

Records & Recollections

The Aln and Breamish
Local History Society

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Society News and Events: Chairman's Report

The Society which was revived in the Spring of 2003 continues to make progress. There are now 58 members and the edition of *Records and Recollections* now available is the fourth in the new series. So far this year we have had three speakers at well-attended meetings.

Our first speaker this year was Thomas Tokely whose subject was "Lives of the Kirk Yetholm Gypsies". Having known and worked amongst these people for many years and having researched his subject most carefully the speaker was able to give us a lively and authoritative address. His great affection for these people was very evident.

Our next speaker was D.J. Skinner who gave an illustrated talk on the "Devil's Causeway" as the Roman road from Corbridge to Berwick-on-Tweed is known. The audi-



Above: Society members on last year's visit to Callaly Castle, courtesy of Dr Tony Henfrey. There will be a repeat of this visit on 16 July this year. See page 2 under **Society News and Events**.

ence appreciated this talk particularly because the line of the run runs through Whittingham, Glanton and Powburn.

The talk in May was by Paul Frodsham – an ar-

chaeologist who is the expert on the archaeology of the Northumberland National Park that was the subject of his address.

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Summer Social Event at Callaly Castle

- July 16th at 3.30 at Biddlestone Chapel followed by refreshments at Callaly Castle at 5.30
- Bring a plate of something to eat
- The Society will provide a glass of wine or a soft drink
- Make a note in your diary now!

About this issue ...

This issue of *Records and Recollections* has two major articles. The first, by Neil Mackichan, poses the question, "Did a shire of Whittingham ever exist?" The argument takes us from historical geology into Roman, Anglo-Saxon and early mediaeval times, un-

familiar territory to many of us and therefore intellectually stimulating and challenging. The editor is grateful to Neil for the reading and research that he has put into providing us with this original and thoughtful article. Thanks

are due too, to Jo Catling, for her editorial input.

The second of the longer articles, on the Browne family, tells us something of how the very rich lived in our area, as exemplified by the lives of the late Victorian inhabi-

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Society News and Events (cont. from page 1)

After June 2006 a new chairman and secretary of the Society will be required.

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Mr Frodsham gave an overview of a decade of diggings in the Breamish valley that have revealed fascinating insights into the prehistoric landscape and its inhabitants. He ranged over 10,000 years of history and gave the audience an understanding of what life must have been like in the remote past. After the talk which was held in the Ingram village hall members were able to visit the splendid National Park Visitor's Centre where the subject of the talk was further illustrated and where numerous artefacts from the diggings are preserved. Mr Frodsham's book *Archaeology in Northumberland*

National Park (£19.95) contains a comprehensive account of what are some of the finest archaeological landscapes in England. Another book by the same author is *Peoples of the Breamish Valley* costs £4.50. Both are available at the Visitors' Centre.

Regarding the future of the Society I would just say that we have a very full programme planned and would welcome new members so if anyone knows of any potential members would they please try and recruit them. I would also add that at the next AGM (2006) we will be seeking to appoint a new Chairman and a new Secretary because neither Bridget

nor I propose to continue in these roles after June 2006. It is not that we find them burdensome. It is just that we think it a mistake not to involve other people in running the Society.

We hope that you will all attend the summer social event at Callaly Castle on Saturday July 16th. This will be preceded by a visit to Biddlestone Chapel (be there by 3.30) conducted by Tony Henfrey, who will also show us over the lovely Callaly Castle grounds. Bring a plate of something to eat, and the Society will provide a glass of wine or a soft drink.

George Winstanley
Chairman

About this issue ... (cont. from page 1)

The next issue will contain Part 2 of the article on the Brownes of Callaly as well as a memoir on the Brownes of Whittingham.

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tants of Callaly Castle.

For Part I of this article, I am extremely grateful to Alan Winlow MBE, who grew up locally and has provided me with a rich source in the form of press cuttings from the scrapbook of his grandfather Mr J.W. Young of Alnwick. Another source has been a recorded talk to this local history society given by the late Major Alexander (Simon) Browne in the 1970s.

Part II of the article on the Brownes of Callaly will be published in the December issue of *Records and Recollections* and will cover lives of the members of the family

who occupied the house in the twentieth century. In addition to the same written sources mentioned above, I have been fortunate enough to receive from Mr and Mrs Richard Bateson and Mr and Mrs M.A. Kerr, not only warm co-operation, but a wealth of photographs and other information about the family, for which I am most grateful. Many of the photographs are now being re-photographed as slides to enable me to present them at a talk on the family on September 8th this year.

