NEWS BULLETIN

THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

No.81 June 2026

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ABOUT US

The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne promotes the preservation, study and enjoyment of historical and archaeological heritage in general, and of North East England in particular. We have over 600 members, and always welcome new ones. We have a full programme of public events, lectures, walks and visits, and social activities. We are guardians of worldclass collections of antiquities and archives, and of a library of over 30,000 books and journals. We sponsor and publish research into North East history and archaeology of all periods. For more information, look at our website, www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk or contact us at SANT, Great North Museum: Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT, phone 0191 231 2700, email admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk. EDITOR'S NOTE: All relevant contributions to the Bulletin *are welcome – 300 words plus an illustration. The deadline for the next* Bulletin *is 6th November, 2026 and my e-mail is mikebarke46@hotmail.co.uk*

SUBSCRIPTION INCREASE

The news that subscription prices would increase from 2027 onwards was included in the last *News Bulletin*, in December. We have now decided on the details, and we are sending out a letter alongside this *News Bulletin* explaining them.

It will then be 12 years since the last subscription increase, in 2015. There have been a lot of cost pressures to absorb. Print costs, postage and lecture theatre hire have all risen dramatically. We have made economies where we can, but the Society's spending has been greater than its income in each of the last few years. So we need to get the Society's finances back on a sound footing to make sure that we are safeguarding our charitable objects of 'the study, investigation, description and presentation of antiquities and historical records' particularly in the North-East of England.

Even so, the increases are less than inflation has been over the period, so the subscription

remains excellent value for money.

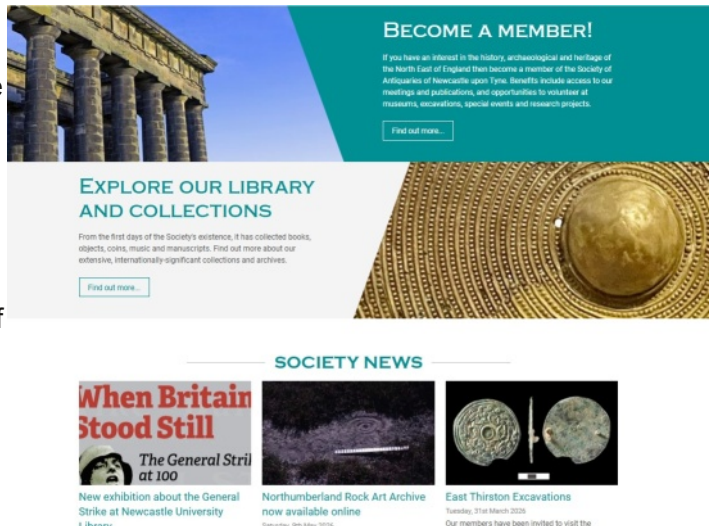
Our programme of activities has continued, and we now livestream our monthly lectures, so they are available to all members, wherever they live. Most are also recorded and available on YouTube. *Archaeologia Aeliana* (*AA*) now has colour illustrations and, sometime later this year or early next, there will be a bonus issue of *AA* for members on the excavations of Newcastle Castle. Do have a look at our newly relaunched website, if you haven't already done so – it is more up-to-date and easier to use.

Your subscriptions also support the research grants we offer, the addition of newly discovered items to our collections, making them available for public display and also support the museums and archives which house our principal collections.

Do contact me with any concerns, at treasurer@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk

Simon Pallett
Hon Treasurer

NEW SANT WEBSITE



The Society's new website (https://www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk/) went live on 20th March. This was the culmination of the project to update our online presence, formerly managed by Cornwell Internet.

The specification for the new website included up-to-date software that could be freely used by Society members, more visual presentation of the Society's museum and library collections, enhanced security for the members' area, online access to the latest volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* for institutional subscribers, online booking and payments for events, connections to social media, and a means for people to donate to the Society to support our work. The archives of digitised and transcribed sources from our collections were moved to a separate static website (https://sant.org.uk/).

Several companies were approached to submit tenders for the new website work, and their applications were assessed against agreed criteria, which included cost but also previous experience with organisations with similar activities to the Society. The successful application was from Heritage 360 at the University of York. As well as a competitive cost, they have worked with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, *Antiquity* journal, and the Royal Archaeological Institute.

Working with Heritage 360's project manager Pat Gibbs, the Society's representatives (Marta Alberti, Abbie Hammond, Katie Mountain, Don O'Meara, Simon Pallett, Sue Ward, and Richard Pears) decided on the structure and content of the new website. Several members have received training to be able to update and maintain the website.

Please bookmark the website on your device and look out for updates online. The website is a means to keep you informed of events from the Society and other organisations. It can be updated for free and at short notice, unlike printed mailings. If you use Facebook or Instagram, please use the links on the website to follow us on those platforms so that you are updated on events and news and can contribute your comments and news.

