

Haltwhistle History Group Newsletter

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

Edition 4, 23rd October 2023

Edited by Steve Gibbon

Hello everyone, here is the fourth newsletter of the History Group with a reminder that I will very much be 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. For the last meeting I am indebted to Jan Millward and Colin Mills who provided notes for the meeting in October in my absence.
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. I also apologise that this newsletter is a little late.

Please note that the group meetings have moved to the first Wednesday of the month due to a clash of meetings in the large room of the library

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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. Thanks.

In this newsletter:

1. Holy Cross Church
2. Library
3. Heritage Exhibition
4. Next and Future Meetings

At the moment the group meets once a month on the first Wednesday of the month at Haltwhistle library on the second floor. Meetings gather at 1030 for 1100 and will finish between 1200 and 1230. Refreshments are available from 1030.

History and Tour of Holy Cross Church

The October meeting was held at Holy Cross Church and was kindly hosted by Colin Mills who gave a talk on the history of Holy Cross Church. He began by recapping some of the information from his talk about King Edward I in August to set the scene:

- There are possible connections to St Aidan which survive in the place name 'Eden's Lawn'.
- The Anglo-Saxon church became large and well endowed. During the reign of King Knut, it was included in a lady's dowry on her marriage to king Duncan of Scotland, and its royal status meant it was protected during the Scottish raids
- The monks of Arbroath Abbey built a 'new' church in 1230, which is essentially the building we have today, and sits exactly on the footprint of the original structure.
- It also survived the Reiver raids of late 13th and early 16th centuries with little damage.

Colin suggested that he give a run-down of the history aspects before we each took a look around the church. We could then ask questions about features which were of most interest to us.

From about 1558 to about 1750, only 5 new churches were consecrated in this area of Northumberland. In the following 250 years, driven by the industrial revolution, this number rose to 153. These 'modern' churches were warmer and drier. They also had pews which were the same for all, regardless of social standing. Previously, pews were status dominated by the gentry. They were mainly box pews, installed individually by well off parishioners. A haphazard layout resulted over time.

In August 1812, we read that new pews were erected. They were allocated to Rev Hollingsworth's family (he was rector at the time) and local dignitaries after public auction. The money generated paid for a People's Gallery in the north-west corner.

In 1869, Canon Lowe became priest at Holy Cross. He realised that the church was being left behind and was badly in need of a makeover. He began to raise funds and make plans to bring about this refurbishment.

Canon Lowe was aware of past local commissions in the parish for John Dobson, the famous architect, who was responsible for the construction of Central Station in Newcastle. He had been involved with projects at Unthank Hall, Bellister Castle and St Cuthbert's, Greenhead and the Old Vicarage that still adjoins the burial ground to the south of Holy Cross church.

However, Dobson had recently died but his practice in Newcastle had recently been bought by Robert Johnson FIA and his partner. Johnson was well regarded by Sir George Gilbert Scott and so was engaged by Canon Lowe to undertake the redesign, repair and reorganization of Holy Cross.

Johnson's concept and design was unusual as it did not follow the then current convention to rebuild in the Gothic style that had been fashionable up to this time. As a result, the 'Early English' style of Holy Cross was preferred, and all building changes were harmonious.

The Chancel

As a minimum, a chancel comprises of three walls (but not the chancel arch), a weatherproof roof and windows glazed with plain glass. It was a Lay Rector's ancient responsibility in law to ensure that the chancel was fit for the Eucharist to be celebrated.

The Restoration Committee therefore declared that the refit of the chancel was not their responsibility. However, the chancel was not in a good condition; and it would be beneficial to repair the chancel and church at the same time and in a similar style.

The Lay Rector at this time was Sir Edward Blackett. The meeting's minutes show that after 4 months of negotiation, he agreed "to restore the chancel, in a manner commensurate with the Parish's intention to restore the nave, for a sum of £350 that would release him from any other claim interest of the works currently proposed."

