

# BERWICK CIVIC SOCIETY

## Winter Newsletter 2025



## BRYAN & SUZANNE STANLEY

As many of you know Bryan and Suzanne took on the collation and editing of our Newsletter, even when Bryan was so seriously ill last year and confined to the house for months on end. Sadly he has had a recurrence of his illness and at present is undergoing gruelling treatment; resulting in spells in hospital to deal with the reactions to the treatment. On behalf of the Civic Society and myself personally, we send you both our very good wishes and hope before long we will see you both back in Berwick.

Martha Andrews and myself have complied this newsletter which is an online issue and hope that Bryan and Suzanne will forgive us!

## CHAIR'S REPORT

Anne Humphrey

This will be my last report as Chair as the next newsletter will be after the Annual General Meeting. We have had a very busy six months and although we are a small team we have been able to work together to cover everything.

We have a good relationship with the Town Council and our County Councillors, including the new County Councillor - Nicole Brooke. This is encouraging and they value our input on various matters. The town centre is improving and although there are still issues progress does seem to be made. The market is now under the control of the Town Council, who wish to make improvements and attract different traders

The large projects in the town are taking shape, with the Barracks, The Maltings, the High School and lastly the hospital, which now has a new construction firm appointed and on site. As with any project there is always controversy, we will never all agree, but it is important to attract investment in the town which has a domino effect to businesses, our prosperity and much needed employment.

We were approached by Neil Fairbairn of Grieves about producing an inexpensive history guide of Berwick upon Tweed which was inexpensive, ie the price of a cup of coffee and a cake. Martha Andrews took up the challenge and produced Berwick upon Tweed - Bulwark of the North, which turns out at £7.50 cheaper than a cup of coffee and a piece of cake! The book is proving to be very popular and other outlets in the town are selling the booklet including the new book shop - The Book Loft.

We have been invited to events over the past 6 months and have done our best to promote the Civic Society in a good and positive way.

Our talks have been well publicised and we have had good attendances at the meeting. In the past couple of years we have had to take a long hard look at our finances and I know that we have had to make decisions where the head has had to rule the heart. These decisions had to be made to ensure our future and you cannot spend more than your income. We have been extremely fortunate that a member gave a donation of £500

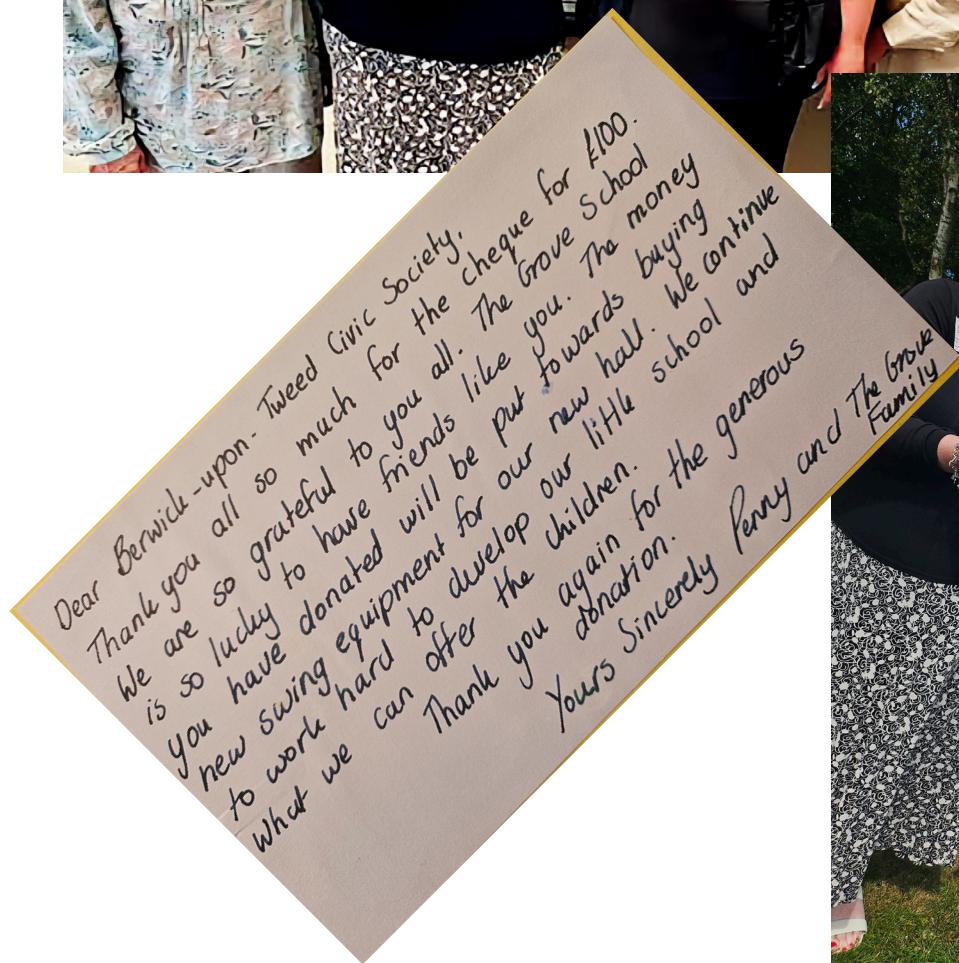
and we are deeply grateful for this donation. The subscription fee will increase to Individual Membership - £10.00 and Joint Membership - £15.00. If you pay by Bankers Order please contact your bank to amend the figure payable.

