

Haltwhistle History Group Newsletter

All your history group news, reports, upcoming events and information FREE in your inbox after every meeting.

Edition 7, 14th February 2024

Edited by Steve Gibbon

Our website: <https://history.haltwhistle.org/>
Our Wiki(pedia) <https://haltwhistle.org/history/>

Hello everyone, here is the seventh newsletter of the History Group with a reminder that I am very much dependent on 2 sources to make this work:

1. My notes taken at a meeting and any other information people can supply, particularly from those people who may have contributed to a discussion or presentation.
2. You, the reader. If you have anything you would like to see in this newsletter, please provide me with information.

I can't do all of this on my own, so all contributions welcome please.

Please note that the group meetings have moved to the second Wednesday of the month due to a clash of meetings in the large room of the library. We now meet in the Community room of the Hospital which at the moment is provided for free, is on the ground floor and accessible. It is an excellent venue with a small kitchen for tea and coffee preparation. We meet at 1030 for a prompt start.

I can be contacted via email at steve@stevegibbon.co.uk or by phone on 01434 344 383.

Also feel free to mail this on to anyone else who might be interested or print a copy for them. If you did not receive this directly from myself then I do not have your email address. If you want to ensure you are on the circulation, please contact me by email and ask to be put on it. Equally if you do not want to be on the circulation let me know and I will remove you from it. Thank you.

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Digital News

A few items have progressed digitally since the last newsletter and meeting.

WIKI

Have you heard of Wikipedia? Perhaps you even use it regularly or occasionally. It is an online encyclopaedia more extensive than the old Encyclopaedia Britannica. Wikipedia is a free online encyclopaedia, created and edited by volunteers around the world and hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation.

The software that drives Wikipedia is freely available and well supported. It drives not just Wikipedia itself but lots of specialist 'Wikis' round the world. I am using it at The Heritage Centre Bellingham to record our Heritage and History and the stories people have and can pass on digitally before they are lost. I have now done the same for Haltwhistle and created our very own publicly accessible Wiki for Haltwhistle Heritage and History. You can find it here:

<https://haltwhistle.org/history/>

which is supported via the Haltwhistle Partnership website.

There is not much on it at the moment but that will quickly change. To get started I have used my notes from these newsletters since the group started. However, we can expand this with help:

1. Do you have any heritage recollections or history notes about Haltwhistle in the past? This could be about occupations, people, places, or simple anecdotes. Send them to me in an email or Word document and I can put them on the Wiki. You do not have to format anything, just keep it simple. Photos would help as well.
2. If you do not do email or Word, then either find someone who does to help you or at any meeting pass me some legible handwritten notes.
3. Do you have a topic you want to find out more about? I can create a holding page and ask the public for contributions to help fill it out.
4. If you have a little bit of IT capability, I can easily train you to be a contributor or editor of the WIKI, it is not too hard. Just get in touch.
5. If you have information from past exhibitions, I can load that up to the WIKI as well.
6. If you are working on a new topic of interest you can load up information to the WIKI as it develops, you don't have to wait until the work is complete. This way you can start sharing immediately and others might then be interested in helping or contributing.

It is simple and quick. One of the advantages of recording this information digitally is that it need never be lost and is easily accessible for ANYONE. So, CAN YOU HELP please?

Website

We now have a simple website to advertise our programme and other news, including the library and back copies of the newsletter. It is nearly finished, and you can find it here supported by the Haltwhistle Partnership website:

<https://history.haltwhistle.org/>

Summary of Meeting held at Haltwhistle Memorial Hospital – 14th February 2024 – The Alston Branch Railway and the STRPS

Our invited guest Speaker this month was Richard Graham, a Director and volunteer of the South Tyne Railway Preservation Society (STRPS) who enthralled us for an hour (he could have done much longer) with the history of the Alston branch railway and the STRPS. Richard had many images to support this excellent talk and it stirred memories for many present. What an excellent speaker!

