriff of Northumberland, James Royds.

The Planning and Development Committee continues under the expert chairmanship of Brian Gowthorpe. His informed, planning reports and other work have been very well received and appreciated.

In Events and Promotions, there have been a wide variety of interesting talks since May - reports by Brian Gowthorpe and Sandra Gann appear later in this newsletter.

The Hon. Secretary Anne Humphrey, the Executive and all the Committees have been very busy and I am extremely grateful for all their support.

We have a number of new members who I hope will get involved in the work of the Society.

The Christmas party on 7th December has been advertised in advance this year and promises to be a very enjoyable occasion. I hope to see many of you there.

## THE MAIN GUARD

The Summer Exhibition in The Main Guard was on 'Royal Berwick', which, of course, was very appropriate this year. I have never seen such favourable comments in the visitors' book. The displays were enhanced by items on loan from The Berwick Museum, The Town Hall Museum, The KOSB Museum and other contributors. We were very grateful to members who coordinated rosters and those who acted as stewards. The exhibition could not have been run without them and a small drinks party was held on 1st October to show our appreciation to them.



*Main Guard Stewards*

The Main Guard also featured in the HODs event in September. Siobhan Bankier's HODs report follows features later.

Bari Bear, the mascot for the HODs event visited The Main Guard on two occasions - the first for tea with friends and later a session, featuring the military drums. The illuminated lamb and sheep also paid a visit.

**Zoreen Hill**

# HON SECRETARY'S REPORT

We have had a very busy Summer and it has kept me on my toes! Once again, I have thoroughly enjoyed corresponding and meeting a lot of our members and I hope that I have dealt with your queries and questions satisfactorily.

I would like to add my grateful thanks to the small number of volunteers that stewarded over the summer months at The Main Guard, the comments in the Visitors Book says it all, WELL DONE. I would especially like to thank Bob Steward and Sandra Gann, without them we would not have had the success that we achieved. I soon realised the four main questions asked were not nothing to do with the history of Berwick, although I learnt quite a bit!

“Where is the nearest loo?” “Is this the Visitor’s Centre?”

“How far is the station?” “Where are The Barracks?”

A huge thank you must go to Zoreen, who works so tirelessly for the Civic Society and gives so much of her time. On 14th December Zoreen will be celebrating a very special birthday and I am sure we all wish her a very Happy Birthday.

We have had a number of new members join and I do hope that you enjoy being a member and hopefully wish to participate, our gratitude must go to our new members who are already taking an active role.

The historic town map is making very slow progress with respect to fund raising and I would be grateful for any help/assistance/guidance is getting to our target.

The Events team have been busy and we seemed to have formed an unintentional catering team. To those who have made donations towards the food and wine this year, thank you. This has gone a long way to covering the costs of the monthly talks.

Thank you to Bryan and Suzanne Stanley for kindly agreeing to compiling the newsletter, no easy task.

If I have missed anyone out my apologies, thank you to everyone who has given up their free time and money to help the Civic Society.

I wish you all the peace and blessings at Christmas with hope for the New Year.

**Ann Humphrey**



*Visitors to the Main Guard*

## HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer's role is very much behind the scenes, making sure that bills are paid and money is banked. Thankfully the only thing this year which I could call unexpected has been an ongoing 'discussion' with Scottish Power about electricity for the Main Guard. I know that I am far from alone in not being impressed with them! Hopefully this will be resolved in the near future.

We continue to make donations to other local organisations to help them with their work and events. This year we have made donations to the Berwick Beer & Food Festival, and to the Churches Together Christmas Presence and Warm Space. We also recognise outstanding achievement at local schools, making awards to students at Longridge Towers, Berwick Academy and Engage.

The Society's finances remain relatively healthy, and now that we have been able to open the Main Guard for the whole summer and have regular meetings / talks these are bringing income into the Society. The Main Guard itself brought in £870, with the daily average number of visitors back to pre-pandemic levels.

Wishing you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.

**Bob Humphrey**

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

It is very pleasing to report that during 2022 we have seen a steady flow of new members, with 16 joining so far this year. There is not a single reason behind people joining of course, but it is noticeable that people join around the time of our talks. The quality and variety of these talks are enjoyable in themselves, but also vital in encouraging new members. Don't forget that talks are open to non-members too, so please do let others know about them. Sadly, we saw three of our members pass away during the year.

As with all local organisations, it is our members who make the Society what it is. We are exceedingly grateful to all those who has helped during the year. Not just committee members, but Main Guard stewards, contributors to newsletters, helping with talks, the list goes on. So, if you think there is something you would like to do to help please let me or indeed any Exec member know.

We are rapidly approaching the new year, and subscriptions will become due on 1st January. Our administration system (Membermojo) will send out a reminder as always nearer the time. In many cases it will be nothing more than for your information - many of you have set up standing orders, so the payment will be sent to us by your bank automatically in January. However, if you do pay by bank transfer, cheque or cash, that is fine, and the email will tell you what you need to do. Subs remain the same as in 2022, namely £12 for a joint membership or £8 for a single.

Wishing you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.

**Bob Humphrey**

# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT NEWS

So far this year members of our committee have reviewed or are working on 41 planning applications in our three Conservation Areas. We have also made further comments on those outstanding from previous years, notably the proposed redevelopment of Spittal Quay and the Berwick Youth Project's plans to convert the former grammar school on Palace Street East.

