



# Records & Recollections

Aln & Breamish Local History Society

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## Chairman's Report

The AGM was held on 8 June and after the official business Richard Sharp gave an informative talk on archaeological diggings at Wallsend which revealed the remains of numerous barracks and associated buildings connected with the Roman wall. He illustrated his talk with slides taken when the excavations were in progress.

The summer event took place on 16 July and was well attended. A visit to Biddlestone Chapel at which Dr Tony Henfrey gave a talk describing when the chapel was established, how it fell into disuse and how it came to be lovingly restored was followed by a social evening in the grounds of Callaly castle. Fortunately it was a glorious summer's evening which added to the enjoyment of the event.



On 8 September Bridget Winstanley gave a talk on The Last Two Brownes of Callaly Castle to a very well attended meeting. Members were treated to a fascinating and sometimes anecdotal glimpse of one of the county's most interesting families in the not so recent past.

Alan Fendley gave a talk on Northumbrian battles on 13 October and once again he succeeded in holding the attention of the audience whilst he ranged over the numerous battles that have been fought in the county's frequently turbulent past.

The last speaker in the official programme was Roger Miket a retired archaeologist. On 10 November he described early Anglo Saxon settlements in North Northumbria. This was a scholarly presentation delivered in a readily understandable form and portrayed a vivid account of how closely settled this part of the county was in the middle ages.

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## About this issue ...

This issue of *Records & Recollections* has a delightful article by a former resident of both Glanton and Whittingham, the fourth in a dynasty of George Browns of the area. His research into his locally well-known forbears and his own memories of a childhood

spent in Whittingham make an excellent read.

Then we have the second and concluding part of the story begun in the last issue about the Brownes of Callaly Castle. Alec Browne handed over the care of Callaly Castle in 1925 to his son Simon, still fondly remembered by many as

"The Major". My research into the Browne family led me to Sir Raleigh Grey, the second husband of Simon's grandmother, who took part in the infamous Jameson Raid of 1896. His story will be told in the next issue of *Records & Recollections*.  
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## The George Browns of Whittingham

### By George Brown

*This is a story of four generations of Browns, all called George, who lived in Whittingham and Glanton.*

#### *George Brown I - my great grandfather.*

George I was born at Wark, a small hamlet near Carham on the banks of the Tweed, in 1838. His father Thomas Brown, a Scotsman, was a tenant farmer managing 935 acres at Carham and George I was the youngest of his five sons.

In the 1850s the family moved to run the farm at Spittle Hill (120 acres) close to the pretty village of Mitford near Morpeth. George I grew up at Spittle Hill and became a stonemason, living with his family on the farm. When his father died in 1865 his mother Elizabeth managed the farm for a while until she retired to live in the Old Manor House. This was in a state of disrepair and is now a ruin (the Mitfords had by then built a brand new Manor House for themselves across the river). The dog-powered spit used for roasting at the Old Manor House still exists and is on show at the Chantry Museum in Morpeth. Finally she moved to the old water mill at Mitford that had once been used for grinding snuff and was known as "Snuff Mill" or "The Factory". Both these buildings appear to have been used as lodgings for Mitford estate workers in the 1880-1900s.

At Spittle Hill George I married Margaret Fletcher from Cottingwood in 1875 and they had four sons, Thomas, William, George II and James Fletcher. Margaret had two daughters from a previous relationship – Annie and Isabella Clark. When his mother retired from Spittle Hill farm George I moved to Newton Underwood near Mitford with his growing family and then on to Lightwater Farm that adjoins it. Sadly both James Fletcher and his mother died shortly after he was born in 1880 leaving George I with two stepdaughters and three sons to bring up by himself. The oldest stepdaughter, Annie, became "mum" for the family but young George II was only one year old so was sent to live with his Aunt and Uncle Snaith, who lived in one of the cottages at Whittingham Lane.

#### *George Brown II – my grandfather*

Although George II was born at Newton Underwood in 1879 he was brought up by his aunt and uncle at Whittingham Lane and attended Whittingham school. After school he became a grocer's assistant to William Dixon, who owned Dixon's shop in the village. George II worked there for the rest of his life, eventually becoming shop manager in the 1910s until his retirement in 1948.

I understand that George II did leave the village for a short time to help run a transport business with his older brother Thomas, which apparently failed. If anybody has any information on this, or what happened to his brothers Thomas or William, I would be very happy to hear from them.