I wish to thank the Executive Committee, Committee Chairs, Committee members, Stewards and everyone who has helped in anyway, your contribution is why the Civic Society continues. Every organisation needs people to function; every contribution is valued and needed. If you would like to volunteer in any way, please contact one of the Executive team.

I wish my successor and the Civic Society every success in the future.

## AWARDS 2025

Awards this year of a £100 were presented to Faith Dodds - Berwick High School, Linda Richardson - Longridge Towers, India Bryson - Engage and The Grove Special School.



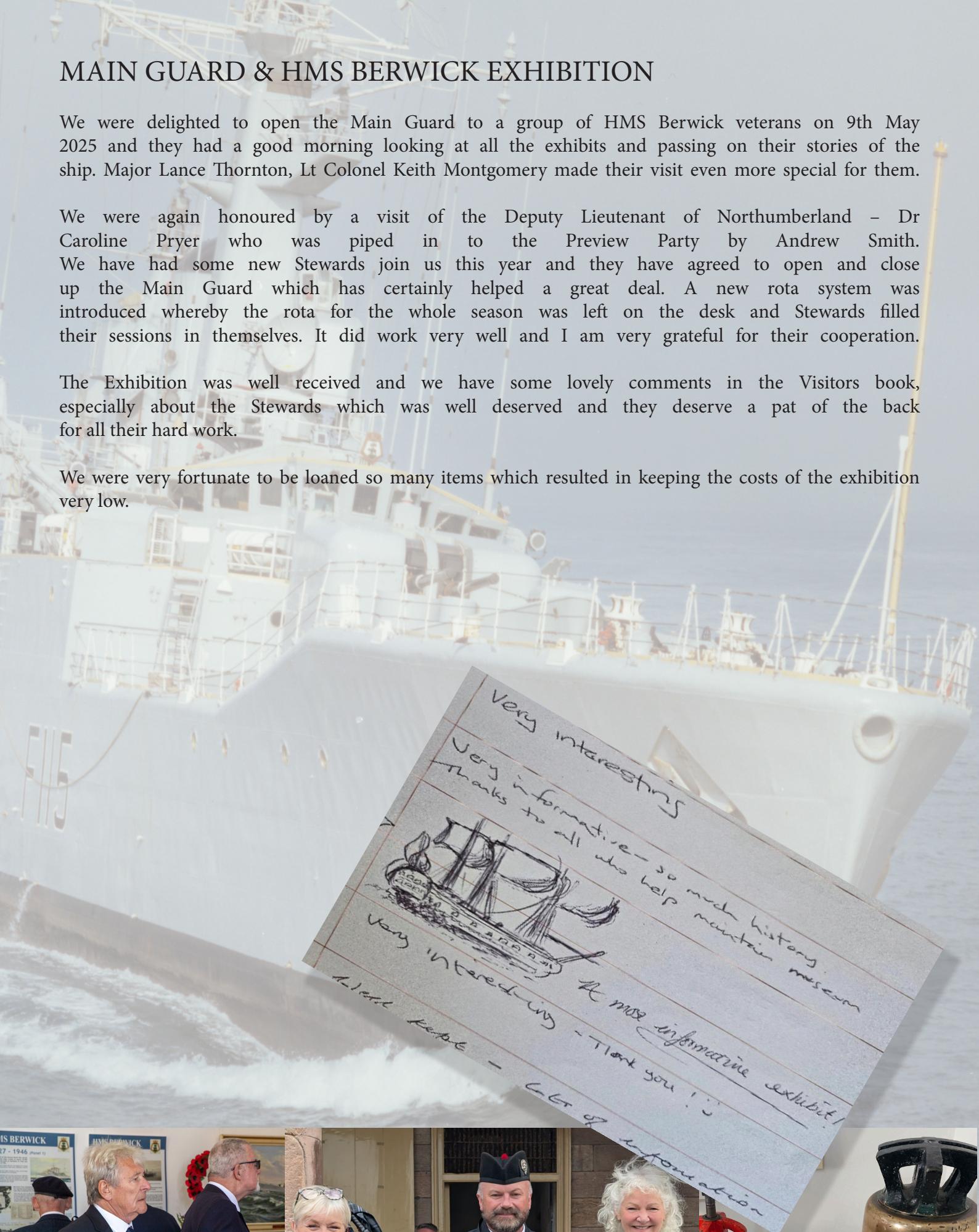
# MAIN GUARD & HMS BERWICK EXHIBITION

We were delighted to open the Main Guard to a group of HMS Berwick veterans on 9th May 2025 and they had a good morning looking at all the exhibits and passing on their stories of the ship. Major Lance Thornton, Lt Colonel Keith Montgomery made their visit even more special for them.

We were again honoured by a visit of the Deputy Lieutenant of Northumberland - Dr Caroline Pryer who was piped in to the Preview Party by Andrew Smith. We have had some new Stewards join us this year and they have agreed to open and close up the Main Guard which has certainly helped a great