Another family of similar name will feature in the next issue: the

Brownes of Whittingham and Glanton. I have been in touch by e-mail with Mr George Brown, whose mother Peggy died recently in Glanton, and whose aunt, Mary, was a prominent member of this Local History Society in its earlier manifestation. His grandfather, another George Brown, was manager of Dixon's store in Whittingham for over fifty years and was secretary of the Whittingham Games and of the Memorial Hall for very many years. George Brown has agreed to provide us with an article that will recall the family as well as his own memories of Whittingham in the 1950s and early

The Hearse House and Bier, Whittingham



To see this quaint little building in Whittingham you must walk down the farm track just beyond Village Farm on the Eslington road, towards the double ford across the Aln and the Callaly burn. It belongs to the Eslington Estate, but for years immemorial it has been let to the Church of St Bartholomew for the purpose of housing its hearse and bier. The hearse has long since been moved to the safety of a museum (the Beamish Museum we think—does anybody have more information?), but until January this year, it still housed the bier, shown in the two pictures left.

The bier, despite its rather dusty appearance, is still very sound and is beautifully made with rolling bars to enable a coffin to slide on to it with ease.

Eslington Estate has now reclaimed the building and the bier has been moved to a place of safety. Its ultimate location will depend to some extent on the discussions now under way about the use of space within St Bartholomew's Church. If it is agreed to open up some of the space currently occupied by pews, it is likely that this bier will form part of a display of historical and contemporary information about the church.

Whittingham Tower: Work in Progress



Left: the Tower in October 2004 when Alnwick Council contractors removed the unstable parapet.

Right: upper window showing extensive cracks and fissures.



In February 2005 Mr Steven Armstrong bought the dilapidated tower from the Eslington Estate and set to work immediately to restore it.

Left: a rare moment of inactivity as he watches materials being unloaded.

Right: the same window as seen top right after stabilising and re-pointing.



Left: A parapet stone being hoisted back.

Right: stonemason Mr Harry Smith contemplating his work—with well deserved satisfaction, we hope.



The two pictures at left and right show the Tower on 22nd May, with the parapet restoration under way.



Did a Shire of Whittingham ever exist?

by Dr N.D. Mackichan

A shire has been defined as “a mediaeval administrative district ruled jointly by an alderman and a sheriff”(i). This may well be true of the great shires of mediaeval England but less certain of the shires of the North and Scottish Borders, though vast strides in our knowledge of these have been made in recent years(ii). Shires to us imply units of land suitable for administration, some degree of administration by the leaders of a group of people such as a tribe or a clan and governmental reasons for the unit to exist e.g. for defence or taxation.

The precursors of our shires are lost in antiquity but we do have some clues about their origins. For example we have river names, the earliest of all our place names in the north, of which the best example in our area is the Till, the continuation of the Breamish. We also have the Roman names of tributary tribes situated north of the Hadrian and Antonine Walls, giving us suggestions of tribal territories forming a Roman northern buffer zone.

We tend to think from our own experience of the above-mentioned shires, clans, tribes and even tax-systems as having a degree of permanence but this is historically not so. We have only to look at the 19th century map of Northumberland to realise this. Not only did Northumberland administer the land round County Hall in Central Newcastle but we have Hexhamshire, Bedlingtonshire, Islandshire and Northshire. The last three are early mediaeval in origin being granted to the Bishops of Durham, “the fighting bishops”, primarily for defence of the realm and for the maintenance of law and order in the eastern march. Now long gone as administrative units they are still recalled as part of “the heritage industry”. For our purposes they give us a very good idea of a mediaeval shire.

Historical geography surely makes the Vale of Whittingham an ideal location in which to allow our ancestors to settle once the ice ages were over. Formed by the River Aln and the earlier glacial Lake Whittingham, it offered a reasonably safe territory in reasonable climatic conditions with a degree of access north, south and west and to the coastal plain, with transhumance to upland grazing. In geological times, Lake Whittingham gave rise to the settlement of cement stone and formation of boulder clay before the Aln broke through the old red sandstone at Catheugh to enter into present day Hulne Park from where the lower course of the river flows to the sea. A second outlet was between Glanton Pike and Titlington Mount (the latter a part of the fell sandstone), whilst to the west the river rose in the high ground between the Vale and Lake Holystone and the Coquet valley. The former opened up a route north clear of Crawley Dean and the latter a similar one to the west. To the south a longer, gentler gradient allowed for the sum-

mit of the fell sandstone to be reached by crossing the Coe burn(iii). The deposits, at a lower level provided for good arable land and pasturage, whilst, at a higher level, the lavas and granites made pastures suitable for transhumance.