The Faculty (a licence or authorization from the diocese to make changes)

With funding in place, the church's specific needs could be clarified. In addition to the actual building work, Johnson envisioned that some fixtures in the church (e.g., the pulpit, the font) would be disturbed to enable new flooring and would need to be reset or replaced afterwards.

The faculty stipulated the following:

- The general restoration and repair of the church.
- The necessary work to be funded by public subscription.
- The gallery to be removed.
- Repairs to all windows, inserting appropriate stonework and suitable reglazing with strong, rolled cathedral glass.
- The removal of earth against the exterior church walls (they were very damp).
- The erection of a new bell gable, a vestry and a heating cellar (first mention of this).
- The exhumation and re-interment of (unknown number of) burials within and outside the church as may be necessary to accomplish the restoration. (a lot of discretion here).

The budget for the works was estimated at £3000 to be raised by public subscription.

The Nave

It is unusually square, the aisles being integral within the original build and not added later. The same is true for the high clerestory windows giving the impression that this may have been intended as the first phase of a monastic building. None of this was changed by Johnson, who nevertheless removed the rotten sash windows that had at

some time been inserted in the wall behind where today's kitchen stands. He re-styled them consistent with the rest of the church.

The Pulpit

Old drawings show that the old pulpit was within the main body of the nave, beside the nearest pillar in front of the present lectern. Before the age of microphones, it was nearer to the congregation. Before electricity, an oil lamp could be hung from the pillar to illuminate the vicar's sermon notes. The pulpit probably fell to bits when removed for new flooring.

A new pulpit was designed by Johnson himself and cost £25. His new lectern was £10, and the altar rail was £14.

The Old Stoup

This is the oldest object in Holy Cross church, possibly of the Anglo-Saxon period. It looks like a crudely carved font or water basin intended by its shape to be fixed to a wall. According to local legend, it was used as a baptismal font by Paulinus. In the rebuild it was preserved and re-sited; and now stands to the left of the vestry door.

The Font

The Bowl is probably the original of the monks in 1230. They had high standards. The inside is finely carved, perfectly round and smooth. The rim is well-worn with a patina from much use and shows places where an ornate cover would have been fixed. However, it has a crude exterior that speaks of damage, possibly vandalism during the time of the puritan iconoclasts. The crude restoration, including a Scottish thistle, bears the date and the initials RP of Robert Priestman who was the first priest appointed after that period. (see the list of vicars). Soon after, a minute records a bishop's visitation ordering that a new cover be made, as it was improper to be without one. It now stands at the rear of the church, reset by Johnson on a Victorian plinth.

The Flooring

The old floor was of stone slabs set on beaten earth. These were taken up, internal graves removed, and the ground dug out so that the new interior floor, when finished, would be level with the new paths outside the entrance. The new floor would be raised up, "ventilated" and built of pitch pine. A heating cellar was also installed, and the heating channels can be seen along the aisles. The central aisle in the nave was specified to be finished with red and black Staffordshire tiles.

Two members of the Restoration Committee had been appointed to act with the vicar should any burials be found. They were given approval to reinter the burials without further reference or faculty. Flexibility with discretion!

Likewise, when walls were stripped back and memorial tablets were removed, they could decide which should be reinstated and where they should be sited.

The West End

The west end wall of the church was almost falling down and needed to be rebuilt. This was when the 'new bell gable' was erected and the large west window was created with plain, cathedral rolled glass.

The Stained Glass Windows

All the windows in the original church and the 1872 restoration were all in plain glass. Only buildings such as Westminster Abbey, York Minster, etc generally had coloured glass, most of which was very old, rare and precious and was symbolic of their status. Parish churches were almost always glazed in plain glass to admit more light when internal lighting was poor.

However, in the late 1880s the newly rich gentry wanted a way to honour their sons who had died and were possibly buried overseas following military or diplomatic service. Many stained-glass companies arose. The trend was then taken up as a way to remember local family members. Most of Holy Cross's stained-glass windows are of that kind and date from that period.