deal. A new rota system was introduced whereby the rota for the whole season was left on the desk and Stewards filled their sessions in themselves. It did work very well and I am very grateful for their cooperation.

The Exhibition was well received and we have some lovely comments in the Visitors book, especially about the Stewards which was well deserved and they deserve a pat of the back for all their hard work.

We were very fortunate to be loaned so many items which resulted in keeping the costs of the exhibition very low.



We were asked to take part in the Berwick Shines “Her Extraordinary Colours” Exhibition and we flew the Grace Griffin flag.

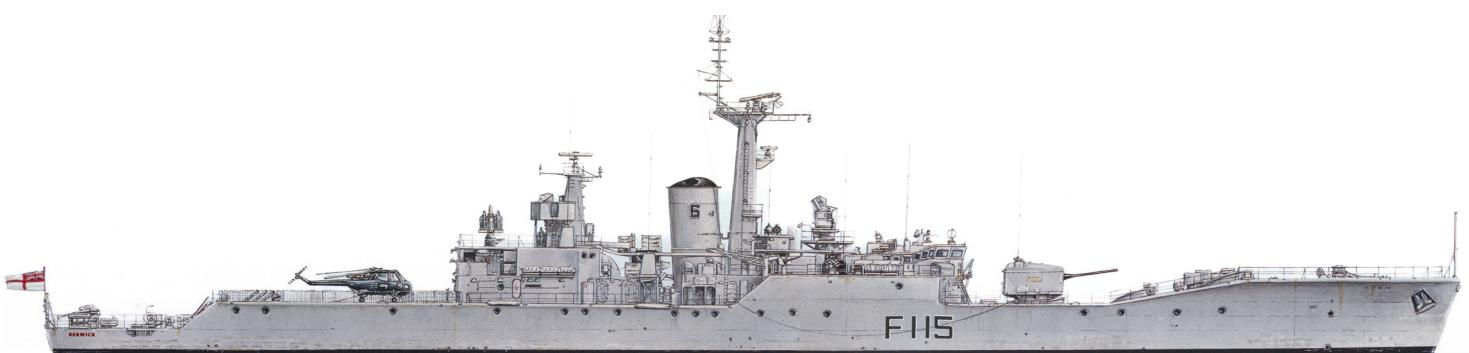
We again took part in Heritage Open Days and were very busy. We closed two days this year as we are short of Coordinators and there was concern at what effect it would have on the Main Guard. I am pleased to report that we have rested Stewards. There were 9048 visitors, which is a 1000 less than last year BUT we had 1000 visitors over the Bridge 400 weekend in 2024. Our income was £1906.57 which was up on 2024. We will be adjusting the opening hours next year as the morning is definitely busier than late afternoon. The hours will be 11am to 3pm, Friday to Tuesday.