One of the most interesting facts for myself was that there has been a discovery of Lithium (used in so many batteries) beneath the relatively recently mined areas of the North Pennines. This is a much-wanted metal and there are few known deposits in the UK – most deposits are in South America, Australia and China. It will be a much sought after and valuable commodity. Could we see another 'gold' rush in the North Pennines?

Here are a few notes I managed to take at the meeting, but these will not do justice to Richard's talk – any mistakes are mine. There is general information about the Alston Line on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alston_line .

In 1797 a cross country canal was proposed between the two coasts linking Maryport to the Tyne. It would be a full and separate canal rather than a series of linked canalised rivers. In this area it would largely be located North of the current railway line.

It was not until 1819 that the Carlisle Canal Act was signed by George III but it never came to pass. By 1829 (under George IV) the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Act was signed, and construction started in 1835 at a very fast pace by today's standards. By 2nd May 1839 the railway was completed.

9/3/1835	Blaydon west to Hexham
18/6/1838	Haydon Bridge to Greenhead
2/5/1839	Blaydon east to Scotswood and Newcastle

Aside from the Alston branch there were many connections in Haltwhistle to the industries at what is now Edens Lawn and Potts Plant Hire and then by narrow gauge up the burn to a further set of industries including mines, a woollen mill, etc. The narrow gauge was originally a series of ropeways or simple cart and pony extraction but became a narrow-gauge railway when the 'line' was extended to the quarry at Cawfields.

Haltwhistle surprisingly never had a loco shed and relied on locomotives from the sheds at either Alston or Blaydon. There were coal drops along the route to Alston Arches near where Kilfrost is now.

An Act of Parliament in 1846, modified in 1849 established the intent for a line to Alston and Nenthead (although the line never went past Alston). This was in competition to a proposed line from Teesdale to Alston originating at the Stockton Darlington Railway, and routing via Lambley and Brampton which would have incorporated a tunnel at Killhope and would have meant there never would have been a branch from Alston to Haltwhistle.

Originally the line was intended to leave Haltwhistle to the East, cross the Tipalt burn and re-join the current line around Park Village but a change in plans resulted in the line leaving to the West and the building of the Alston Arches.

There are 61 'bridges' on the Alston branch over the 13 miles of track bed. Bridge Number 3 is the Alston Arches and Bridge number 61 is known as the 'Snicket' and goes under the road at Alston near the Station into the large quarry area behind.

There was the first halt (rather than station) at Plenmeller for all the workers employed there with lots of sidings for the mines. Some information can be found on a redirected page on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Featherstone_Park_railway_station

Featherstone Park (originally Featherstone) is the next stop on the line (more information at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Featherstone_Park_railway_station). There was a goods yard here (behind the platform and Station House) and coal drops on the other side of the level crossing. This station's claim to fame is this is where the armoured Royal Train was stationed overnight when members of the Royal family visited Tyneside during the war. This was done in complete secrecy for security and safety. It is not known whether any photographs exist of this happening.

There was a station at Coanwood of which the platform remains a remnant. There were extensive mines here and so lots of need for the railway. (Ed: The station was originally known as Shaft Hill or Shafthill. It was later renamed Coanwood on 1 March 1885 by the North Eastern Railway.) More information on Coanwood Station on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coanwood_railway_station

Lambley Viaduct (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambley_Viaduct - a significant example of railway engineering) is Bridge Number 16 on the line and then to Lambely Station (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambley_railway_station) which is the junction with Lord Carlisle's railway (also full gauge) to Brampton (for goods only) with lots of narrow gauge lines linking mines and quarries to it.

This is of course where the original planned route from the Stockton/Darlington railway would have arrived en route to Brampton.

On to Slaggyford Station (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slaggyford_railway_station) with some unofficial request stops in between at one time. The platform at Slaggyford is now on the other side of the line to where it first was. Slaggyford is where Maureen Hardcastle's great grandfather was Stationmaster.

The terminus was of course at Alston – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alston_railway_station

There were many proposals to close the line to Alston both with Beeching and prior to that. The line resisted closure because it had a healthy revenue from freight (but very poor revenues from passengers) and there was a lack of an all-weather road to Alston.