We thus have a good area in which man could make his mark. All post-Ice Age human activity is archaeologically well represented but, from our point of view, the



Fig. 1. S-W Boundary of Bromich-shire as proposed by O'Brien. Could this be placed too far south? From O'Brien, C. The Early Mediaeval Shires of Yeaveering, Breamish and Bamburgh. *Archaeologica Aeliana* 5th Series XXX (2002) modified by N.D.M.

fact that the Romans were here in sufficient numbers to justify two Roman roads and a fort together with the above mentioned tribal buffer zone indicates an administrative organisation that was firmly established in the Romano-British period. Thus there are clear signs of administrative organisation from Iron Age and Roman times. The change of river name from Breamish to Till is an example of the former and Learchild fort of the latter. These are too obscure, however, to determine with conjecture let alone accuracy. North Northumberland's first clear evidence of administrative organisation comes from the later Anglo-Saxon period usually referred to as “early mediaeval”. It is here that our Islandshire, Northshire, Bedlingtonshire and Hexhamshire, mentioned above, come into the picture.

Raine in the Northumberland County History and latterly Barrow have given us a good insight into the sort of shire and its components we are considering. This is the Shire of Yetholm(iv) which runs from the south bank

Did a Shire of Whittingham ever exist? By Dr N.D. Machichan

of the rivers Glen and Beaumont in the north, down the west banks of the Wooler Water and Harthope burn in the east, virtually to Cheviot, taking in the College valley to the Beaumont Water in the west on which we have Yetholm. Note that this shire crosses the later Anglo-Scottish Border, then non-existent (and not to be for several hundred years) but contains the ecclesiastical centres at Yetholm and Kirknewton and ten of the twelve

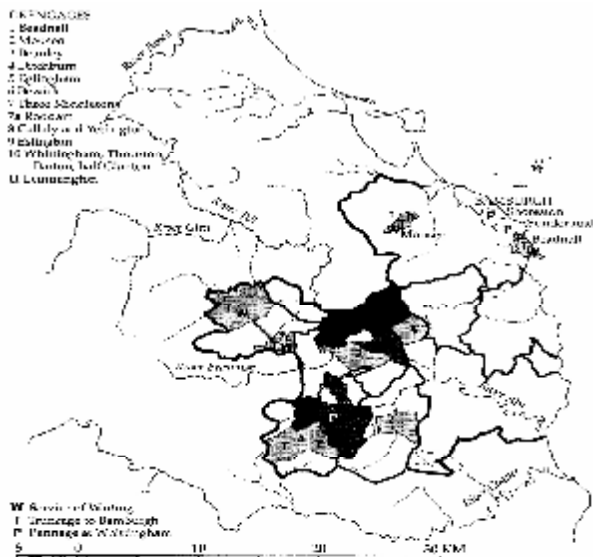


Fig. 2. Drengages and service tenures in Bamburghshire
Drengs were the Northern English equivalents of thanes, administrators in the villae regis of the Anglo-Saxon 'multiple estates'.

W – General services of waiting (waiting on).

T – Truncage i.e. cartage of a trunk or tree for the king's hearth.

P – Pannage i.e. pig farming in woodland

vills. We must add that the early feudal land grants were made to tenants irrespective of the boundaries of these shires but such charters etc. as exist have been useful in defining the earlier shires(v). The considerable complexities of this matter need not detain us here as our knowledge of the early land charters of the Vale of Whittingham are obscure and were greatly altered in the early mediaeval period. However, for a study of early Whittingham we must take note of the "decaying of shires" caused by the change to feudal land tenure. Barrow has identified one of these in Yetholmshire where feudal tenure appears to go wrong with the intrusion of Walter Corbet as a knight-service barony in the 12th century which estate should have been held by the de Ros family(vi). Moving further south, we have a known Bamburghshire based on the royal site at Bamburgh. This shire included Lesbury in the south and Edlingham and Whittingham to the west. O'Brien has listed these drengage holdings (see Fig. 2). In Whittingham parish we have pannage at Thrunton, Barton and half of Glanton and Lemmington in Edlingham parish. Truncage was supplied by Callaly and Yetlington and Es-

lington to Bamburgh(vii).

As research proceeds so there are emerging shires demonstrating their ephemeral nature. Thus we have Gefrinshire, based on the villa regis of Yeaveering filling a gap between Bamburghshire to the east, Northumberland and Islandshire to the north and Yetholmshire to the west, down the centre of which territory runs the river Till. This shire is not complete in that a western gap appears to the north-west of the Middletons and Roddam. This gap has as its southern boundary the shire of Bromlic – less well defined than any in North Northumberland (viii). However, of importance to us is what happened to Bamburghshire because this clearly would affect the parishes of Whittingham and Edlingham with which we are concerned. O'Brien states:

"How early estate and shire organisations were formed is not possible to assess from the written records which refer to the seventh and eighth centuries; but the changes evident at that time suggest that the shire of Bamburgh, as we can recognise it, may itself be a survival from an earlier grouping of shires which formed the territorial basis of kingdom and kinship and which also encompassed Islandshire, Yetholmshire and others which then alienated to the church"(ix).