Richard Pears

PILGRIMAGE UPDATE: THE PILGRIMAGE OF HADRIAN'S WALL 2029

We are progressing well with the organisation of the 2029 Pilgrimage. The dates are 21–29 July 2029. This year we travel from west to east. Our main base in Carlisle will be the Crown and Mitre Hotel and in Newcastle the Royal Station Hotel: both are booked, as are Tyne Valley

Coaches. The handbook for the Pilgrimage is being edited by Tony Wilmott and Beccy Jones and we have a quote from Titus Wilson for its printing. These three elements are the main costs of the Pilgrimage. It will come as no surprise to society members that the costs are higher than in 2019. We are working to keep costs as low as possible but it is likely that the full cost of attendance, including Carlisle and Newcastle accommodation, will be about £1200. This compares well with a week-long history study tour. There will be an option of booking without hotel accommodation.

It is possible to register interest in booking for the Pilgrimage now at: HWPilgrimage2029@gmail.com. This initial registration list will be used to help plan accommodation needs and it would be useful at this stage if you can tell us what accommodation you might need (e.g single room, twin room, double etc.). The full booking details with all costs will be sent out closer to the Pilgrimage.

There will be more information on the Pilgrimage in the next newsletter.

David J. Breeze
Chair, Pilgrimage 2029 Organising Committee

ALL CHANGE FOR THE SOCIETY'S WEBSITE: FAREWELL TO RICHARD CORNWELL

Richard Cornwell

This year marks the end of a Chapter for the Society's website, as Cornwell Internet are handing over responsibility to Heritage360, who have designed a new site which members will have seen for the past few weeks.

Cornwell Internet was set up in July 1998, 'three months before Google got going' says its owner, Roger Cornwell. He had just taken early retirement from BT following a 30-year career programming computers and managing computer projects. Already having designed some web pages, he set about helping individuals and small organisations to create websites.

Among early clients was the children's author Anne Fine, not yet appointed as the second Children's Laureate. He was delighted in 2005 to win a Visionary Design Award from the National Library for the Blind. By then the company was doing well enough to allow Roger's partner Jean Rogers to join him and take on a portfolio of websites. Among these was outremer.co.uk set up as a companion site to the Books of Outremer written by Chaz Brenchley. An article that Jean wrote about the Crusader castles of the middle east was plagiarised by a lecturer at the US Naval Academy in Ananopolis, which led to an official complaint and, ironically, much helpful publicity.

In 2005 the Society approached Cornwell Internet to tender to run their website and their bid was accepted. The site used a content management system, *Clearsight*, which had been written by Tom Chadwin who was moving on in his career. This software has served the Society well and Cornwell Internet implemented a number of enhancements including improving site security and adding multi-level member log-in, so members can now read recent volumes of *Archaeologica Aeliana* online, and Council members can read relevant papers.

Alongside the main site, Cornwell Internet enhanced Wordpress software so that documents from the Society's archives, painstakingly transcribed into spreadsheets by volunteers, can now be read online. These transcriptions have now been moved into a new website at sant.org.uk. The same concept was used to provide a website for the Northumberland Name Books project, now available at namebooks.org.uk.

As well as looking after the Society's websites, Cornwell Internet looked after dozens of other sites, including for ten years the Crime Writers' Association. In 2011 the CWA awarded Cornwell Internet its coveted Red Herring award, which the CWA reserves for special service to the organisation. As well as being itself an award-winning company, Cornwell Internet must be unique among companies of its size in that three of its clients, David Almond, Ann Cleeves, and Anne Fine have all been awarded OBEs.

In the 20+ years that Cornwell Internet has been looking after the Society's websites technology has moved on apace. At the start, the internet was reached via 56kbs dial-up

connections. Today the connection speed is 2,700 times faster. Mobile technology means websites can be accessed on small smart phones as well as larger screens on desktops. However, the *Clearsight* software that has served the Society well has reached the end of its useful life.

Sue Ward

SANT FACSIMILE OF THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

Many SANT members may not be aware that the Society owns a full-size replica of the Bayeux Tapestry, albeit on paper rather than cloth. This was commissioned by Rev John Collingwood Bruce in the early 1850s and was copied by a gifted pupil at his school in Percy Street. The young man was John Moffat, intriguingly a relation of David Livingstone, the missionary and explorer. The facsimile consists of a series of panels depicting scenes from the Norman invasion. Subsequently, Bruce had the work on display, first at the Castle and then the Blackgate, but over the years much of it gathered grime and soot and gradually became hidden behind bookcases and cupboards. On the Society's move to the GNM it was decided to 'store' the panels at the Discovery Museum. They were rolled up, placed in bags and largely forgotten about. Although the panels are filthy (as shown) and some are damaged, most are in surprisingly good condition.