In those days Dixon's shop was a big business, providing food and stores for the village and many of the farms around. Next door to the shop was a warehouse, now occupied by Alan Davies, and across the road from the shop a stables, now converted into a house (Stable Cottage), and a field for the horses running down to the river Aln, now the location of Mr Phillipson's house. William Dixon was the brother of David Dippie Dixon who wrote the famous book *Whittingham Vale* and who George II knew very well. At the shop George II developed a canny ability to correctly add up long lists of prices in pounds, shillings and pence in his head – just by running his pencil down the list – no pocket computers in those days – and no decimalisation either!

#### *Marriage and family*

In 1905 George II married Caroline Hanton, a baker's daughter from Alnwick, and they had six children. Sadly the oldest, Isabella Fletcher, died of meningitis at the age of 10. Isabella Fletcher and Margaret Caroline were born at Mount Hooley then the family moved to Rose



A picture taken in 2005 of the premises of the former Dixon's Shop, with Rose Cottage on the right and the former shop warehouse on the left.

## The George Browns of Whittingham

Cottage next door to Dixon's shop where George III, Jack, Mary Holland and Frank were born. In those days toilets were situated at the bottom of the garden and my grandfather had a novel way of announcing his need for relief: he used to say he was going "up the garden to the netty" – backwards. "ytten eht ot nedrag eht pu" (netty = loo).

Although George II spent his working life as a shop manager it will be the other things that he involved himself in that he will be remembered for. He was Clerk to Whittingham Parish Council for 35 years, secretary of Whittingham Games for 27 years, secretary of the Whittingham Memorial Institute for 14 years and secretary of the AIn and Breamish Lodge of Oddfellows for 30 years.

### *Whittingham Games and other activities*

George II was known throughout the County for his connection with Whittingham Games. His popularity among the athletes and the general public, together with his unceasing and unselfish efforts to serve his adopted village, was the means of building up and retaining the time-honoured Festival of Whittingham Gymnastic Games as one of the most popular social gatherings in the North. Whittingham Games Committee was able to offer £200 in prizes before World War 1 and later this was increased to £300. This made the Games one of the greatest sporting events in the North. George II also acted as a judge at wrestling events under the Cumberland and Westmorland Rules, and was also chosen to referee a World Championship at Morpeth Sports.

George II retired as secretary of both the Games and of the Memorial Institute in 1933 and a presentation was arranged for him and his wife in the Memorial Institute. When handing over the various tokens of esteem, Lord Ravensworth paid a great tribute to the work George had done. "If you want a thing done", said Lord Ravensworth, "just ask George Brown and he will do it. To the best of my knowledge George Brown has never failed. I think that is a record to be proud of". In 1956, when he died, he was President of the Games.

It was at a Games Committee meeting that the suggestion was first made to have a suitable War Memorial for the Vale of Whittingham. At a public meeting called by George II on 15th January 1919 it was decided that a village hall would be the best memorial besides meeting the needs of the district. George II was appointed secretary and he held that office until 1933. The hall was actually built by my other grandfather Albert Johnson, a builder from Glanton. It was sited next to the village school and opened in 1925. Its official name was the Whittingham Memorial Institute and it cost over £2,000.

George II also twice broadcast for the BBC, eyewitness accounts of, and stories about, the Games at Whittingham. He also made the first broadcast of a Northumbrian Kirn Supper from a granary at Trewhitt Hall in 1942 when Sir Archibald White was in residence. He was also a correspondent for the Berwick Journal where he was described him as "the Grand Old Man" of Whittingham in the obituary they published on his death. The writer Glen AIn visited Whittingham in 1943 to research a book and was shown round by George II who he described in his book as a jolly man having a "grand Northumbrian handshake".

George II was associated with practically every other social event that needed organizing in Whittingham: the Cycling Club, the Rifle Club (he organized building the rifle range) the Dramatic Society, an annual West Percy Hunt Ball, as well as the local Savings Committee during World War II. He was also an accomplished tap dancer.

### *Family life*

I knew George II when I was a small boy, visiting him at his home at 2 The Croft which he had occupied since it was built. He had retired by then and was indeed a jolly old man who



The Village Hall, Whittingham, in 2005.