We have an overview of most of the planning applications submitted in Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal. Sadly, the quality of very many applications is poor, failing to provide a good quality heritage, design and access statement and not building a strong case for approval. As in previous years, many of the applications relate to the replacement of traditional sash windows that are suffering from the impact of timber decay in cills and at the bottom of the lower sashes. Applicants imagine that installing new double-glazed replica windows will be welcomed, tidying up the Conservation



*Multiple issues*

Area and reducing carbon emissions. But this is a sensitive area of building conservation and Historic England's longstanding position is that all historic windows should be repaired and not replaced. This issue comes up time and again, leaving many building owners angry and disappointed. The Civic Society is preparing a short leaflet to explain the issues and we understand that Northumberland County Council plans to issue a more wide-ranging guidance note.

Other news includes our decision to provide a running record of applications that we have reviewed with summaries of our conclusions. This will be on the Society's website. Another major step forward is that Rob Murfin, Director of Planning at NCC, has agreed to adopt our 3-D digital model of Berwick as a pilot project for the authority. I explained the uses of the model in my last piece in the newsletter and we will let members know how this project develops. Finally, there has been much discussion this year about the apparent growth in the numbers of holiday homes and the impact on our town. NCC has provided some useful information and I am preparing a discussion paper for our committee. I will update members on our agreed stance in due course.

**Brian Gowthorpe,  
Chair, Planning & Development Committee**

# NESS GATE HOTEL AND THE MILLERS

Only faintly now, on the frontage of Marlborough House, at the end of Ness Street, can be made out the scuffed lettering 'Ness Gate Hotel'. It was a familiar part of the Berwick scene from 1960s to 1990s when its proprietors were Bruce and Joan Miller who hailed from Bolton. I never did discover what prompted a Lancashire engineer to come up to Berwick to be a hotelier.

They certainly put their heart into it, overdoing it at first. 'We did all sorts,' said Joan, 'even afternoon tea'. Later they sensibly scaled it back to B&B, though also doing occasional things such as wedding receptions. Keith and Issy Graham of the Albion Inn have fond recollections of theirs. Some of their guests stick in the memory. Jim Jenkinson, Master Mariner, after appointment as Harbour Master, stayed there for some time while looking for suitable housing and took us nightly voyaging round the world. Then they had a group of Swedish golfers, much impressed by the, to them, cheapness of alcohol, and took full advantage. Yet they were never any trouble: one man, collapsed, was carted off to bed with the laconic comment that 'his legs have gone'. By contrast, a lady with an inexhaustible demand for white wine after hours, had to be asked to move on. Then there was the man who spent his evenings in the bar writing his Christmas cards. There were a couple of long-term residents, young working men, one a butcher at Low's supermarket. With the other, a fierce Scottish Nationalist, care had to be taken in the bar to offer him only 'Scottish Bluebell' matches, not 'England's Glory'. Then there was the elderly man who plunged to his death off the pier who was thought to be some relation to the international arms dealer Zacharoff.

As the bar didn't have a public licence, regulars were few. There was a retired Durham railwayman who lived opposite. His son, a busy Shell executive, was only occasionally seen. One regular at the bar was Bill Benton who lived further down Ness Street. He worked for many years at Elders and wrote a book about it as well as being a staunch supporter of the British Legion, doing poppy-selling duty until advanced old age. Unwittingly, he inaugurated an annual celebration. The cause was his puzzling over an entry in a diary he'd been given at Christmas - 'Waitangi Day'. 'What is it?' he kept asking. His sustained musings were given effect the following year when he came into the bar to find Bruce's daughters wearing grass skirts and the place festooned with bunting. He was bemused. "Bill, have you forgotten? It's Waitangi Day!" It became an annual event with ever more elaborate costumes and displays.

Son David loved the Bandits but school meant little to him. Soon after leaving he decided to follow his father's earlier profession and within a surprisingly short time became a nuclear welder. Jackie, having grown up in a hotel, always wanted to work in one. As part of her training, she was sent down to Newcastle for a tutorial on the making of cocktails. At the end of the session the lady tutor

said; "Well, as we've made all these cocktails we might as well drink them." A good

course to be on. Joan’s father, Alf, came up with them and was quite a presence at the bar, alternately fulminating and laughing. “Grandad, you should be on tele!” once joked grand-daughter Tracey.

Around 1990 Bruce fashioned a new bar in what is now the front of Marlborough House. Before much longer the difficulties in running the place became considerable. The hotel had expanded down Ness Street in a rather rambling way and the costs of refurbishment and repair, along with all the Health and Safety requirements, were becoming prohibitive. It suffered too from a lack of parking. Nor did the Depression of the early 1990’s help. Bruce began the process of putting the property back into private houses.

Coincidentally all three of their children got jobs in Gloucestershire and so they decided to move down to Devon to be nearer to them. By that time Bruce was Berwick’s senior hotelier and often asked for advice by others in the same line. ‘Big-hearted’ Alf once said of Bruce. He was certainly that.

How do I know all this? I often used to stay at the Ness Gate during school holidays and that prompted my decision to come and live here - something I’ve never regretted.

**Michael Cullen**

## **RECENT TALKS AND EVENTS: REPORTS**

### **Berwick-upon-Tweed Heritage Open Days 2022**

For us on the Steering Committee, Berwick Heritage Open Days (HODs) always feels like a big event in the town’s calendar. Since the current team was established in 2018, we have tried to grow the event each year and we are proud to report that 2022 was our biggest and most successful event yet! Since January our team of nine worked closely together to arrange the festival, planning our most ambitious programme ever and introducing new events. We also welcomed two new members to the committee this year – Cameron Robertson and Helena Hughes. Most of you probably know Cameron from his photographic background, research into the history of the Cowe buildings and the Photo Centre Collection amongst other things. Helena is new to the area and after trying out HODs as a visitor and volunteer in 2021, thought she would give organising a go and has joined us as a volunteer coordinator. Both Helena and Cameron bring something new to the team and were integral to the success of this year’s event. We also lost one member of our team this year as Catherine Kent and her husband have relocated. We wish them all the best in Fife but her historical expertise is sorely missed.