Thank you to all our Stewards. Next Year's exhibition will be on the Armed Forces.



## FREEDOM OF BERWICK

The finale this year was the return of the HMS Berwick Veterans and we were delighted to see them receive the Freedom of Berwick. As we delved into the history of HMS Berwick it seemed only fitting that they receive the Freedom of the town. The Town Hall was full - HMS Berwick Veterans and their families, the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland - Dr Caroline Pryer, the Civic Party, Lt Paul McKenna RN, Northumberland Fusilier Veterans and some Town Councillors. A knife and fork buffet was catered by Martha Andrews with her team of Susan Latheron, Christabel Bishop, Lance and Sheena Thornton, Mick Coburn, Bob Humphrey and myself. The Councillors that were present were asked to host a table of Veterans at lunch, as the Veterans were the Town's guests. Lt Paul McKenna RN presented the town with an HMS Berwick badge for the people of Berwick. A huge, big thank you must go to Council especially, Stephen Robinson, Joyce Benton and Lucy Hensall- Thomas for all their hard work in arranging the Freedom and for working so hard on the day to make it so successful. The day ended with the joint talk of the Berwick Civic and History Societies on "The Last Three HMS Berwicks" given by Phil Rowett.



## REMEMBRANCE

The Main Guard marked the 80th Anniversary of VE & VJ Day. The Main Guard was opened especially for VE Day and the Union flag flew. The Society's commitment to honouring the town's military history continued with participation in Remembrance Sunday, laying a wreath for the fallen at the town's war memorial.



# HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Siobhan Bankier

September saw the return of Heritage Open Days (HODS) to Berwick and once again the town was painted pink as the distinctive HODS bunting and banners took over. The festival is still building and changing ever year and the 2025 programme was our biggest ever with over 100 free events for people to explore between 12 th and 21 st September. Now that a few weeks have passed since HODS we have had time to add up our visitor numbers and are delighted to announce that we received almost 15,000 visitors over the 10-day period.

The first weekend of the festival kicked the programme off with a range of exhibitions, guided walks and open sites to give visitors a taste of what was to come over the next few days. Evening talks during the week also discovered the town's past from different points of view including art, fiction, photography and architecture. There truly was something for everyone no matter what their interests.

Although we are quickly running out of new sites to add to our programme we still somehow managed to find people and places who had not been involved before. New geology, art and food guided walks demonstrated that Berwick's history is not limited to its built heritage and The Peace Church on Church Street opened its doors to show visitors a building many people had never been inside before. The 'old favourite' venues around the walls and in town such as Cumberland Bastion, The Gunpowder Magazine and the Goal in the Town Hall were as popular as ever and newer additions to the festival such as tours of Martins the Printers and Berwick Rangers Football Club were popular again this year.

We are very grateful to all venues and individuals who participated in HODS this year, it would not be possible to create such a brilliant event without the support of volunteers and building providers. It is a privilege to open so many venues and hold so many events in Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal over the festival period. A good-natured atmosphere of collective curiosity and pride fills the air during HODs, many people seeing the town in a way they have not considered before while others rediscover stories and places from their youth or just stumble upon the town on the right weekend.

As an organising team we are currently taking a well-earned short break but work starts again on our next event in the New Year. Before we know it HODs 2026 will be on the horizon and, as ever, we will try to make it the biggest and best festival yet and certainly the biggest in Northumberland.

If anyone would like to help with the festival or has any ideas of venues/events, please do contact us via [berwickarchives@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:berwickarchives@northumberland.gov.uk)



## EVENTS & PROMOTIONS

Zoreen Hill

The season started on 23rd May with The Main Guard Summer Exhibition Preview Party. Piper Andrew Smith KOSB heralded the guests as they arrived. Guest of Honour, The Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, Dr Caroline Pryor - The Mayor, John Robertson also attended with his Civic Party.