*"At a public meeting called by George II it was decided that a village hall would be the best memorial ..."*

## The George Browns of Whittingham

*"He enjoyed entertaining his grandchildren. He did this by sitting me on his knee ...teaching me to read the time ... and playing me tunes on his Jew's harp."*

enjoyed entertaining his grandchildren. He did this by sitting me on his knee in his big brown leather armchair and taking snuff (from a silver inlaid tortoiseshell snuff box presented to him by the Whittingham Rifle Club in 1911) teaching me to read the time (from a gold inscribed pocket watch presented to him in 1933 by Whittingham Games), both of which have been passed down to me, and playing me tunes on his Jew's harp.

Of George II's children, Margaret left Whittingham to become a nurse in London and was later matron of Tunbridge Wells public school for many years until she retired. Jack and Mary both lived in Whittingham most of their lives and appear to have inherited the Brown gene for organization. Jack took over organizing Whittingham games and local dances after his father retired and did so until his own death – the Games (now just called Whittingham Show) still awards a Jack Brown prize. Jack worked as a clerk at Blackshaw's garage in Alnwick and has a son Frank who still lives in the village. Mary was treasurer for the Memorial Institute from 1952, secretary of the Aln and Breamish Local History Society from its inception in 1967 and contributed four articles on the history of the Alnwick to Cornhill railway to the society's publication, which she researched herself. Mary worked on the railway as secretary at Whittingham and then Alnwick stations (until both closed in turn) before working as a secretary for the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle until her retirement. Sadly Frank, the youngest of George II's children, died a captive of the Japanese during WW2 from blackwater fever at the Onte Bridge, Brankassi, a prisoner of war camp on the infamous Burma Railway.

### *George Brown III – my father*

George III was born at Whittingham and brought up in Rose Cottage next to Dixon's shop and Holly House, Glanton. He attended Whittingham school until he was 14 years old. His first job was as "boots" at Eslington Hall – cleaning the shoes and riding boots for the house, and although this only lasted one year, George III had a "thing" about clean shoes (and polished insteps) for the rest of his life. Then his father got him a job as an apprentice mechanic to a Mr Blackshaw of Alnwick, who owned a garage at the bottom of Clayport. Apparently George II told Mr Blackshaw that if young George III was no good – "just send him back home".

### *Cars, motorbikes and tennis*

*"... he could get from Holly House, Glanton to the top of Clayport, Alnwick in eight minutes with his brother Jack on the back of his bike ..."*

But George III was good, engines became the love of his life, and he likened their sound to that of good music. Just by listening to the sound of an engine George III could tell what was wrong with it – something modern car mechanics cannot do without the aid of computers. Before WW2 very few people had cars, so when a new car was ordered the mechanic had to take the train to the manufacturer's factory (at Oxford or London) and drive the chassis back up to Alnwick – a trip of several days. Then the bodywork (mostly wood) had to be built onto the chassis by the mechanic, the new owner taught how to drive and perform basic maintenance before the sale was complete.

George III acquired a 500cc "Rudge Special" motorbike (cost £59 in 1932) which he used to get to and from Alnwick. Rudge was a racing motor bike company which won many Isle of Man TT races with a 1st, 2nd & 3rd in the 1930 Junior TT and the famous BBC F1 motor racing commentator Murray Walker's father, Graham, won the Ulster Grand Prix race on a Rudge racing bike. George III claimed that he could get from Holly House, Glanton to the top of Clayport, Alnwick in eight minutes with his brother Jack on the back of his bike – something I tried and failed to do many years later in a Lotus sports car – he must have been travelling very fast. In those days there were no crash helmets – you just turned round your flat cap to stop it blowing off and George III is known to have crashed at high speed running

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down Alnwick moor when a tractor pulled out of a side road in front of him, which left him with a cracked skull. George III also attended the Isle of Man TT motor bike races with his friend Tommy Jackson (who lived for many years at No 4 The Croft) and "tuned" racing motor bikes for "sand racers" at Alnwick before WW2 (most motor bike races were held on the beach in those days because of the lack of suitable circuits).

When George III was young the Rev. W. Mackie of Whittingham had built a tennis court to teach the village children how to play. This was situated in the field next to the cemetery where the new Vicarage now stands. George III became a keen tennis player and played doubles for Alnwick before the war. In his spare time he was an avid gardener, always digging or planting something and we always had fresh vegetables for dinner in our house. He also taught many people to drive and even ran well-attended evening classes in car maintenance before his health failed him.