HODs, like the rest of the world, have been affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic for



the last two years. In 2020 we were forced completely online and in 2021 we had a hybrid event, partly online and partly in person. We've continued this approach in 2022, but the ending of restrictions finally allowed us to step out of Covid's shadow and open as many in-person venues as we could. Overall, our 2022 programme consisted of 67 events between 9th and 18th September, including online talks, guided walks, open buildings, online videos and exhibitions. We also introduced several new events to the programme this year which all proved very popular. They included the Court House (former Council Offices in Wallace Green) and the Blackburn and Price Cellars on Silver Street, as well as a guided walk of the geology and history of Cocklawburn beach and an interactive tour of the gaol in the Town Hall.

Unfortunately, the lack of Covid did not mean the end of problems for the 2022 event. Instead, we were faced with another once-in-a-lifetime event – the death of Queen Elizabeth II. This was something that no one could have foreseen and the whole world struggled to comprehend. Like everyone else we too were faced with the issue of balancing the need to respect and commemorate Her Late Majesty with the desire to run a festival we had worked so hard to produce. We decided to go ahead with HODs as planned but several events were cancelled in light of the news - the opening of Berwick Lifeboat Station and Berwick Magistrate's Court - and we took the decision not to put out our trademark HODs pink bunting until the last minute and tempered it with black ribbon.

Despite the challenges that faced us during the festival it was an overwhelming success. We are incredibly proud to have welcomed over 12,000 visitors during the festival period, far more than in any previous year. Ten of our sites received over 500 visitors each and particularly busy attractions included the Town Hall (1,800), the Main Guard (920) and Berwick Visitor Centre (900). We are very pleased with these numbers and we hope we can build upon this success to create an even more popular event in 2023.

In addition to our in-person successes we also enjoyed our most successful year ever on social media. We began our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts back in 2019 and I have been in charge of them since 2022. In this time, we have quadrupled our Facebook followers, doubled our Twitter followers and our Instagram followers have increased by 80%. Throughout our social media campaign to promote Berwick HODs



2022 we reached over 160,000 views across these three platforms in the six weeks leading up to the event and during the festival itself. Once again these are some fantastic statistics that we are very proud of and hope to build on in the future. Our mascot, Bari Bear, who you will probably have seen on our posters, now has his own Instagram account and is becoming a recognisable face around town.

In February 2022 we applied to join the HODs 'New Wave Programme' run by the National Trust, aimed at increasing the engagement of 18–25-year-olds in the heritage industry by creating a HODs event in collaboration with them. We were one of 10 organisations chosen to participate out of 100 applicants and were the only voluntary organisation on the programme. Four online sessions conducted between March and July helped us learn about collaborating with this age group, as well as marketing our event and understanding how to learn from it. There was also a final session which I attended in London in October and finally got to meet the rest of the group in person.

For our New Wave event we worked with a group of four 18-year-olds, first holding a focus group then developing their ideas into an event and helping them to plan, organise and produce it. The outcome 'Crime Unlocked', an interactive tour held on Friday 16th and Sunday 18th September, which centred on four genuine criminal cases from 19th century Berwick. The tour began with a short video re-enactment of Grace Griffin's trial shown in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall, then the group was taken upstairs into the courtroom and asked to decide whether Grace was guilty or innocent. The group was then given time to explore the Gaol before being taken down to the stocks and then the Quayside, where the stories of three other individuals were told. This event was researched, written and presented by Niamh Bankier (HODs is becoming a bit of a family business) who had two sell-out events and achieved her target of 25% of the audience being in the 18 – 25 age group. We are all extremely proud of Niamh and her achievements, and we hope we can give other young people this opportunity in the future.

Overall, Berwick HODs 2022 was an overwhelming success which highlighted Berwick's wonderful and unique heritage. We are looking forward to next year already and the potential it holds. So, if you would like to help, get in touch and make sure 8th - 17th September 2023 is in your diary, as 2023 promises to be a year not to be missed!

**Siobhan Bankier**

## **Heritage Open Day Revelations**

Anyone wondering how villages and small towns could, in their heyday, support so many pubs, need only walk into The Free Trade on Castlegate in Berwick. It's tiny – you can't help but chat to your neighbours, or even the whole room. Back in an age of hot and thirsty manual industries you would indeed need at least one pub in every street to accommodate all comers. We visited this little gem during HODs weekend. As most Berwick residents know, The Free Trade is of interest also for its licensee,



*The Free Trade*

Brenda Collins. She and her late husband Eddie took on the pub in 1971, and there she still is, presiding over a friendly space for talking and drinking.

The building dates from 1767 and was Grade II listed in 1994. Historic England states the reason for listing as “a good Edwardian pub front” with “fascia board, glazed tiles and stained-glass windows” plus its ornate iron pub sign and the interior. Excitingly, it is little changed inside since 1910, and has a very rare panelled and glazed partition secured by curved iron braces, which creates a corridor from the entrance to a little off-sales counter and into a rear smoke room or snug (now a pool room). We gathered from the HOD guide that the partition was to preserve the modesty of women and save them from the ordeal of entering the bar (but for all

we know, it was a cunning male ploy to discourage women from entering what men regarded as their preserve). The bar room has panelled walls, an early 20th-century bar, a period fireplace with a hint of Art Nouveau, and two fitted wooden benches. The back room still has its bell-pushes and a covetable 1930s / 40s tile and brick fireplace. As for the Gents’ toilet - well, I suggest you visit it and see for yourself!