The Exhibition on the HMS Berwicks was superb and much appreciated by all who also included veterans of the last HMS Berwick. Two of the talks in the programme on the ships were given by historian, Phil Rowett - firstly on the early years 1669 - 1821 and later in the year, the ships of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The rest of the talks have been varied and very well attended. The speaker during the HODs week was Martin Lowe,

Reports of these meetings from Phil Rowett and Sandra Gann follow later in this online Newsletter. The Main Guard was also the backdrop for our Annual Remembrance Service on 11th November led by Chairman, Anne Humphrey. Participants were Rev Lyn Phillips, who took the service, Captain Andrew Herberts KOSB, Piper Andrew Smith and trumpeter Marlow Parker of Longridge Towers School.

Three mini buses of the Longridge Junior School attended who are always very welcome and a great addition to this occasion. Headteacher, Mr Jonathan Lee accompanied them this year.



John Nichol with Radcliffe at the Main Guard Preview Party

# 2025 TALKS

MAY 2025

## THE EARLY HMS BERWICKS

A Presentation by Phil Rowett

There have been 11 vessels that have taken the title of HMS Berwick and of these, eight were sailing ships. The first talk was about these eight vessels.

The first was launched in 1689 as part of the extension of Charles II's navy and was given the name Berwick to show that the King's power extended to all the different parts of his kingdom. It fought at the battles of Beachy Head 1690, and Barfleur and La Hogue in 1692.

The second Berwick was a rebuilding of the first, it fought in various battles including Vigo Bay and at Gibraltar when the ship's boats landed Marines who captured what has been a British possession for the intervening 300 years and more.

The third vessel was an unlucky vessel, as part of Hosier's fleet off the Central American coast where there was little fighting and huge casualties from disease.

The fourth arrived as relations with France and Spain were collapsing and so it was kept busy. It is said that "The Battle of Toulon is the greatest example of tactical disorder in British naval history." Out of this mess the only ship to receive any praise was the Berwick. Although this version sailed for less than twenty years, it fought in many battles and was a proving ground for a new generation of talented officers.

The next three Berwicks are all part of the same story. The fifth Berwick was launched in 1775 and went on to play a large part in the Napoleonic Wars. Unusually, this vessel was captured by the French and thus ended up in the French fleet at Trafalgar. While surviving the battle the ship sank before reaching Gibraltar. Her place was taken by the Spanish prize St Juan Nepomuceno that was now rechristened as the Berwick. This version stayed in Gibraltar until another Berwick appeared and this seventh version saw out the war until it was broken up in 1821. There would not be another ship of the same name until the end of the 19th century and this was to be a coal-burning metal leviathan.

"Oh!" you cry, "that's only seven!" Indeed, there was another Berwick but this has much argument as to whether it was ever an HMS Berwick rather than just a merchant ship. What we can be sure of is that it was adopted by the Navy as HMS Sirius and became the flagship of the

First Fleet to Australia which established the first penal colony there. So eight sailing Berwicks and another three modern versions to go...

## THE NORTH EAST AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

A presentation by Robert Bruce

Bob's introduction told us of his former career which included service in with the Armys Special Air Service (SAS) during which he served as a pilot in the Falklands and the Gulf. He is now a volunteer speaker keen to spread information about the Air Ambulance Service to as many people as possible as the organisation is completely reliant on charitable contributions to fund the £10 million or more it costs to run annually. It was a consolation to learn that the one advantage to not having government funding is that the organisation has control and allocation of resources - government funding does have a tendency to be cut or redirected. We were assured that all public contributions are used directly for service provision. The Great North East Ambulance Service (GNEAAS) covers 10,000 square miles of the Northeast, Cumbria and the Isle of Man from two sites. Eaglescliffe (Teeside) and Langwathby (Penrith). The emergency responses are co-ordinated from the air desk at Eaglescliffe. This operates a 24-hour monitoring of all 999 calls and liaises with other emergency services as needed.

The fleet of 3 top of the range Dauphin N3 and Dauphin N3+ helicopters. are manned by a highly trained Critical Care team composing of a doctor, paramedic and pilot/driver. They carry any emergency equipment that would be available in an A&E Department, "We will bring the hospital Casualty Department to you." Every call out, whether by helicopter during the daylight hours or car at night arrives at the scene of the accident within 20 minutes. There are over 2,500 call outs a year at a daily operating cost of over £30.000. Other valuable services the GNEAAS offer are courses in pre-hospital medicine covering emergency anaesthesia and an emergency medicine crew course.