Section of untreated facsimile. Photo: Mike Barke

The imminent loan of the original Tapestry to the British Museum has provided the catalyst to try and restore at least part of this unique artefact. This, of course, is a highly skilled and expensive operation and we are seeking external funding to finance the cleaning and repair of as many panels as possible. The skilled team at the Discovery Museum have already started this task. These will be placed (free to view) on display at the GNM:Hancock and other venues within the region at the same time as the British Museum's display of the French original (£33 ticket price).

Section of cleaned facsimile

Our purpose is to make the facsimile visible for free to those who would probably never be able to see the original in London but also to utilise the educational value of our replica. The team at the GNM:Hancock will devise a series of activities related to the historical episode depicted in the 'tapistry' for the many school children who visit the Museum.

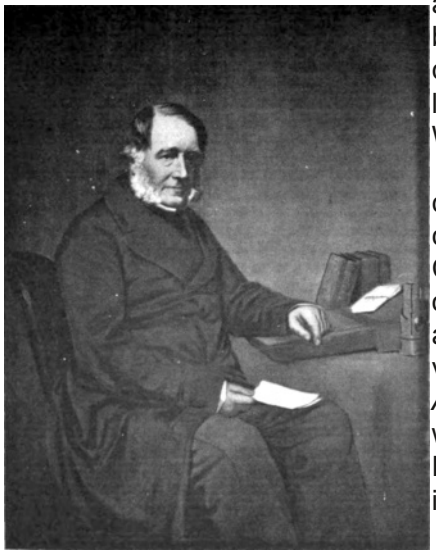
Mike Barke, SANT Hon Librarian

SANT LIBRARY GEMS

Nicholas Wood, 1825, *A practical treatise on rail-roads, and other interior communication in general: with original experiments, and tables of the comparative value of canals and rail-roads*

As well as providing a comprehensive collection of published material on Roman Britain and Hadrian's Wall, the SANT library also contains a rich and diverse range of books on many aspects of the history and heritage of the northern region from Pre-Roman times to the present day.

The Library is especially useful in highlighting the achievements of notable individuals and their importance in the history and development of the North-East. An example of this is Nicholas Wood (1795–1865) who was an eminent and influential mining and steam locomotion engineer who was born near Ryton. He was a founder member of SANT and president of the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers. He was also a close contemporary and



Nicholas Wood, 1795–1865

associate of George Stephenson. This rare first edition of his book *A Practical Treatise on Rail-Roads...* published in 1825 contains a number of fine engravings of early steam locomotives and other railway associated items. Nicholas Wood is buried in the cemetery at Hetton le Hole.

Other examples of important individuals sharing a comparable background to Wood represented in the collection include John Buddle (1773–1843) and William Chapman (1749–1832). Buddle was also a founder member of SANT and, as a leading mining engineer, was concerned about safety in coal mines and devised improved methods of ventilation. His *First Report of a Society for Preventing Accidents in Coal Mines* is included in the SANT tracts. He was also involved in the design, testing and promotion of Humphrey Davy's miners' safety Lamp which was invented in 1815.

William Chapman, who knew Buddle, was a mechanical and civil engineer who lived and worked in Newcastle. He worked on the development of canals and also improvements to river navigations. Also included in the tracts in the SANT Library is his *Report on the Measures to be Attended to in the Survey of a Line of Navigation from Newcastle upon Tyne to the Irish Channel*.

All of the material mentioned above, and much more, is available to view on a reference basis by contacting Mike Barke the honorary SANT Librarian.