This has brought us at last to consider the parishes of Whittingham and Edlingham. What do we know of these in the early mediaeval period? Clearly it is easy to say "not a lot" and certainly not as much as we would like. However, there is enough to allow us to say that changes occurred. To the east we find Abberwick, now, a shrunken village reduced to a single farmstead but which in the early mediaeval period must have begun to thrive (x). This indicates stable settlement. In Whittingham itself we have evidence for the ecclesiastical settlement required as part of a shire system in the church. Here as at Edlingham the church is founded in the mid—8th century just when we are looking for change, whilst the dedication to St Bartholomew with the Lindisfarne connection must be significant. This excludes the association with a later Anglo-Saxon minster site as demonstrated by Briggs and Bailey(xi). But the crucial evidence of change and prestige comes with the Synod of Twyford, 687 A.D. Bede calls this "Ad Twifyrd" meaning 'at the two fords' but Symeon of Durham appears to draw on more local knowledge, the source of which has now been lost, to specify the double ford(xii). For this, taking in this latter interpretation, there are two rival sites on the Aln – Alnmouth and Whittingham. On geographical grounds the latter seems the more probable as being the only true double ford. For a villa regis to accompany it we can also consider this the most likely. In the hot dry summer of 2003, a site reappeared in the glebe field near the summit of the hill to the north-east of the church. This could well be a further ecclesiastical structure but might well be the villae regis necessary in a shire system. The corresponding building in Edlingham might still lie under the

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castle site in spite of lack of evidence in the modern excavation or might lie further up the hill in view of the migratory nature of land development in that village.

No other sites clearly determine the layout of an equivalent early civil administrative structure for Whittingham or Edlingham, but there are some small pointers. First, the Whittingham and Ilderton parish "shapes" are unusual. Even taking a cautious approach to the early boundaries, there is no area protruding westwards and south of the possible boundary with the Shire of Bromwic. This does not easily fit in the pattern of territorial inclusion in Bamburghshire. (We have seen how, in a historical geographical sense Gefrinshire was "completed" by closure of the gap to the south-west). Secondly, the Learchild Roman site has produced pottery not just from the Roman period, as we would expect, but continuously from those times into the Middle Ages. Further evidence of some early administration comes from the Roman road connecting Holystone with Learchild. This was in use into early mediaeval times because of the association with the road and two wells, that at Holystone itself and the other at Whittingham Lane, linked to the cult of St Ninian. This cult must have arisen after the arrival of the saint at Whithorn and before the Cuthbert era – arguably between c.500 and 685 A.D. but possibly of longer duration in that Celtic and Anglo-Saxon custom probably existed side by side much later in the North(xiii). We thus have an early era of Christianity which was a cultural mix of Roman, British and Anglo-Saxon. Melrose, for example, where Cuthbert's first Christian experience began, was initially pure Strathclyde Brittonic whilst Lindisfarne was at the start Goedelic but later Anglo-Saxon. (This assumes the earlier Paulinus era to have had little if any lasting impact).

The best evidence for a Whittinghamshire boundary comes from the shire of Bamburgh. O'Brien states:

"The shire itself, perhaps an unusually large unit of land of 530 square kilometres, apparently encompasses a number of sub-units, which in the mediaeval period appear as parishes, each of which, in its eighth-century state could be regarded as multiple estates. In the case of Edlingham, Eglingham and Whittingham, these were alienated from the king's holdings in the eighth century by grant to the church. That the three are contiguous suggests that there may have been an intermediate level of organisation and that for Bamburghshire the multiple estate model should encompass a three-level hierarchy."(xiv).

Thus, from consideration of Bamburghshire we have clear evidence that Whittingham and Edlingham parishes were likely to be early units of administration absorbed into Bamburghshire as the latter expanded with economic and political administrative growth. Further consideration of this would be helped by greater knowledge of the boundaries which we do not have. There is, for example,

some evidence that an early thaneage of Longhoughton may have been swallowed up in this way, but for more western territories history is a blank. To the east, we are better informed about Lesbury parish. The north and west are entirely problematical. The western watershed is a natural boundary and Alnham a natural location near the source of the river. Such a place name seems at first sight a likely location of an administrative centre but, apart from it not being included in the "Ten Towns of Coquetdale" (see Fig. 3) its name may be a corruption of Yldham, derived from the tributary river Yel, perhaps 'the white river'. But the river may take its name from the Alnham settlement itself which indeed might be a corruption of Oldham.



Fig. 3. The Ten Towns of Coquetdale:
Alwinton Biddleston Burradon Sharperton Netherton
Farnham Clennell Chirmundesden
Ingram Fawdon.

BF II 1118; Percy Chart 244-5; NCH 14 (1935).