This attracts applicants worldwide and provides a welcome income. New courses are being developed. Bob told us of the many ways the public can help, not just by donating financially but collecting clothing and having other fundraising events. Please see the GNEAAS website for further information. Bob's presentation included 4 videos showing aspects of the work of the service including two case studies. This together with the knowledge of the costs involved was sobering however Bob's entertaining presentation ensured that there were many laughs along the way.

Sandra Y Gann



## ROMAN SLAVES BECOMING MILLIONAIRES

Dr Peter Jones

We were very pleased to welcome Dr Jones on a return visit to the Society this month. His lecture challenged a common present-day view of slavery in which slaves are regarded as inferior and of little value. Dr Jones took us back in time and place and gave us an informative and fascinating insight into what life was like for the Romans and their slaves around the second and third century CE. This was a time when land ownership in the expanding Roman Empire reflected wealth and power and ownership of slaves an equal measure of status.

Slavery played a significant role in Roman Society. At its peak slaves represented up to 20% of the population with some Masters owning many hundreds of slaves. Slaves were acquired in many ways. Vast numbers of prisoners of war or the bounty of pirates were bought and sold, with due taxation, in the markets. They may have been abandoned or put on the market by parents. They could be born into slavery. In some cases individuals would opt to become slaves and we were to understand why this might have been a good option. Slaves were subject to the laws of ownership and were not entitled to marriage although they did form 'common law' relationships. The life of a slave varied from those placed in dangerous and harsh conditions to those who were regarded as an investment and highly valued by their owners despite the expense of owning a slave, especially those who came with artisan and academic skills able to carry out many roles in society indistinguishable from others. Many of these had been captured from other cultures.

Brutal treatment of slaves was regarded as obscene and could result in a court case. Slaves were used as gladiators – inevitably with a limited life expectancy. There were Revolts and rebellious activity and attempts to escape which resulted in being tagged and dealt with harsh punishments. The Public Treasury commissioned hundreds of slaves to work on civic projects e.g. in the mines, aqueduct maintenance and fire prevention.

As the opportunities and importance of trade increased slaves with business skills were used for trading as this was not seen as an appropriate occupation for the elite. This could lead to a partnership benefitting both owner and slave and in some cases enabling slaves to acquire vast personal wealth. Some chose to gain freedom with citizen status, albeit with certain restrictions although children of these Freedmen were accepted as full Roman citizens. Many former slaves continued to work as Freedmen but continued in partnership with their former Master bringing financial advantages to both and this could result in the Freedmen repeating the pattern of buying land and slaves as a reflection of their acquired wealth. The Roman Jurists' view that 'Slavery is a human invention, not found in nature' is still relevant. However, despite the abolition and opposition of slavery in more recent times, today more than half the countries in the world do not regard ownership of slaves as a criminal activity. However, sadly, there are no opportunities for modern slaves to become millionaires.



Sandra Y Gann

# “THEY DON’T MAKE THEM LIKE THAT ANYMORE: THOUGHTS ON CONSERVATION & NEW DESIGN BY AN HISTORIC ENGLAND INSPECTOR”

A Presentation by Martin Lowe

Martin works as an Adviser and Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings for English Heritage responsible for the North East area from the Tweed to the Tees. He drew on his extensive experience to give us an insightful and informative understanding of the tensions between conservation and new design. We warmed to his opening statement of his love of Berwick together with Spittal and Tweedmouth. Both help make Berwick so special. Initial thoughts of Berwick, and other historic towns, could be categorised by Class and Ghosts! Berwick's development in the 18th and 19th centuries clearly reflected the class system underpinning all aspects of society at that time. We had illustrative examples from the elegance of the townhouses on Wellington Terrace to the more quirky but charming smaller dwellings in Spittal. The size, design and quality of the building materials reflected the social status of the residents. Martin made special reference to William Wilson, noted for his eccentric adornments to his houses in Spittal. All contribute to our understanding of history. Ghosts too play a part in the history of buildings, from the candle smoke drawings on the ceilings at the Barracks to derelict ancient buildings, all with a story to tell or for us to imagine.