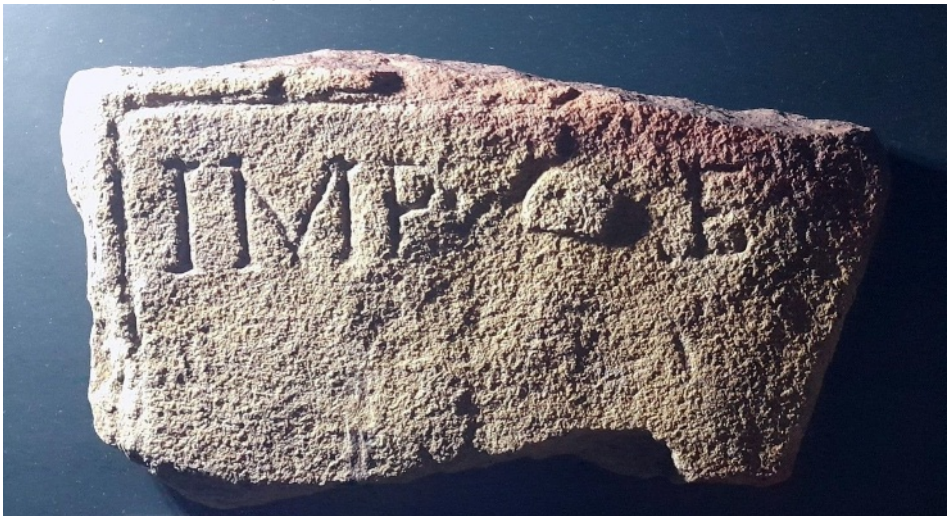
Ian Bower

A NEW ROMAN INSCRIPTION FROM BENWELL

Amongst the Society's collection there are several famous inscriptions from Benwell Roman Fort (Condercum), such as the three altars to Antenociticus (*RIB* 1327–9). It may come as a surprise, therefore, to learn that none had been found since 1938 (*RIB* 3285) until a small fragment was donated to the collection in 2025.

The stone was found in a garden in Fenham, 0.8 miles from the fort. Measuring 26.4 x 14.3 cm, with a thickness of 4–4.5cm, it is the top left corner of a building inscription with a single incised line border. Although in poor condition, it is presumed that this began *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari)*, as does the inscription set up at Benwell by the *Classis Britannica* (*RIB* 1340).

The first three letters are clearly IMP, ie the abbreviation for *imp(erator)*; there is then a gap before a letter E. Through a magnifying lens it is just possible to see the top left curve of the letter C. There is a raised lump in the middle of the C which is harder and less micaceous than the rest of the panel, a geological anomaly which may be the reason the inscription was not completed. The bottom right serif of the A is visible, but the stone is broken and smooth where the S should be. There is no sign of any letters below IMP CAES. All the visible letters are



Inscribed Stone found in a Fenham Garden. Photo: Lindsay Allason-Jones

aligned at their top edges, but the lower serifs of the M and P are higher than those of the I and E.

The 'frame' is just a roughly incised single line which gives the impression the carver scored control margins, rather a final border. The stone is unusually thin for an imperial building inscription, being similar in thickness to one of the Vallum stones from Denton (*RIB* 1362 and 1363), although those are merely simple centurial stones.

The fragment is now in the Great North Museum (acc. no 2025.10). Thanks are due to the staff of the Great North Museum for providing access and the photograph. I am also grateful to Dr Roger Tomlin and Dr Nick Hodgson for their comments on the inscription.

Lindsay Allason-Jones

HIDDEN TALENTS

We probably all know someone whose talents – musical, intellectual, artistic etc. – have never been properly recognised. They have simply remained hidden. The attached image by Robert King (b.1919), painted along with several other scenes on the walls of the council house where he lived, demonstrates such an example. In those days, Robert had to seek permission from Tynemouth Council to carry out this work. How times have changed! In his daily work Robert was a painter of a different kind – at Swan Hunters shipyard, Wallsend. He would occasionally carry out painting and decorating at private houses. He never had any formal artistic training, and he appears never to have painted on canvas or to have left behind any further examples of his work.

One of Robert King's Wall Paintings. Photo: Mike Barke

The image shown here was recently discovered by new residents of a house on Marden Estate, Cullercoats. In the process of re-decorating they stripped away the existing wallpaper only to find that the walls beneath were not bare but had several decorative paintings including this nautical scene. The house is where Robert King lived and where his daughter, now Pam Taylor, was born. Pam is the source of this information and I am extremely grateful to her for this story. She describes her father as a good man, quiet and hard-working. Tragically, exposure to asbestos in the course of his work led to illness and his death at the early age of 57. One can only speculate on what he might have achieved and what kind of artistic legacy he may have left if only his talents had been publicly recognised.

His story contains an object lesson in the potential significance of recognising and appreciating natural talent where it occurs. Robert seems to have been a very modest man, and it probably never occurred to him that others may have been interested in and enjoyed his paintings. The chance discovery of his paintings and a fleeting view of them is a source of pleasure for others. But one wonders how many other manifestations of similar talent are quietly hidden away elsewhere in our region.

Mike Barke

A TREASURY OF TYNESIDE TALES

A Treasury of Tyneside Tales is an ambitious heritage project aiming to uncover the treasure of Tyneside Stories and local folklore. The project invited intergenerational community groups from across Newcastle to explore and discover local folklore through exciting workshops delivered by local experienced artists, and to make their very own 'Crankie Theatres', exhibited at the Great North Museum: Hancock during Easter 2026.

A Crankie is a 19th Century storytelling device, where an illustrated scroll of paper is pulled across an illuminated screen using a 'crank' whilst a story is being told. Often, Crankies include shadow puppetry and music.