"Ten Towns" appears to be a misnomer for some of them are nowhere near Coquetdale. The Bromwic end seems to have become a shire based on Ingram and Reavesley surviving into the 12th century into the de Vesci barony and ultimately to that of the Percys. (See O'Brien op. Cit. p. 67.

Map based on that of O'Brien, C. *Archaeologica Aeliana* 5th series XXX, p. 58 (modified N.D.M.)

Place-names help us surprisingly little. Whittingham itself is an -inja name appearing as Hwitinham in 1050, being the settlement of Whita's people. Every writer states in one form or another that the -inga group of names are early. The difficulty lies in that there are no clues as to the definition of "early". We do know from the Synod name that it was known by the title of two fords in the late 7th century. This at first sounds conclusive but if Whita's people were no longer dominant in the area the name could have been dropped as no longer

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meaningful, only to re-surface in the early Mediaeval period. Nor need the different settlement patterns suggested for the Vale relate to anything more than geography. This is in spite of arguments put forward by Frans-Arne Stylegar for the 'central places' concept widely accepted in Scandinavia but not much taken up by British onomasticians. However, Stylegar has demonstrated this in Viking Age Orkney and hinted that it may apply elsewhere if looked for, for the concept is simple and is used to this day in words like town-centre, garden-centre, health-centre etc. Further the centre-names may be from an older, perhaps pre-Viking period which, if applying to Northumbria must be from the Romano-British period at the latest. From this we can argue for a difference between the parish system in Bamburghshire, which could arise from manors etc. as outlined above, and the centre names of important settlements each with a periphery of lesser sites as outlined earlier which seem to predominate in the Vale.

Mention of the "Ten Towns of Coquetdale" brings us to the northern boundary with neighbouring Bromlic, the neighbouring shire about which we know least. A suggested ecclesiastical and civil site is Ingram, which we can assume to be reasonably possible despite the negative small scale excavation by Frodsham in 1991. We are therefore looking for a boundary to the south of the Ingram valley -indeed possibly as far south as Glanton Pike. The above mentioned "Ten Towns of Coquetdale" is a misnomer for the site of these towns refer to part of south-east Cheviot between the Coquet and the Breamish(xv). The ten towns do not include lower lying sites and must be within a boundary running north-east - south-west.

Returning to our original question as to the possible existence of an early Whittinghamshire, the answer seems to be a yes in so far as land-tenure and administrative structure must have existed before the likely absorption into Bamburghshire. If it existed at all it was modest in size and ephemeral, being absorbed into Bamburghshire by the eighth century. The emergence of Bromwicshire in the light of historical scrutiny may produce a definitive northern boundary arising from the earlier shires. One might add that, with the lack of dates, charters and identifiable ecclesiastical or villae regis sites we are not likely to get any farther but, with the results of current renewed interest and scholarship producing such enormous advances in our knowledge this somewhat gloomy view may

well be proved wrong.

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- (ii) O'Brien C. *Archaeologia Aeliana* Fifth Series Vol XXX pp. 53-60 for a recent exposition of the emerging shires of North Northumberland.
- (iii) Robson *A Guide to the Geology of Northumberland and Durham & Newcastle upon Tyne*. The Hancock Museum vol. XVI No I (New Series) 1966. For a geological overview, this work of 1966 remains the best.
- (iv) Bury, L.B. in *Journal of the Royal Society* (1920); Collingwood, R.G. and Myers, J.N.L. *Roman Britain* (1936) 295-301.
- (v) Raine, J. 'History of N. Durham' in Barrow G.W.S *The Kingdom of the Scots* (1973) p. 29 (1852) with comments.
- (vi) Barrow G.W.S op. cit. p.32-34. Pre-feudal Scotland shires and thanes pp 38-46.
- (vii) See, for example, O'Brien C op. cit. p. 56.
- (viii) O'Brien C. op.cit. and accompanying map (Fig. 1) p. 56.
- (ix) O'Brien C. op.cit. p. 61.
- (x) Dixon P. 1984 unpub Ph.D University of Wales.
- (xi) Briggs, D. & Bailey, R.D. *Archaeology and Church Dowsing* (1988).
- (xii) Bede. *A History of the English Church and People*. Penguin Classics revised 1986 p. 262.
- (xiii) Marden J. *Northumbria Saga* p.177.
- (xiv) O'Brien C. op. cit. pp 59-61.
- 9XV) Stylegar F.A 'Central Places in Orkney' *Northern Studies* 38 *Liber Feodearium* London (1920-23) for the 10 towns).

Five Alexanders and a Castle: the Brownes of Callaly Part I by Bridget Winstanley

This is the first of two articles on the Brownes of Callaly. This instalment is concerned with Alexanders 1, 2 and 3 (see box below). The second instalment will appear in the December issue of Records and Recollections and will deal with Alexanders 4 ("Aleck") and 5 ("Simon").