The main **chancel windows** over the altar are the most striking and were the first to be installed. They are accredited to William Morris Co. and carry his trademark wheat-sheaf. There is no panel incorporated in the design to display the name of the benefactor. The date of the faculty is currently unknown.

The Chancel Roof is highly decorated and is a particularly fine piece of art, reputedly designed by Edward Burne-Jones. It is much admired and photographed by visitors who wonder why so much care was lavished on a roof.

The four stained glass windows in the **north wall of the nave** represent Mary, Elizabeth, Salome and Eunice. The benefactor was Miss Constance Lowe in memory of her mother. The faculty was approved in 1898 with a note: "as attached to the church door".

The window in the '**south aisle, east end thereof**' depicts King Edwin and St Aidan. It is a gift from Canon Lowe in memory of his late wife, Elizabeth, who died in 1897.

It would appear that there are no official papers relating to the windows in the **west end of the nave**. Fortunately, there is a letter of thanks from the committee after the installation. The roundel window high above and rarely noticed shows the pelican of the Blenkinsopp-Coulson family crest. This crest can also be seen in the family memorial tablet on the north wall of the chancel. Two ladies from the family commissioned the window in memory of their late father.

On the right of the altar rail, the memorial slab to John Ridley commemorates the cousin of Bishop Ridley (martyr, 1555) who was born nearby at Unthank Hall.

The reredos behind the altar was a gift of the widow and family members of the late Canon Ives who was vicar for over 40 years. Regrettably, no faculty with further

information has been found and the small brass plaque on the north wall is now corroded and unreadable. Strangely, though, a faculty permitting it to be painted is at Woodhorn. This either did not take place or was afterwards cleaned off.

The reredos is unique for the north on England in being of a nativity theme, not the usual Passover or Easter theme. It is complete with a stable, St Mary with the Christ child and Joseph, three kings with gifts, a lamb and a donkey. The figures are in clothing reminiscent of earlier Dutch paintings and could have been recycled, a casualty perhaps that was not considered to fit in and was therefore discarded by e.g., George Gilbert Scott when “modernising” another church into their neo-Gothic style. It is, however, like an early version of our modern Christmas Crib. It is much admired by visitors.

Library

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>
Altweasel 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

Heritage Exhibition

The Heritage Exhibition closed in early October after hosting nearly 400 visitors. The Partnership Office has been leased to a new business and is no longer available. Thanks to all of you who volunteered, supported and visited this small temporary exhibition.

Thank you.

Next and Future Meetings

The next meeting is on Wednesday 1st November 1045 in the library when the discussion is about the past industry in and around Haltwhistle.

If you have ideas for future meetings, please let us know. At a future meeting we will also discuss the sub-groups some of you expressed interest in forming or working with.

Ideas for future meetings include:

- Reminiscences of your childhoods
- The local words and dialect
- A Haltwhistle town centre walk part 2
- A Haltwhistle burn walk part 1
- A Haltwhistle burn walk part 2
- Reivers part 2
- The South Tynedale Railway
- The Railway at Haltwhistle and surrounding area
- A Railway related walk at the Station
- The Roman Wall in the vicinity of Haltwhistle
- Featherstone Castle
- Featherstone Prisoner of War Camp
- Bardon Mill Pottery tour
- Local dialect words and phrases – their origin and meaning
- 110 years since the start of World War I
- The Temperance Movement in the Tyne Valley
- Quakers in the area

Walks will be scheduled for better weather months and will be kept short in length to accommodate all ages and fitness levels. If anyone knows of any speakers for any of these talks (or others) please let us know. We could potentially pay speakers modest expenses (most do not claim) but no speaking fee.

Deadline for contributions

The deadline for submitting contributions is the weekend after any monthly meeting for circulation the week after the event. You may also provide an image with your news contribution for inclusion in the newsletter and email it to me. Please make sure the image is your own or you have copyright right to it.

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