Image courtesy of Moving Parts Arts, 2026. (Reproduced with parental permission)

The stories developed by participants are based on true events that have taken place in their neighbourhoods and developed into modern folkloric tales. As part of their research for the project, participants were invited into the Library at the Great North Museum: Hancock to look at some of the SANT collection. Participants of all ages were incredibly engaged by this, and the folklore and history they uncovered in these visits supported them to think of stories in their own lives and developed their connection to Tyneside.

We're so grateful to have been given access to the SANT collection in the library, it has been an important part of this ambitious project and has been very meaningful to the participants who have visited.

Jonluke McKie, Moving Parts Arts

FROM ARCHIVE TO ARTEFACT

Incense Cup found in a quarry at Belsay

A rainy day in March is perfect for a trip to the Northumberland Archive, and more research for my latest book about Belsay. I have a plan and request a document I spotted when reading the catalogue at home. The envelope is delivered and is stuffed full of treasure which I start to sift through. Every item is inspected and notes are taken, all adding to my knowledge of Belsay. Much of it is written by Sir Charles Monck or Sir Arthur Middleton. Their own words reach out to me from the past.

The last document is picked up, stiff paper which has been folded a little carelessly. Once opened a quick scan picks out the words 'Old English Burial… barrow found in the quarry'. The opposite side has a section of an article cut from *The Proceedings*. Details about an incense cup found in the quarry by Sir Charles and donated to the SANT Collection by Sir Arthur. Senses tingling, I wonder…

Emails reveal that the cup still exists. The full *Proceedings* explain more. It's on display, item 17. I receive an invite to the Great North Museum to see it in person. The cup is removed from the case and placed in front of me. Bronze Age, found in a barrow now lost.

It would have held food or drink, and likely been placed next to a bigger cremation urn. Made of local clay and formed by ancient hands, it fits neatly in my own hands. I can feel the gentle curve of the base. The walls are tactile and decorated with marks cut by an unknown tool. It is well formed and beautiful.

A part of Belsay lost in modern times revealed by chance, the story rediscovered. And the history of Belsay gains 2000 years.

Tony Lamsdale

THE HISTORIC TOWNS TRUST – A MAP FOR NEWCASTLE AND GATESHEAD

The Historic Towns Trust is a small charity working with local partners to promote the history of towns and cities in England, Scotland and Wales. Since 1967, we have been creating inspiring maps and atlases as part of a wider European project to record and compare towns across the continent.

Historic Towns Trust maps are designed to be accessible, enabling anyone with an interest in local history to enjoy exploring places through them, and to appeal to an expert audience. They are full-colour modern maps at a scale of 1:25,000, created through a unique multi-layer mapping technique that shows the complex development of our towns over time. This approach enables us to analyse and communicate the social, economic and political history of a place to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds.

Local partnerships with community organisations or universities are central to the success of a map making project. Local partners, with the support of the Trust, take ownership of funding, researching and promoting their maps. This includes producing a gazetteer that delves further into the history of particular features shown on the map. Local engagement does not end with the finished map, with resources for schools and local events broadening the reach of maps into the wider community.

It has now produced over twenty maps in a diverse range of places, from Canterbury to Coventry, and Bradford to Bristol, and is keen to expand its work in North East England. Having already published a map for Alnwick and Alnmouth (pictured), we are now hoping to develop a map for Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead.

Historic Towns Trust: Map of Central Alnwick

But to do so, we need your support!

Please get in touch with Dr Sally Watson (sally.watson@newcastle.ac.uk) if you would be interested in finding out more about how to get involved in establishing a Newcastle and Gateshead map.

MONTHLY MEETINGS BY SUE WARD AND KATIE MOUNTAIN

NOVEMBER 2025 Meeting

Marcus Jecock and Lucy Jessop spoke about *New Shildon: a pioneering railway town fuelled by coal*. Lucy explained that her talk was based on Historic England's research report on the history of the area, published in 2023 in the run up to the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Postcard of the railway and Shildon Colliery. Archive of the Weardale Railway Trust, Shildon No. 21.

Before 1825 the area that was now New Shildon was largely agricultural, but improved methods of transporting coal made it profitable to exploit the mineral deposits there. Building railway lines and a junction meant draining a marshy area, which left a flat plateau. The earliest buildings constructed there were connected with the railway, such as Timothy Hackworth's house and back-to-back cottages, all built around 1833; these survive, though much altered. There was a huge marshalling yard, now under and beside the buildings of the National Railway Museum's Locomotion. Over following decades, the street plans showed terraces of cottages built around the railway, with the area between the main line and the branch lines gradually filling up with more housing. In due course, the gap between New Shildon and Shildon itself was built over too. The 1851 census showed over 2,500 people, while by 1891 the combined Shildons contained 7,870 people. The subsequent fortunes of the district mirrored those of the key industries; mining declined, the collieries closed and British Rail stopped making wagons there, leading to major job losses. To some extent the town has revived since, with new housing estates built on the eastern side.