There are five Alexander Brownes discussed in this article, and most are known as Major Browne. This makes for very confusing reading, so I have provided a key in the form of the list below and have used the numbers in brackets in the text to ensure that readers know which Alexander Browne being referred to.

Rev. Alexander (1) Browne b. 1790 d. 1857
Major Alexander (2) Browne b. 1812 d. 1894
Major Alexander (3) Henry Browne b. 1845 d. 1898
Major Alexander (4) Browne b. 1871 d. 1961
Major Alexander (5) Simon Cadogan Browne b. 1895 d. 1987

Introduction: The First Two Alexanders in this Story

In the Church of St Bartholomew in Whittingham there are a number of brass plates commemorating members of the Browne family. This story begins with the Rev. Alexander (1) Browne (1780 – 1857), who owned Branton but lived in Budleigh Salterton in Devon. His son, also called Alexander (2) (1812 – 1894), joined the army and during his army service was stationed in Cardiff. There he met and later married in 1842 a Miss Helena Gwynifred Forman. He returned to Northumberland and joined the Northumberland Light Infantry (later the Militia and later the Territorials) and lived successively at Trew hitt and Glanton House in Glanton where he brought up his family, then in Bolton and Lesbury. While in Lesbury he re-bought Doxford, which had formerly belonged to the family and lived there, using Lesbury as a hunting lodge. He built Breamish House which he also used as a hunting lodge(i).

He became Chief Constable of Northumberland but like all the other Brownes in this story, his main passion seems to have been hunting. He had bought, and brought to Northumberland, the South Dorset hounds. He built Greenrigg Kennels and was Master of the Hounds for some 10 years. In 1878 the Hunt became the Percy when Earl Percy, the 7th Duke of Northumberland, bought Major Browne's hounds. He died at Doxford, of a fall from a horse, aged 82.

Let us return briefly to Miss Forman. At the time of their marriage there were a number of people between them and the Forman family fortune. "But they all happened to die off within six months"(iii) and Alexander (3) Henry, son of Major Alexander (2) and the former Miss Forman, inherited the money.

Alexander (3) Henry

Alexander (3) was born in 1845 and died in 1898. We do not know too much about his childhood, but he seems

to have spent it in Glanton and he went to school for a few years in Whittingham before going to Harrow(iii). He married Mary Isobell Cadogan, daughter of Cadogan Hodgson Cadogan of Brinkburn Priory, in 1870. He enters our story at centre stage when he buys Callaly Castle from the last Clavering heir in 1877.

Callaly Castle

Callaly Castle had been the home – for six and a half centuries – of the Clavering family. This unbroken succession of ownership is quite remarkable since the Claverings "took a leading part in nearly every civil commotion, down to the rising in 1715"(iv) and never relinquished their adherence to the Roman Catholic Church. However, when Edward John Clavering died in 1876, leaving an only daughter, Augusta, Lady Bedingfield, who lived in Norfolk, the estate was sold on 6 June, 1877, to Alexander (3) Henry Browne for the sum of £140,000.

Alexander (3) Henry proceeded to implement a lavish programme of improvements to the estate. Among his building projects was the wonderful stable block with stabling for about 40 horses, built in 1890. Although it was a time of collapsing agricultural prices, Alexander (3) Henry put huge amounts of capital into his estate. Much of the building work was done by Mr Dryden of Glanton who employed 38 men at one time(v).

The Alnwick & County Gazette of October 1 1892 praises Alexander (3) Henry's improvements:

"Since the mansion came into the hands of the present owner, Major A.H. Browne, many important improvements have been carried out, and it is now one of the most complete and best appointed mansions in the country. Wherever possible Mr Browne has spared no cost to improve his estate, evidence of which is seen on all sides, in the substantial and well adapted farm buildings. The mansion itself has been thoroughly restored and largely added to; the electric light pervades the rooms and corridors, and the telephone and telegraph connects it with the great centres of activity. In one special feature it is almost unique. It possesses one of the finest private collections of curios and classic works known to exist, the latest addition being the Twizell collection of stuffed birds, and which is at times generously thrown open to visitors"(vi).

Birthday Celebrations at Callaly Castle

We know too that Alexander (3) was equally open-handed with his hospitality. In October 1892 he threw a spectacular series of parties and entertainments at Callaly

Five Alexanders and a Castle: the Brownes of Callaly Part 1

Castle to celebrate the coming of age of his son Alexander (4) (seen below, aged 21). The festivities were quite remarkable, both for their expense and for his generosity, not only to the gentry, tenantry and notables of the county, but also the children of the district. We shall see that he did not stop there, but ensured that all and sundry were treated to a magnificent fireworks display, arranging for a special train to run from Alnwick to bring all who wanted to come. Nor did he forget the workmen, 150 of whom sat down to a "substantial and ample repast" at the end of the celebrations.