We also visited the converted Court House to see one of its four 4- and 5-bedroom townhouses. We note that the properties were marketed as “unrivalled luxury living in the heart of Berwick” retaining Grade II listed features. The building now looks beautiful externally, and it’s a great relief that it has a use, but we learned from the HOD guide that all four are holiday homes, which we think is rather sad. However, maybe a town of Berwick’s size can better assimilate second homes and holiday letting properties than our small coastal villages.



*Court House*

**Suzanne Stanley**

# Cocklawburn: More Than Meets The Eye!

Based on a visit on 24th May

Looking at the natural landscape of the Cocklawburn coast now, it is hard to imagine that it was a hub of industrial activity from the late 1700s up until the beginning of the 20th century with several thriving communities in barely a mile stretch of land. All this came about because of the natural resources of the rocks (limestone, sandstone, clay and coal) abundant in the area and the coming of the railways in the same period.

There has been evidence of human settlement in the area going back to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Aerial photography shows the remains of half an iron age fort on the edge of the cliffs partly eroded into the sea. The old Roman road, the Devil's Causeway, runs nearby to the Tweed.

In Mediaeval times there was extensive farming which has continued to this day. Just to the north of Seahouse, which was a mediaeval farm, there was a significant water-powered cornmill serviced by its own harbour, listed as Scremerston Cornmill, designed in 1776 by the eminent Leeds engineer John Smeaton (perhaps more known for the 3rd replacement Eddystone lighthouse). The original feature was a horizontal Norse waterwheel.

Fishing and salt panning were also domestic activities along the coast. Seawater was heated in lead pans by pieces of coal picked out of the seams, the resulting evaporation leaving salt for local consumption. Saltpan rocks are still marked on the maps with the former community of Saltpan How alongside.



Photograph 1: A painting of Cocklawburn Bay and the village of Saltpan How

by Thomas Swift Hutton, 1897.

Reproduced with kind permission

from Sandra Dods.

The village and cliffs here no longer exist; having been eroded by the sea.

In the 18th century much of the land and farmsteads in this north east corner of Northumberland were part of the estate of Lord Derwentwater. Sadly he was on the losing side of the second Jacobite Rebellion and his lands were confiscated by the Crown and bequeathed to the Greenwich Hospital for Sailors who still are the landlords of many of the farms to this day. A notice stating the coastal stretch was the property

of Greenwich Hospital has only recently been removed but there is still a sign saying it is private land.

However coal was not developed commercially until the mid-19th century when deep coal mines were sunk at Scremerston and continued operating until the 1960s. The developer was Mr John Carr who also owned a lime works and for a while, brickworks, at Sandbanks. He now lived in the former farm, Seahouse; (by the 20th century it was a hotel and now a private house again). The abundance of clay and sand led to much excavation with many pits and quarries still visible along the dunes. These materials led to brick- and tile-making industries between 1850 and 1943.

But the biggest industry was limestone quarrying. There were two main limestone quarries each end of the Cocklawburn bay. Flare kilns lined with local bricks were on three sites, the biggest of which was at Sandbanks where the remains of two of the kilns can still be seen. One is at the edge of the cliffs and the other site is visible by the ramp which runs to the top of the former site of three lime kilns. Trucks carrying limestone were hauled up the ramp by a steam engine at the top. The quicklime was taken from the bottom of the kiln along a light railway connected to the main line which had been extended north to Berwick 1845 – 47, and of course, from 1850 the Border Bridge enabled rail transport further north. Scremerston had its own railway station and this became an important junction for transporting the products of mining and quarrying until the limestone quarry was closed down by the early 1900s and Scremerston Station was closed before Beeching!

The lime kilns at the top of the ramp were used in the 2nd World War as a gun emplacement, part of the Scremerston Beach Defence Battery, but were later filled in with much of the debris from the coastal defences; however, it is still accessible.

It was all this industrial activity that led to the formation of three communities consisting of about 190 inhabitants, below the Seahouse complex - Saltpan How, Philadelphia and Sandbanks.

Figure 1: extract from Ordnance Survey map 1866.

National Library of Scotland

At Sandbanks, excavations in 2016 have left some remains of a line of cottages still visible to the south west side of the bottom of the ramp. Of course, there were many subsidiary buildings supporting the industries – a weighing machine, workshops, a lime depot by the railway line, a windmill and a smithy



and stables. There were many wagon-ways between the sites with wagons hauled by horses. The last cottage remained inhabited until the 1950s.

So next time you are wandering along the AONB path enjoying the flora and fauna of the area, think about the noise and smoke and continual flares from the lime kilns burning twenty-four hours a day and the many people that lived and worked there not even 200 years ago. All because of the rocks beneath your feet.

### **What was it like to be there (Cocklawburn) in the 1860s?**

*the squealing of breaks on the wheels of the wagons  
the whinnies of the horses the cracking of splitting stones  
the clash of metal on metal the screams of pain as accidents occur  
the smell of burning coal  
the clatter of railway trucks  
the howling of the wind  
the chug of the steam engine  
the cries of men shouting to be heard  
the lashing of the waves in winter  
the scrubbing to clean the clothes  
the acrid smell from the lime kilns  
the cries of children as they struggle with heavy loads  
the constant thumping of stone hammers  
the hiss of the steam engine hauling heavy trucks  
the searing heat of the kilns  
the lashing rain  
Life was hard and short.*

Elizabeth Devon September 2022

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**Sandra Y Gann**

# Simpson's Malt – a Berwick History

**A talk by Richard Simpson, Vice Chairman of Simpsons Malt. 8th June.**

Richard introduced himself as the 5th generation of a family business that started as 'Corn Factors' - the buying and selling of corn to others - in 1852 in Leeds. He went on to give an informative and interesting account of a family business that 150 years later is a well-loved local company with an international market.