In 1966 some track was removed at Alston and the signal box was demolished. The station became unmanned in the 1960s. However, the line resisted closure until February 1973 when the all-weather road was established, and a bus service took over the route.

The STRPS was founded in the same year but in 1977 BR contracted a company to lift the tracks. Many barriers, including cost, were being put in the way of the STRPS. However, the original railway act was never repealed and thus a simpler Statutory Instrument was 'all' that was required for the STRPS to reinstate the line as a narrow-gauge line. The first 1 mile of operational track was running by 1983. The loco shed was completed in 1985.

In both 1976 and 1984 the all-weather road was ironically blocked by snow. Alston originally has its own railway snow plough and snow plough loco shed.

In 1988 a main gas pipe to Alston was laid alongside the narrow-gauge railway on the original track bed. In many places the bed was of double track width so there was plenty of room to do this.

As an aside there was a discussion about the Alston Arches Viaduct (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alston_Arches_Viaduct). All but one of the arches is built with its own arch within the main arch. It is believed that the original intention was to have a bridge across the river below the railway and within the arches. However, during the construction of the last pier, a flood washed it away (the dressed stones are still in the river to this day a few hundred yards downstream). The internal bridge idea was abandoned, and the last arch became a solid arch.

Many thanks to Richard for a very entertaining morning.

Richard has been kind enough to promise to share the talk contents with me (and possibly additional information) so it can be included in our wiki which I will do soon.

Wanted – your Memories and Anecdotes.

What are your memories of the 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's or even more recently. What anecdotes and stories can you tell? One of our objectives is to capture this information before it is 'lost'. If you have anything you can share and any images to go with it please don't hesitate to forward it to me when I can then incorporate it into our Wikipedia of information about Haltwhistle and its surrounding parishes.

Thanks, Steve Gibbon steve@stevegibbon.co.uk 01434 344 383

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 13th March 2024. 10:30 in the Community Room of Haltwhistle Hospital. Colin Mills will talk about the Featherstone Prisoner of War Camp.

Library

You can also find this information on the website at <https://history.haltwhistle.org/>

A reminder from Jan that some people may have borrowed books from the library and may not have signed for them or returned them. If you have a book from the library, could you please just let Jan know that you have it and whether you will be hanging on to it or returning it. Thank you. Jan can be contacted at janmillward@btinternet.com

A small reference library of books, maps and pamphlets has already been built up. For now, it will be available at each meeting or via Jan Millward. A sign in/out book will be used to record who has what so books can be kept track of. The list of available publications is provided below.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>
Altwesel at the First Millenium 1000 AD (2 copies)	Tony Storey
Archaeology in Northumberland National Park	Paul Frodsham
Bishop Ridley and the Reiving Ridleys	The Black Bull
The Church at Hautwysel	Tony Storey
Enjoy Haltwhistle's 8 th Walking Festival	Haltwhistle Walking
Festival	
Featherstone Castle, Northumberland	John Cornforth
Haltwhistle and South Tynedale (Geology)	Tony Storey
Haltwhistle and South Tynedale (3 copies)	Tony Storey
Haltwhistle and the Great War (2 copies)	Northern Cultural
Projects	
A Haltwhistle Christmas	Tony Storey
Haltwhistle, Haydon Bridge & South Tynedale (2 copies)	Frank Graham
History of Gilsland	Maria Ann Baxter
In Nancy's Memory	Matthew Parker
Legends of Haltwhistle and South Tynedale	Richard and Susan Sim
Letter From Haltwhistle	Brian Lee
Medieval Castle, Towers, Peles and Bastles of Northumberland	T H Rowland
Northumberland Folk Tales	Rosalind Kerven
My History of Featherstone Castle	John Clark
Towers and Bastles	P F Ryder
War on the Banks of the Tyne	Haltwhistle Partnership

Deadline for contributions

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome – even short stories or anecdotes. You may also provide an image with your contribution for inclusion in the newsletter and email it to me. Please make sure the image is your own or you have copyright permission for it.

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