The celebrations took place over several days, beginning on 27 September 1892. On 1 October 1892 the Alnwick & County Gazette published several pages of description.

"Situated in the midst of most picturesque surroundings, Callaly Castle has this week been the scene of festivities and rejoicings which will be henceforth inscribed in the pages of its history. The young heir, Mr Alexander Browne, whose portrait appears in our columns, obtained his majority on March 29th last, but illnesses and other causes have delayed the celebration of the event until the present week. He was educated at Eton, and is a Lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers. As an officer he is very popular, and is known throughout the county as an enthusiastic and dashing huntsman. The high esteem and popularity in which his family is held, has been shown in a marked degree to the young heir, and the whole district, tenants, neighbours, and friends, have enthusiastically combined to do honour to the occasion. Major and Mrs A.H. Browne spared

no pains or expense to celebrate the event in a fitting manner; and it must be a matter of great satisfaction to them, that the rejoicings have been attended with so much success, and that so many have derived great pleasure from the festivities" (vii).

For this occasion the newly built ballroom on the site of the former Clavering Chapel was the centre of the festive activities. But to supplement its capacity there were seven marquees erected and linked to one another and to the hall by corridors, the whole being magnificently decorated and lit by electric light. The railway station at Whittingham was decorated with bunting and coats of arms. The Bridge of Aln Inn was equally be-decked and in the village of Whittingham "bunting and decorations were place "in conspicuous profusion". Glanton too had gone to some trouble to show its enthusiasm for the party with an arch on which was written in white letters on a red ground, "Long life to the Heir of Callaly". We return to the breathless text of the Gazette to describe the sight that greeted visitors on coming within a mile of the Castle:

"On the great avenue with its fine trees no pains had been spared to make the adornment as perfect as possible. At the entrance the word 'Welcome' on yellow ground greeted the eye, and at intervals of about fifteen yards right along the splendid avenue and at each side of the road Venetian masts were placed. From these were hung double festoons of beautiful French artificial flowers. Baskets of flowers were suspended in mid-air while round the masts winding wreaths of flowers and leaves were attached leading up to flags and shield which had a marvellous effect among the greenery that bounded them. Besides the festoons which in day time looked so lovely, coloured fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns were hung forming at night time shining arches of coloured light, and on the chief trees devices of fairy lamps were fixed. . . . The lamps, and it is estimated about 70,000 lights were used, were lit at night time and, on Wednesday, in particular, the scene of illumination when night fell was most magnificent. There was considerably over a mile and a half of light, arch after arch, glow on glow, gleaming in the distance, and dazzling when at hand" (viii).

The Gazette article goes on to describe the marquees and their 150 yards of connecting passageway. These were no ordinary tents, but were adorned with a terracotta tapestry dado along the bottom and above that old

Five Alexanders and a Castle: the Brownes of Callaly Part 1

gold tapestry. The floors were of red cloth and coloured matting and there was a lavish display of flowering plants, ferns and American aloes, tastefully supplied and arranged by Mr W. Armstrong of Benwell Nursery, Newcastle. Lamps and antique furniture were placed conveniently and in the centre was a pretty fountain, with revolving sprays. Gold fish darted among the rocks and moss. All around were divans and cushions with screens. In the dining marquee the tables were adorned with splendid gold and silver plate from the hall.

The proceedings started on Tuesday night with a Fancy Dress Ball for the county gentry. Over 200 guests attended and the Gazette lists them all as well as naming their costumes. Among them was Miss Edith Cookson, dressed as a Savoyard Peasant. She was later to become the young heir's wife.

The Gazette spares no words in describing the ball and lists every guest and names their costumes.

"The dresses of the ladies were divine, they embraced what is picturesque and beautiful in every period and of every nation. So with the costumes of the gentlemen. The ball room was a medley, a harmonious blending of richly dressed figures, powdered and patched. Ladies of the Georgian era whirled with ringletted Carolian cavaliers, and the gaily clad Spanish toreador and matador"(ix).

The dance programme included fifteen waltzes, four lancers, two polkas and a galop. Supper was served at midnight – twenty-two delicious dishes are recorded. The dance broke up at a little after five.

The next morning the Percy Hunt turned out at about midday, Mr Walter Selby, the Master of the Fox Hounds, arriving with his huntsmen and pack. While the hunt was still in progress, the children of the district began arriving for the entertainment provided for them. They arrived, singing and waving flags and "with other signs of joyful anticipation"(x). Carts conveyed those from the more distant parts. There were over 600 children from the following schools: Callaly, Alnham, Netherton, Ingram, Branton, Glanton, Bolton, Whittingham and Edlingham. There were about 600 children altogether, each group under the supervision of its head teacher and "admirable order was maintained".