In 1862 James Parker Simpson had moved to Alnwick where the first Simpsons Maltings was established. This was the beginning of a family business that has grown and developed to the present day with plans for further innovation in the future. After further growth in Alnwick by 1902, the first maltings in Berwick was established. Now the family had taken over the next process from buying the grain to malting it. This is a three-stage process of steeping the barley to awaken the dormant grain thus enabling it to germinate then finally the heating or 'kilning' process to produce its final colour and flavour. Initially the fermentation process was in Floor Maltings, where the steeped grain was left to dry over large areas of floor. The business grew over the next 50 years with the purchase of other malthouses, mostly in the North East and Yorkshire. With increased production Simpsons were a presence at daily barley markets from London to Edinburgh.

In the 1950s Richard's grandfather, Richard L Simpson, heard about a new style of malting using a Saladin Box, an instrument that mechanically turned the barley two or three times a day. He experimented with a Saladin Plant in Alnwick in 1952 and after research found a good site for an extensive Saladin plant site at Tweedmouth. This new plant eventually took over from many of the old Maltings, many of which had been damaged or lost to fire. In 1967 the Head Office of Simpsons Malt was established at the Tweedmouth site. By 1971 continued innovation saw the instalment of the first barley driers together with jumbo silos for storage. The pattern of development continued with the purchase of 4 Maltings from the Grand Metropolitan company in 1986.

Meanwhile in 1980 there was expansion into another branch of the barley production cycle with the amalgamation with McCreath Agricultural Merchants and in 1984 the agricultural trading company Prentice. This enabled Simpsons to remove the middleman and take over the process of buying the barley directly from the farmers. Later further acquisition of John Guthrie Ltd in 2011 extended close links to farming partners and expanded their geographical spread beyond the North of England and the Scottish Borders. This proved to be an asset later when the farmers grew specific varieties for specific purposes such as food, agriculture, or brewing, as needed by Simpsons. Nowadays the work is done in two main distilleries, one at Berwick and one at Tivotshall.

Richard told us that the family love their legacy but are always ready to find new ways of expansion and innovation. He illustrated the ways the business keeps up to date. He told us about the Waste Water Treatment Plant unique to Berwick with the ability to reuse water; the installation of a Seed Plant enabling seeds to be fertilized before being sown; of a modern Roasting and Crystal House and for plans for a Green Site at Speyside. Simpsons Malt are also good communicators, expanding in other ways by maintaining a blog and even have a You Tube channel and other social media outlets!

From that small start as Corn Factors back in 1852 in Leeds, Simpsons Malt now employs 360 people, processes 160,000 bags of barley to provide 425,000 tonnes of malt each year to supply brewing and other industries across the globe, as well as small craft breweries which have become so popular.

We were told that a favourite barley brand of craft breweries is 'Golden Promise' and it would seem that could apply to Richard's forebears' early dreams which continue to successfully expand.

**Sandra Y. Gann**

## **The Perils of Property Development**

**Talk by Brian Gowthorpe BA FRICS (retired), Chairman of the Civic Society Planning & Development Committee. 13th July.**

We were pleased to have Brian Gowthorpe give a fascinating insight into the Perils of Property Development. Perhaps his opening image of Bruegel's Tower of Babel should have given us a clue about the difficulties of negotiating ways through the labyrinth of factors and issues that we would be hearing about and, most significantly, the importance of good communication skills needed to do this.

He reminded us that despite people's concerns about living in a crowded land, Kevin Cahill has estimated that UK and Ireland are 70% agricultural land and another 20% is moor, bog or mountains; only perhaps 10% of the land is built on and of that only 5% as housing. Green belt restrictions have an impact on this land too. Many non-residential buildings have a natural life-cycle after which they are often demolished and the land recycled for new buildings. An example of downtown Boston Massachusetts illustrated this point, showing how the city's buildings had been redeveloped over 120 years, many as skyscrapers but still on the same plots clustered in the central business district.

He explained the 'economic cycle' that can be applied particularly to many commercial properties. He described this as upwards of 50 years between when the building is new, in top condition and fully occupied earning maximum income, to when it depreciates in stages to the point where it is no longer viable to refurbish. The needs of tenants and the locality have changed so demolition and redevelopment make sense. The



housing market tends not to follow the same pattern because of the value tied up in multiple private ownerships.

He gave a list of the innumerable legal documents that must be entered into before initiating a new scheme, from local authority rules and regulations to implications relating to heritage and archaeology. 'Prediction is very difficult especially about the future!' is a quote from Nils Bohr which we will all remember. Reducing risks to maximise the chance of a successful outcome – a safe commercially successful building without unnecessary financial outlay in advance – is of prime importance. Using a spreadsheet of a financial appraisal, he demonstrated how an apparently 'good' return can in reality plummet over the life of the scheme as a result of the many problems and issues that arise, turning from a predicted healthy profit to a disastrous loss.

All these facts and figures were brought to life when Brian presented us with five fascinating case studies of infamous developers or developments. We heard about ruthless Crassus, a Roman who was always on the lookout for a deal and became the richest man in Rome.

We could all recognise the characteristics of Donald Trump, well known as a brilliant self-publicist but not a successful businessman. Trump Tower made a loss, ending up in the hands of the banks who had financed the project. It was his father who was a ruthlessly successful property developer and gave his son his opportunities in the business world. v

Harry Hyams of Centrepont fame was of particular interest to those of us who had wondered why such a large building should have remained empty for so long. Brian explained the story of how it eventually became a site for an exceptionally tall office building. However, when it was completed in 1966 Hyams rightly predicted a boom in the office market. He decided to keep the building vacant whilst rents rose and he could let all the offices to a single tenant.