It is important when managing change to consider the significance and character of historic buildings and spaces. Examples of this may include restoring room layouts identifiable from old floor plans, thinking about the materials used and the height of new buildings amongst the old. Listed buildings should be respected ensuring that they are not submerged into a modern urban environment. Internally, could features such as a door or fireplace be retained? Two principles of planning alterations are to work with what is important, based on existing layouts, but to think creatively. Martin provided the example of addressing accessibility requirements for the new museum block at Grade I listed Berwick Barracks, by constructing an external lift shaft rather than by destructive internal alterations. When thinking about design and planning, the outside spaces, can be just as important as building interiors.

Of course, when thinking of saving historic buildings there must be a will to save them, and the necessary funding – a particular problem in these times. Martin acknowledged the important role the Berwick Preservation Trust has had in conservation. Owners of listed buildings are under no statutory obligation to maintain their property in a good state of repair, but they should try to keep them water and weathertight. An example was given of the Keelmen's Hospital in Newcastle which has been vacant for 30 years in a very shabby state. Plans for renovation as affordable housing are now underway, bringing the building up to modern standards for access and energy efficiency.

Martin emphasised the value of developing design codes for Conservation Areas. At their best they promote honesty in the form, style and materials used in new buildings. By applying the guidance in these codes modern, simple, minimalistic designs can still be attractive and can contribute to the architecture of an historic town.

Semi-detached stone houses built in 1878 by William Wilson, architect, builder and funerary sculptor. Fine examples of the late Victorian love of decoration and ostentation, the carvings feature animal heads, figures of men, and birds. One carved head is perhaps meant to be a self-portrait of Wilson himself!

# ARCHITECTURE AND CONSERVATION WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

A Presentation by Donna-Marie Kirk-Sargeant

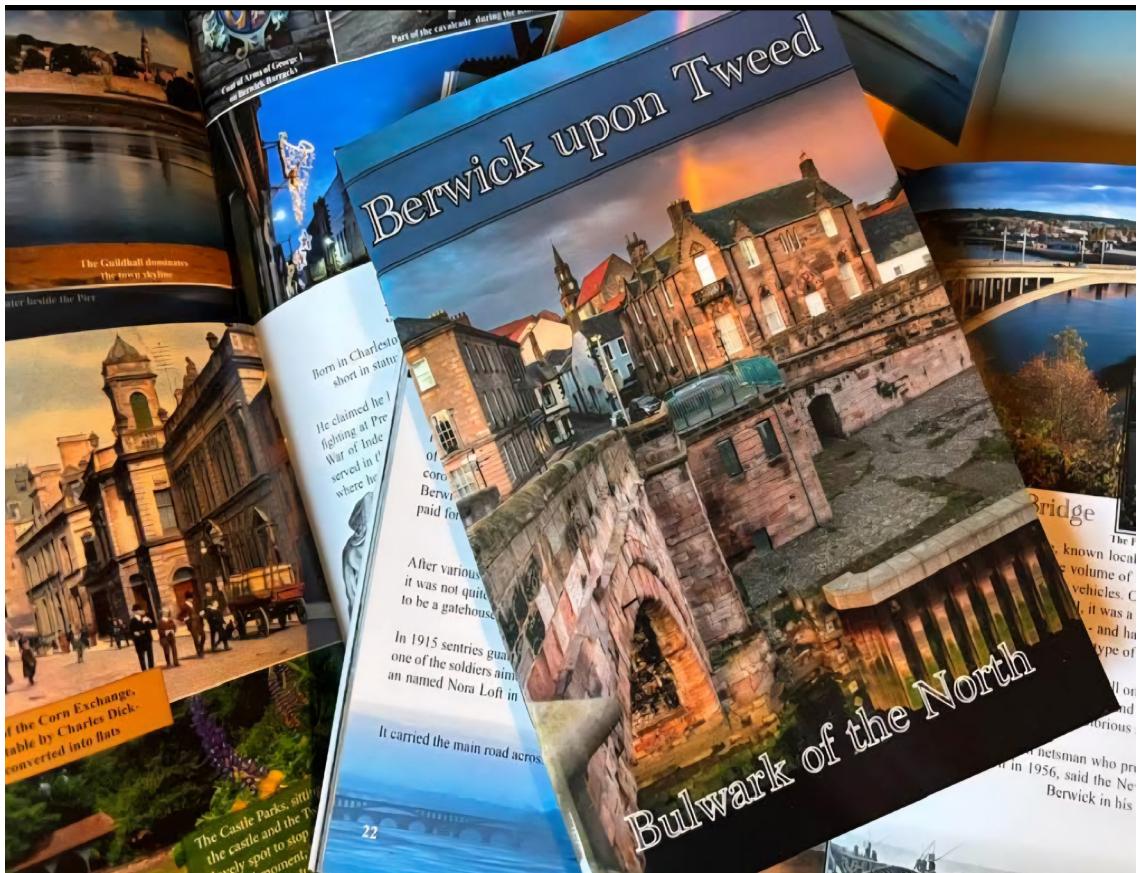
We were pleased to welcome Donna-Marie Kirk-Sargeant to our November Society meeting. Her enthusiasm and passion for the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was learnt from her family as a child growing up in in South Island, New Zealand and her current employment with the New Zealand High Commission in London.