Marcus then spoke about Historic England's research into the Coal Drops at Shildon, the impressive remains of a locomotive-coaling stage built to speed up the refuelling of locomotives that pulled the coal trains assembled in the Shildon marshalling yard. This was quite innovative in that it used gravity to deliver coal into locomotive tenders; however, it required a particular design of coal wagon to make it work, so was not widely copied by other rail companies. It was however very profitable for Joseph Pease, who was a key investor in both the collieries and the railway. Much restoration work has been carried out on the structure, which is no longer considered to be at risk.

A recording of Lucy's and Marcus's talks can be seen on the Newcastle Antiquaries YouTube channel.

JANUARY 2026 meeting

Lindsay Allason-Jones spoke about *The Spy in a Berwick Garden*, the title of a recent book by Phil Rowett and herself. She explained that in 2016, an archaeological investigation of a World

The Shelter in the Berwick Garden. Photo: Lindsay Allason-Jones.

War II air-raid shelter in the garden of her house in Berwick had discovered massive concrete foundations and roof, and the remains of much electrical wiring. There were mysteries about its siting, and why it was so well-built at a time when civilians could not get hold of concrete.

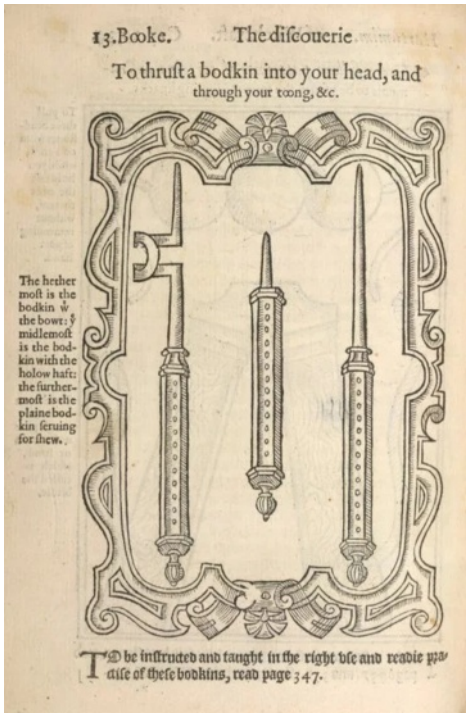
The house had been occupied by the Steven family, key members of Berwick society during the 19th and 20th centuries, who owned the local newspapers. Captain Gibson Ferrier Steven, who lived there before and during the war, was a radio expert. Among other things, by 1922 he was relaying concerts from London to the area outside his Newcastle shop in Claremont Road.

In London by 1938, with the approach of war, the Radio Security Service had been set up and was creating a system for intercepting radio communications. Gibson Steven probably took a major part in setting up and running the local network of Voluntary Interceptors (VIs), who had radio expertise and the ability to send and receive Morse Code at 25 words a minute. The task involved spending many hours listening to short-wave radio transmissions from ships and submarines in the North Sea, putting each letter of the Morse Code down on a printed form.

Films and books about Bletchley Park, she pointed out, concentrated on the computing side of the work, and Alan Turing's work, and never mentioned where they got the information from – which was these VIs, working in attics and bunkers around the country. Their contribution remained secret until the Official Secrets Act was lifted in 1974, and much documentation had been destroyed before then or since. Fortunately Lindsay's co-author Phil Rowett had interviewed some of the VIs in the past, and they had been able to piece together the story. Gibson Steven was one of Berwick's unsung heroes, and deserved to be remembered.

Lindsay can be contacted on lindsay.allason-jones@newcastle.ac.uk. The book is published by Northumberland Archives, £9.99 + p and p. A recording is also available on our YouTube channel.

FEBRUARY 2026 Meeting



A woodcut of the types of bodkin used to test for the devil's mark, from Reginald Scott's The Discoverie of Witchcraft *(1584), courtesy British Library.*

For our February talk, Dr Katie Liddane talked about *Anglo-Scottish Spiritual and Material Economies in the 1649-50 Newcastle Witch Hunt*, a topic which had been one part of her thesis on the history and heritage of witch persecution in Newcastle and Northumberland between 1642 and 1675.

She explained that in 1649, at the behest of petitioners, a Scottish witchfinder was commissioned by Newcastle upon Tyne's councilmen to search the town's suspects for 'devil's marks'. Those accused were pricked, gaoled, and tried at the 1650 summer assizes. Fourteen women and one man were hanged for witchcraft on the Town Moor.