The study of Brockhall Hospital in Lancashire was an example of how social policies affected the life and success of a building. Originally built in 1904 as The Lancashire Inebriates Reformatory, it changed its name several times, partly as a result of growth in political awareness, eventually becoming a hospital for people with learning disabilities. The 'Care in the Community Act 1990' led to its closure in 1992. The closure contravened a key term of the original 999-year lease and by default, the land returned to property tycoon Gerald Hitman who had bought the freehold for £750 in 1982 when it was generally considered worthless. After some renegotiations, he reached agreement with the NHS and built the 400-home Brockhall village development, a training ground for Blackburn Rovers and a mansion for himself, reflecting his huge financial success as a property developer.

Finally, Brian told us of a development which he had had project managed. 'No 1 Marsden Street' was an example of replacing a dated 1960s office building. He described

the difficulties in managing a development on a tight city centre site when erecting a larger, much taller building with far more stringent fire safety regulations. Several significant problems arose but were resolved along the way by careful negotiation with the contractor and the design team.

This stimulating talk raised strong opinions leading to much discussion and questions which proved Brian's point – Property is not just about Buildings – but People!

Sandra Y. Gann

## Repurposing an Existing Museum

**Talk by Paul East Project Architect, Burrell Collection Refurbishment. 14th September.**

Prior to our talk by Paul East we were treated to a private tour by Anne Moore, Keeper of Collections of the Burrell Collection at The Barracks. We learned the history and character of Sir William Burrell. An astute business man who made his fortune in shipping, he brought those same skills to his personal life in building a collection of ultimately 9,000 artefacts which, upon his death, he bequeathed to the people of Glasgow. A smaller collection came to Berwick upon Tweed near to his Hutton Castle home where he lived after retirement until his death in 1958. A complex man, he imposed many conditions to his legacy including the space in which his treasures were to be displayed.

This was a good introduction to a very interesting and informative talk in which we heard about the need to fulfil the wishes of Sir William Burrell with the original design of the building and the importance of its setting in Pollok Park. It opened in April 1984 to much acclaim and was considered one of Scotland's greatest 20th C. works of architecture and A-listed. A triangular, glazed building of innovative design and craftsmanship both externally and within, for example each display cabinet was designed and built to reflect its exhibit.

Sadly the years were not kind to the building. Many structural problems with the glazing system and flat stainless steel roof led to issues such as leaking causing damage to the exhibits, and the design led to much heat loss. The space was not used to its best advantage and merely 10% of objects were on show at any one time along with difficulty in visitor accessibility.



Though many visitors flocked in in the first year or two, by its closure in 2016 only 187,000 entered the museum despite 2,000,000 visiting the Park. Technically and conceptually the building was not meeting the multi-purpose functions of a museum of the 21st century.

Paul described the many challenges to remedying these problems in a sustainable way within the original footprint of the museum, without losing the original philosophy, as well as retaining the unique craftsmanship and beauty of the original materials where possible.

Following many months of multidisciplinary assessment, planning meetings and liaison with the engineers, the work commenced. Some examples of the huge task included a complete redesigning of the inner space with zoned areas offering larger displays and easier visitor accessibility and circulation. Provision was made for an Education Centre, guided tours and a space for events to be held, along with the necessary public facilities - toilets, a cafe and coffee points. A new glazing system was fitted reducing operation costs by 60% and an asphalt roof with a heating reclamation system installed, along with a new lighting system using natural light where possible, and a modern security system. Attention was paid to ensuring the museum benefited from its woodland park setting with a large glass entrance hall and terraces welcoming visitors whether on foot or by the new shuttle bus service.

The changes in the £66 million renovation fulfilled the aims of the renovation - Profitability, Efficiency and Use of the Setting, and have resulted in a beautiful, unique building welcoming visitors to enjoy the Burrell collection and other amenities in the lovely rural setting Burrell requested.

**Sandra Y. Gann**

## **The Miracles of St Aebbe of Coldingham**

**Berwick Civic Society / Berwick History Society talk by Robert Bartlett CBE FBA FRSE  
Bishop Wardlaw, Professor of Mediaeval History Emeritus, University of St Andrews.  
19th October.**

We were very privileged to welcome Professor Bartlett to the Guildhall this month to talk about the miracles of St Aebbe of Coldingham. He first gave us a fascinating insight into the 7th century world of Princess Aebbe, born in 615CE, the daughter of a pagan King of Northumbria, and explored the 'rules' to becoming a Saint, giving us an understanding of what can be deemed a miracle before describing accounts of St Aebbe's miracles.

Following the murder of her father, Aebbe's mother fled with her children to the Kingdom of Dal Riata in the North of Scotland, an area closely connected to Ireland and already a Christian community. By the time Aebbe and her family were able to return to Northumbria she had adopted Christianity as her own faith. It was said that in her efforts to flee from an unwanted marriage she went to the headland 2 miles north of Coldingham. Her prayers were answered and the suitor was thwarted. In gratitude she established a small monastery on the site of an iron age fort, on Kirk Hill, the headland which had been her refuge.

Later Aebbe became the Abbess of a 'double monastery' which she established at nearby Coldingham. St Aebbe's influence as a wise and holy woman who contributed to the spread of Christianity in Northumbria grew over her lifetime. She was a compatriot of St Hilda of Whitby and St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne. She died in 683CE and we owe it to Bede who, in his History of the English People in 735, gave the only detailed account of her story for the next 400 years during which time the original monastery buildings became ruins following fire and war.