In 1914 it was Fabian Ware head of a mobile ambulance unit run by the British Red Cross who whilst working on the Western Front was saddened by the improvised nature of burials and grave marking. Ware lobbied higher authorities to turn his unit into a dedicated team. This small beginning lead to the CWGC being formed under the Chairmanship of Fabian Ware supported by a small team of eminent people including Edward Lutyens, whose design was used on the headstones, and Rudyard Kipling, as Literary Advisor. Now a global organisation in 23,000 locations in 150 countries it works on behalf of the Governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom to commemorate the 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth who lost their lives in the two World Wars. The CWGC also liaises with the Ministry of Defence who have the responsibility of those who have lost their lives in conflict since the second World War. The first task was the design of the headstones. Consideration was given to the needs of bereaved people at home, some of whom were initially reluctant to have their loved one commemorated in a uniform way, and the needs of people from different cultures and religions. The CWGC do not differentiate on the grounds of social or military rank, or by religion. However a religious symbol was allowed on individual headstones and a personal inscription if wished. Thought was also given to a commemorative memorial to act as a focal point in each cemetery and the 'Stone of Remembrance' was the outcome. This depicts a Christian cross but one that can also be seen as a sword symbolising those who lost their lives in conflict.

The CWGC pledge 'Their Service is not to be forgotten – We remember' continues over a century later by locating, exhuming and identifying bodies which continue to be found in isolated sites and in mass burial sites still being uncovered.

Sustainable conservation is an important aspect of the work of the CWGC. Rather than replacing damaged headstones time is spent on restoring them to their original form using less harmful materials. Illustrations of the damage that cemeteries endure – from floods and natural disasters to war destruction gave the audience some idea of the mammoth task that the CWGC has undertaken. The workforce numbers 17,000 the majority of whom are gardeners and stone masons. The CWGC are committed to ongoing sustainable care of the grounds and gardens. They are also indebted to the thousands of volunteers who carry out various duties from the inspection of headstones and guiding visitors to helping with research and archives. Designated people in each Region are responsible for checking and maintaining those individual graves that are situated in local churchyards as well as the continual care of cemeteries, and monuments.

The CWGC emphasised its ongoing commitment to remembering the Dead of the British Empire and currently is investigating and addressing historical injustices to ensure that one of their basic principles is carried out - that there is Equality in Commemoration. Donna's illustrated, informative talk was full of many facts and figures which can be found on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site <https://www.cwgc.org>. These illustrate what an effective global organisation CWGC is but the personal case histories shared were impressive examples of the care and lengths that the CWGC go to help individuals on their personal quests to locate sites of previously unknown graves.



## Berwick Upon Tweed – Bulwark of the North

Ubbanford Press - £7.50

Available from:

Berwick Civic Society  
Berwick Visitor Centre  
Grieves  
Northern Edge  
The Seagull's Nest  
The Book Loft

IN REMEMBRANCE

REV RAY SIMPSON

JOHN AYERST

HE WALKS WITH US DOWN QUIET  
PATHS

AND SPEAKS IN WIND AND RAIN  
FOR THE MAGIC POWER OF MEMORY



# Merry Christmas

**BERWICK CIVIC SOCIETY EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEE, WISH ALL THE MEMBERS A  
PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS AND HOPE FOR  
THE  
NEW YEAR.**

**MAY THE MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS  
FILL YOUR HEART WITH FAITH.  
YOUR HOME WITH HOPE  
AND YOUR LIFE WITH LOVE**