The Newcastle witch-hunt had existed largely in the periphery of English witchcraft historiography and in the broader historiography of the region, with brief analyses characterising the hunt merely as a chronologically isolated instance of scapegoating used by local officials to consolidate control of the town. They had been driven by a narrow focus on the minimal surviving evidence, and a binary approach towards English and Scottish witchcraft historiography,

Dr Liddane put forward a more nuanced understanding of the hunt's origins, re-examining the surviving evidence directly relating to the trials. She also discussed evidence of more long-term influences beyond the town's walls and north of the border. Even while Newcastle had needed to defend itself against military attacks from Scotland, there was regular cross-border migration, and also trade in material goods between the two countries. This close cross-border relationship brought with it a heightened interest in news from the bordering regions, including the spread of religious ideas

and stories of witchcraft. This ‘spiritual economy’, a shared network of beliefs, created a context in which the character of witch persecution in the North-East was influenced by both English and Scottish witchcraft ideologies.

Dr Liddane can be contacted on Katie@twbpt.org.uk, and a recording of her talk is also available on our website.

MARCH 2026 Meeting

Ian Jackson spoke about *The influence of geology on prehistory in the north of England*, as outlined in his latest book, *Defined by Stones*. The relationship of prehistoric people to the landscape was intimate, he said; stone was used for shelter, implements, ornaments and ritual.

A glacial erratic of Silurian sandstone resting on a pedestal of younger Carboniferous rocks. Photo: Ian Jackson.

He suggested it would perhaps be wise, to consult professional geologists during archaeological research or excavations where the attributes of stone were fundamentally important. Without this, misunderstandings are likely to occur and opportunities lost. Archaeologists and geologists shared a curiosity about, and a passion for, the past, and their approaches could and should be complementary. He gave examples of these shared areas of interest and also of the differences between the disciplines. He also stressed the intellectual resources that geology offered, including isotope analysis of the metals and ores found by archaeologists; only useful because detailed geological maps existed. There were nearly 50,000 of these in the British Geological Survey; a comprehensive contextual coverage that had no parallel in archaeology. Archaeological data and surveys were very detailed but very fragmentary and coherence was a challenge. Narratives were produced which required much inference.

Assumptions by non-geologists about the geology of the landscape were frequently simply incorrect – he cited several examples in the rock types of stone circles and monuments – like Long Meg and Daughters and Castlerigg. There was also lack of understanding of the complexity of glacial processes and ice sheet dynamics which could move rocks considerable distances, and change direction, and leave their debris over a wide area. Fragments of Shap granite, for example, were found in Anglesey and on the Cleethorpes coast. Similarly, the rock used for the polished stone axes in what had been called the ‘Langdale axe factory’ could be found on Glaramara, Scafell, and many other places in the Lakes. All these factors should be included (more than they are currently) in any attempt to produce a coherent narrative about the origin and journeys of stone monuments and tools.

Summing up, Ian said that our landscape and its rocks were prehistory’s most persistent record, and there could be no understanding of the lives of ancient peoples without understanding the landscapes they occupied and the rocks they relied on.

Ian’s book, *Defined by Stones*, can be obtained from Northern Heritage at www.northern-heritage.co.uk, and there is a recording of his talk on our own website.

APRIL 2026 Meeting

James Gerrard, Professor of Roman Archaeology at Newcastle University, presented *Travelling Britannia: a materialist and experiential perspective* – a distillation of some of the ideas in a book he has been writing called *Connecting Small Worlds: travel and infrastructure in Roman Britain*.

James brought together archaeological material culture and documentary evidence to challenge perceived wisdoms about mobility and travel in the Roman World.

Ancient Dna and Isotope analysis of skeletons can identify where people were born and grew up, such as the North African ‘Ivory Bangle Lady’ of York. The media and the public often focus on the origins of those who have been born elsewhere but died in Roman Britain, seeing them as ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders’.

Common preconceptions of travel and mobility in the past included

The ‘Neptune’ Roman altar found in 1875 in the River Tyne © Newcastle University

the thought that travel was carried out more by elites, men, and the military. He highlighted a 2005 paper by Margaret Harvey in *Northern History* concerning a survey in 1360 conducted by Papal delegates in association with a case against the Bishop of Durham. Witnesses were required to travel from Durham to York and back. The survey showed people from all levels of society could and did travel many miles in a day, and it is likely this was the case for people of Roman Britain – although perhaps in more difficult conditions due to the hazardous state of the roads, as mentioned in a Vindolanda tablet.

James argued that the personal experiences of travelling in the past should be considered, and used Roman boats as an example of the time, effort, cost and skill involved in providing a mode of transport.