It was in the 12th century that there was a new interest in Aebbe and a desire to make her a saint. Her sainthood was prompted by two people: i) a Coldingham monk (now part of the Monks of Durham) who was said to have found the tomb of Aebbe's body at Kirk Hill and taken it to Coldingham Priory and ii) a local man, Henry, a poor serf but described as a Christian, a 'man of St Aebbe', who was said to have been driven to madness following a tumultuous love affair. Following prayers, he had a vision of St Michael and was told to build an oratory on Kirk Hill. He did so and was cured of his madness. This led to the Monks rebuilding the oratory and re-establishing the church and Priory of Coldingham.

In the next 20 years there were accounts of 43 miracles of St Aebbe's. Professor Bartlett gave us an example of a local folk singer and fiddler who was cured of the plague after prayer, though not of his long-term gout until he appealed to St Aebbe. Miracles form a recognised pattern - illness or disability; an appeal to St Aebbe; a visit to a holy site; a vision during sleep; and finally a cure than cannot be assigned to natural causes. Miracles were usually recorded as happening more to men (60%) than to women (40%) but in St Aebbe's accounts it is noted that many more women than men received miracles.

For an hour we were immersed in St Aebbe's world. She was a holy princess; a 7th century powerful woman who contributed to the Christian enlightenment of the Region. We followed her influence through the mediaeval age and have a greater understanding of the significance of St Abb's Head (from 'St Aebbe') which I am sure we will see with different eyes on our next visit, thanks to Professor Bartlett.

**Sandra Y. Gann**

# The Museum of the Wood Age

Talk by Max Adams, Archaeologist, Author and Woodsman. 25th October.

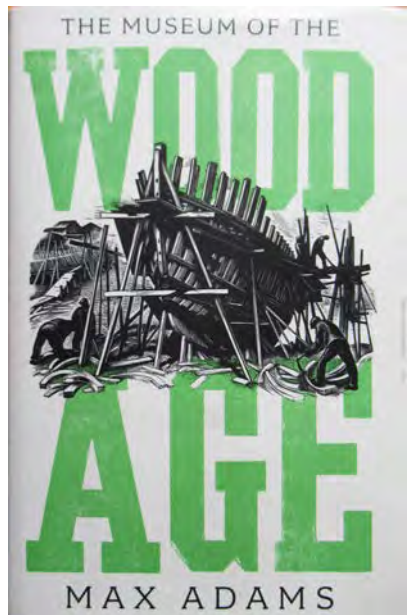
We were very pleased to welcome Max Adams to the Society for a tour of his virtual Museum of the Wood Age. As well as the beauty of trees, we were reminded of their unique properties that make them such a valuable resource - longevity, durability and utility and the many species, each with its own characteristics, which provide strong and resilient wood used for different purposes.

Max suggested the Wood Age is the earliest, longest 'Age' known to man. He pointed out the intelligence and skill needed by early human beings which enabled them to provide shelter and warmth and make wooden utensils to aid the tasks of daily living. Wood enabled the construction of devices such as the lever, windlass and wedge, designs which have been in use ever since.

From the time of those earliest man-made dwellings, wood has been the material of choice for both domestic homes and public buildings. The round house, traditionally the central point of many communities, was a design that continued to be used over many centuries. Wood was used in the construction of transport both on water and land, from early canoes, the Vikings' longboats, to our own early sailing vessels and ships. The ingenuity of the wheel, hewn out of a half tree trunk, enabled movement by carts and later, railways which were first constructed of wooden tracks and wagons. The industrial uses of wood are many from the pallet to the mill.

Wood was also used to construct religious and leisure buildings from the earliest henge to the 14th century Salisbury Cathedral with the wooden structure of its 123m (404ft) spire still in place within the modern steeple. Other examples included the beautiful early 15th century Westminster Hall and the 16th century Globe Theatre. We have created objects of wood that have given us our greatest pleasure, from the touch and look of carved furniture to musical instruments. Max proposed the violin as the most outstanding artistic expression of the Wood Age.

One could say the ending of the Wood Age was 1779, with the erection of the first Iron Bridge. However, it was agreed that the knowledge gained from working with wood has been used ever since, even with modern materials.



Indeed, wood continues to be chosen for homes as well as the 85.4m multi-functional timber tower in Norway, currently the tallest timber building in the world. Looking to the future, a Japanese company is planning to build the first wooden satellite. By the end of our talk, we could appreciate that wood has long been a part of our lives, and it would be hard to visualise a world without it.

Max has an encyclopaedic knowledge of wood and the trees from which it comes. His stories and illustrations showed his love of the subject and ensured that we paid rapt attention to a very engaging speaker.

**Sandra Y. Gann**

## REMEMBRANCE DAY 2022



*In Berwick*



*In the Main Guard*



## FUTURE EVENTS

These will all be at the Parish Centre.

**Wednesday, 7pm 7th December 2022**

**Christmas Party** with music, raffle and finger buffet.

**Tuesday, 7.30pm 10th January 2023**

Talk by **Professor David Saunders**, an expert on Ukraine,  
“**Why is Putin attacking Ukraine?**”

**Wednesday, 7.30pm 8th February 2023**

A presentation by the **NCC Director of Regeneration**.

**Wednesday, 7.30pm 8th March 2023**

A “**Question Time**” to discuss important current issues for to Berwick-upon Tweed.