The children's entertainment took the form of games, a programme of music performed by the band of the 3rd Battalion of Northumberland Fusiliers, then the "kindly servants of the Castle, under Mrs Craig, plied the young ones with cakes and tea. Then there was a conjuring entertainment "which was full of whimsicalities and held the children in great glee". This was followed by a Punch and Judy show which delighted the children and the adults who had begun to arrive for the next part of the entertainment.

As evening drew on, preparations began for the great fireworks display and more visitors began to arrive for the show.

"Major A.H. Browne had been made aware of the desire of many in Alnwick to witness what promised

to be a stupendous exhibition of pyrotechnics, and one of the best the firm [Messrs Pain & Co.] had ever given in these islands. In accordance with this desire the North Eastern Railway had been approached and the gallant Major's wish readily granted. A special train was accordingly run to Whittingham in addition to the usual train"(xi).

On Thursday the grounds were again illuminated and a dance given to the tenantry and friends from all over the county. Over 300 people attended what seems to have been a very jolly occasion. After supper at midnight a number of toasts were proposed, including one to the health of Mrs A.H. Browne, proposed "in felicitous terms" by Mr Errington. Mrs Browne rose "amid tremendous cheering and in a neat little speech acknowledged the compliment". After several more toasts and replies, Mr W. Dixon of Whittingham rose and asked the heir to accept a presentation from the tradespeople of Whittingham, a beautiful claret jug, suitably inscribed.


The final act in the celebrations was a dinner for the workmen at which 150 guests were assembled. They "did full justice to a substantial and ample repast".

Alexander (3) Henry died in 1898 at the unusually early age, for this family, of 53. There is no one living today who remembers him, but he left a great legacy in stone and mortar on the Callaly estate, and is remembered in the written records with great affection.

The next instalment of this article will begin with the Alexander who was at the centre of the birthday celebrations described here, and who inherited – and spent – a vast fortune.

References

- (i) Browne, ASC Talk on the Browne Family at Callaly, 1976 *Records and Recollections: the Journal of the Aln & Breamish Local History Society* Spring 1976 vol. 2 no. 1 p. 2.
- (ii) and (iii) Ibid. p. 3.
- (iv) Dixon, D.D. Whittingham Vale, Northumberland: its history, traditions and folk lore. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Robert Redpath, 1895 pp.122,123.
- (v) Browne, ASC Talk on the Browne Family at Callaly, 1976 *Records and Recollections: the Journal of the Aln & Breamish Local History Society* Autumn 1976 vol. 2 no. 2 p. 2.
- (vi) *Alnwick & County Gazette and Alnwick Mercury* Saturday October1, 1892.
- (vii) to (xi) Ibid



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Programme June to December 2005

8 June 2005 Annual General Meeting: Richard Sharp on the archaeology of the Roman Wall at Wallsend.

16 July 2005 Biddlestone Chapel with Tony Henfrey, followed by a visit to Callaly Castle and refreshments. 3.30 at Biddlestone Chapel, 5.30 at Callaly Castle.

8 September 2005: Bridget Winstanley on "The Last Two Brownes of Callaly Castle".

13 October 2005: Alan Fendley on Northumbrian Battles.

10 November 2005: Roger Miket on Early Anglo-Saxon Settlement in North Northumbria.

Next year's programme will be announced in the December Newsletter.

About the Society

The Aln and Breamish Local History Society provides a lively programme of historical lectures and publications. A minimum of six lectures a year, three in the Spring and three in the Autumn, are arranged. In addition, there is a speaker at the Annual General Meeting in June.

Talks take place in the Whittingham Memorial Hall at 7.30 unless otherwise indicated and are followed by coffee or tea and biscuits. If there is sufficient demand, meetings may be held in other villages in the Aln and Breamish valleys.

Excursions

We try to arrange excursions to places of historical interest within our region. Do contact the Secretary if you have any ideas for places to visit.

Bulletin

We provide members (as part of their subscription benefits) with a newsletter called *Records and Recollections* which appears twice a year in Winter and Summer. Please let us have your memoirs of life in your village in earlier times, old photographs (to be copied and returned) and anything else which recalls life in past times. The magazine also carries news of all the Society's activities.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions have been set at £8 per individual member and £12 for joint members living in the same household. Visitors may attend meetings on payment of £2 per meeting. These payments include the tea and coffee with biscuits provided at each meeting.

St Peter's Church, Glanton

The 115 year old Anglican church of St Peter's in Glanton was destroyed by fire on the night of Friday 11th March. It is thought that faulty electrical wiring caused the blaze. All who knew the little church have been deeply saddened by this event, especially since it is most unlikely that it will be rebuilt.