Looking beyond maps and origins of people, and thinking more about the human experiences, time and efforts of travelling, can give a better understanding of ancient travellers and migrants.

We will let members know when James's book is published.

James can be contacted on james.gerrard@newcastle.ac.uk

Katie Mountain

BOOK REVIEW

***Northumbria AD367-867: Earth Hall, Ring-Gift and Heavens Field* Ian Jackson, 2025, Max Adams and Colm O'Brien, 2025, Birlinn Publishing Ltd, 395 pages, colour images and maps throughout**

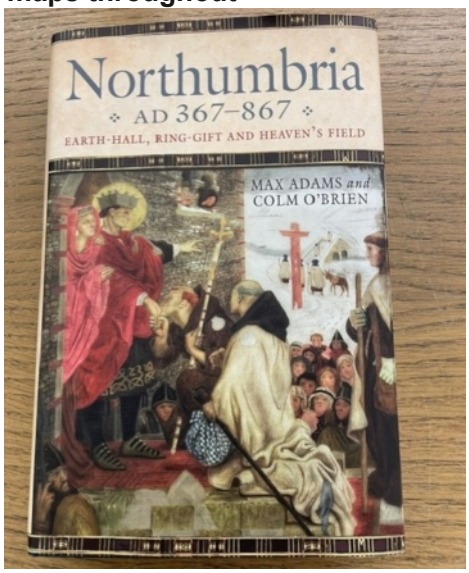


Photo: Mike Barke

In this book Max Adams and Colm O'Brien bring together many years of collaboration and research into early medieval Northumbria, and its surrounding sources of cultural influence. This collaboration has included research in the North East with the Bernician Studies Group since 2009, as well as research at early medieval sites in north-west Ireland, along with their many publications in academic journals.

A key contribution in this book is the bringing together of forms of evidence not widely integrated in previous general treatments of early medieval Northumbria, such as the results of metal-detecting, geophysics, lidar, and the products of developer-funded archaeology. The volume is framed between the years AD 367 (the year of the Barbarian Conspiracy) and AD 867 (the year York is captured by the Vikings). This 500 year period gives the work a narrower focus compared to previous comparable works (typically works on early medieval England bracket themselves from *c.*410–1100), though this also results in a more cohesive historical framing, and gives the authors space to explore the different strands of evidence in a considered manner.

The sum total of this work is a book which expertly combines disparate threads of archaeological evidence, historical texts, place-name evidence, and historical geography. The gathering of many new sources of data also results in a work which is distinct from earlier treatments of this topic. This will give even the dedicated reader in early medieval Northumbria something to consider, while for the more general reader the text is an engaging and accessible journey through this topic.

Don O'Meara

SANT LIBRARY ACTIVITY

Earlier in this *Bulletin*, Ian Bower, former Librarian at the GNM, has drawn attention to the wealth of original bibliographic material held by the Society. Not only does the library contain research monographs and reports, supplemented by classic 'state of the art' texts, but also a wide variety of less conventional material including tracts and personal papers. In this context it

is particularly gratifying that recent months have seen a steady increase in specific queries about previous SANT personalities and topics. This clearly indicates a healthy level of research activity that the Library is delighted to support.

Inquiries have related to individuals such as W.H.D Langstaffe (1826–1898), a former editor of *Archaeologia Aeliana* and Vice-President of SANT. He was based in Darlington and Gateshead for most of his career and made a number of significant contributions in several areas of investigation, especially numismatics. R.O. Heslop (1842–1916), best known for his studies of Geordie dialect and words, has also been the subject of recent inquiry. He was President of the Lit & Phil and published papers in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. Our experienced volunteer Phil Thirkell has spent considerable time and energy in pursuing the career of the Rev. C.E. Whiting (1871–1953) in response to queries from an archaeological group in South Yorkshire. He was President of SANT in 1942 and 1943 having joined the Society in 1921 and been a founding member of the North of England Excavation Committee in 1925. Holding an academic post at Durham University, he appears to have heavily involved in excavations near Doncaster and also became President of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society.

As well as specific individuals, we have received requests for information on particular topics. These have included issues as diverse as pottery dredged up from the Tyne in 1870 and William Brown's colliery plans of the eighteenth century. If we are unable to answer specific questions it remains satisfying to be able to direct such inquiries to known experts and appropriate institutions elsewhere.

SANT's library is thus much more than simply a collection of books and is happy to celebrate this diversified role.

Members are reminded that the SANT library catalogue is available on the Website.

Mike Barke, Hon. Librarian

EDITOR'S NOTE

All relevant contributions to the Bulletin *are welcome – 300 words plus an illustration. The deadline for the next* Bulletin *is 6th November, 2026 and my e-mail is mikebarke46@hotmail.co.uk.*

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