**Wednesday, 7pm 12th April 2023**

**Annual General Meeting** followed by a talk by Peter Jones, the eminent classicist on  
“**Democracy in Ancient Greece.**”

## More Than “An Elegant Accomplishment”

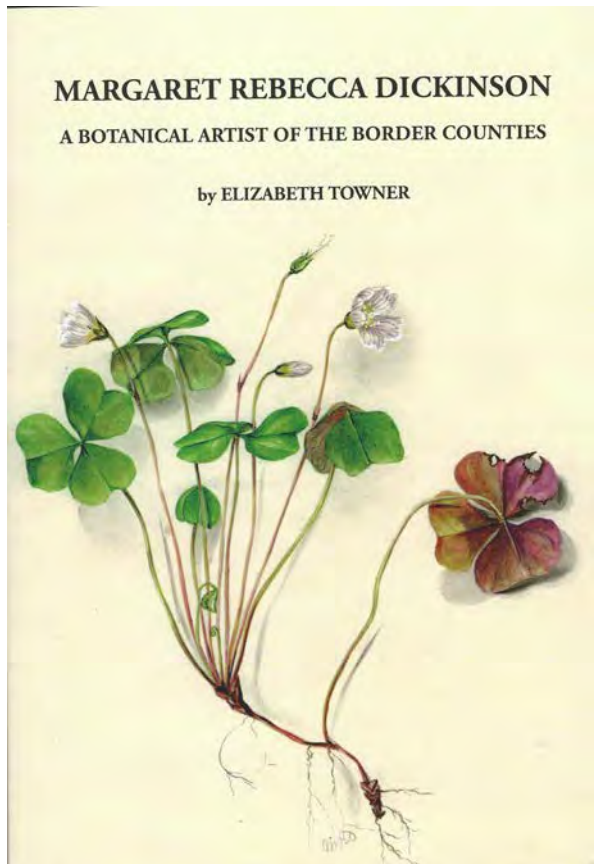
Despite our interest in plants, we’re not huge fans of botanical painting, so with no strong feelings of anticipation we paid one of our regular visits to the Granary Gallery in Berwick recently. “Margaret Rebecca Dickinson: a botanical artist of the Border Counties” didn’t sound particularly promising – we hadn’t even heard of her. But what a revelation! Her painting technique is of outstanding quality, her botanical knowledge was clearly considerable, and so were her scientific documentation skills, whereby she recorded exactly where and when she found each of the plants she then so accurately drew and painted. She was one of the few female members of the Berwickshire Naturalists’ Club, which was founded in 1831, and is the “oldest continuously active Club of its kind in the UK”.

Elizabeth Towner, a current BNC member, has traced Dickinson’s history and produced a book about her and her work. <sup>(1)</sup> A fascinating scene-setting biographical chapter reveals that, having been born and brought up in Newcastle in 1821, the daughter of a tobacco and snuff manufacturer, she moved with her family to Gattonside in the late 1850s, then 10 years later, with her parents and one sister, to Tweed Villa in



Norham, where she continued to work until her death in 1918. Separate chapters in the book are devoted to Dickinson's collecting in and around those three locations. Once the artist had joined BNC, she went on local field trips with the group, as well as widening her search for plants in locations of her own choosing. There is a fascinating chapter on "more unusual plants and habitats" which describes for example ballast flora, of which Dickinson's collection has three specimens. When ballast containing stray seed was emptied out of ships onto riverbanks and elsewhere, some germinated and survived, introducing new plants into the area. Thus she collected the south and central European native Fine-leaved Mustard, *Sinapis tenuifolia* (now known as Perennial Wall-rocket, *Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) in South Shields in 1866. Records show that it was still present in 1993 around parts of the Tweed, Berwick and Amble. She also sought orchids, of which she made exquisite and highly accurate paintings. Her records enable botanists and wildlife specialists to compare those locations (including Upper Teesdale well before the Cow Green reservoir was constructed) to the present-day habitat and flora, and of course identify plants that have become extinct, at least locally.

The author also devotes a chapter to something of particular interest to horticulturalists: Dickinson's decision to focus on one cultivated species, *Narcissus*, resulting in an album of 30 highly accurate watercolours of named cultivars mostly grown in her own garden (yes – she was a keen gardener too!). She notes on each painting the full botanical name, its provenance (eg "Root gathered in Portugal by Mr Peter Barr in 1888"), the date of her painting and where it was growing at the time. As we'd expect, some of the varieties are no longer in cultivation. That album was acquired in 1996 by the Lindley Library for the RHS, as part of its internationally significant botanical art collection.



I can't recommend Elizabeth Towner's book highly enough: it's an insight into a less known area of our local natural history, is a deserved tribute to an exceptional woman artist and botanist, and is beautifully illustrated. And all for £9.99 at the Granary Gallery (prices vary on-line).

And so to the exhibition<sup>(2)</sup>, which offers the opportunity to see in the flesh a selection of



*Image by Colin Davison, courtesy The Maltings.*

Dickinson's work. It's hard to sound other than over-effusive, but Dickinson combines the observation of a scientist with the sensitivity of an accomplished artist (see the seedhead of a "dandelion clock"! ). Her painting technique involves the use of shadow behind the plants which lifts them from the page. She left "my botanical collection of dried plants and my paintings of them [458] my collections of seaweeds and my paintings of fungi to the Hancock Museum . . . ", where they are now stored in the Natural History Society of Northumberland's archive. Elizabeth Towner reports that the Wildflower Collection was available on the NHSN website, and has been transferred to the JSTOR website where it will reach a wider audience.

Elizabeth has very kindly agreed to talk to Plant Heritage North East in Ponteland in March. Everyone welcome.

(1) Margaret Rebecca Dickinson: a botanical artist of the Border counties, by Elizabeth Towner. Berwick: BNC, 2021. ISBN 978-0-9516434-4-0

(2) Exhibition open until 19th February, 2023. The Granary Gallery is open Wed–Sun, 11-4. Free. To preview, go to

**<https://www.maltingsberwick.co.uk/whats-on/margaret-rebecca-dickinson-a-botanical-artist-of-the-border-counties/>**

**Suzanne Stanley**