Because of his engineering skill George III was kept in a reserved occupation during WW2 to maintain all the agricultural equipment in the north of Northumberland. After the war Blackshaw's garage, which had moved to a location outside the Bondgate tower opposite the old Hotspur Hotel – now sadly gone, had separate car and agricultural departments. George III was foreman of the agricultural department until he suffered a heart attack in 1960 and had to stop working. If your lighting plant, tractor or combined harvester broke down – you called George Brown to get it fixed. I often went with him in his van on Saturday mornings to visit a farm where a tractor or combined harvester had broken down and I was impressed that he always seemed to know what was wrong and how to fix it. He was from the old school of mechanics who were trained to take something completely apart, find the broken component and fix it (and he could), rather than the modern ones who will just replace the whole engine or gearbox irrespective of what small component has broken.

### *Peggy Brown*

In 1948 George III married Margaret Mary Johnson (known as Peggy), the daughter of Albert Johnson, the builder of Glanton. She was then the barmaid at the Castle Inn pub at Whittingham and together they had 4 children of whom George IV was the oldest. Peggy Brown died earlier this year.

### *George Brown IV - me*

I started my life in Glanton in 1948 where my parents lived with my grandfather Albert Johnson in No 4 Garden Terrace (Rose Lea). By the time I was six there were three children and five adults living in the house so it was time to set up on our own and we moved into South View, the house immediately to the left of the Memorial Institute in Whittingham. The house was rented from Lord Ravensworth's Eslington estate.

### *Living at South View*

I disliked this house immensely. It had only a small parlour and apology for a kitchen downstairs and two small bedrooms upstairs. The toilet was up the garden in a shed with a wooden seat with a bucket under that got emptied once a week by the bin men. There was no bath, so bath times were a tin tub in front of the fire and there was no damp course either so in the winter the bedroom walls ran with water and the wallpaper peeled off by itself. I developed asthma there, which I attribute to the damp, and suffered from it terribly for the next seven years. At night it was potties under the bed and on Saturday night there was the noise from the very popular Whittingham dance (organised by my Uncle Jack) going on in the Institute only 20 feet away to keep us children awake until well after midnight.

*"In 1948 George married Margaret Mary Johnson (known as Peggy), the daughter of Albert Johnson of Glanton."*



South View Cottage in 2005.

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### *Schooldays*



The Old School in 2005.

School was no better, even though it was just around the corner. I had grown up in Glanton and knew the children there well, but the boys in my class at Whittingham school all lived outside the village on farms and even though I had moved only 1½ miles, I was treated like an alien for the first couple of years by my “schoolmates”.

We didn't have a TV either, but the two old ladies who lived in the other South View house did have one and often invited me next door on a Saturday afternoon to watch “Cowboy and Indian” programmes (Hop-along Cassidy and The Lone Ranger) – in black and white of course. Nor did we have a fridge - just a “slab” (of marble) in the small pantry. But then you probably didn't need a fridge anyway as there was no frozen food or canned beer and the milk was delivered by tractor and trailer every day straight from Mr Smith's cows at Castle Farm, pasteurised and bottled by Mrs Smith – so it was always fresh.

However Whittingham did have some attributes to attract a young boy, the river to plodge in, loads of trees to climb – and I've climbed most – the Vicarage and Whittingham woods to explore and the old Prisoner of War camp and rifle range. The camp, up the Calaly road on the right, had been a wartime camp to house German prisoners who worked on the nearby farms and was still there in the 1950s, although derelict. It has since been built over with council houses. The rifle range was a long wooden building situated in the field just outside the school fence next to the Memorial Institute. George II had organised its building in the early 1900's, however it too was in a dilapidated state in the 1950s and out of bounds in school hours, but ideal for little boys at other times.

### *Friends*

Just across the road from South View is a large house called “Chesterford” which had previously been a doctor's house and was then the weekend home of the Fenwick family – yes, THE Fenwick family who own the shops in Newcastle, London and elsewhere. Most weekends they used to arrive in their red Alvis sports car to spend time in Whittingham. They had three sons John, Mark and James and as luck would have it John and Mark were my age – so we became friends. They also had a part-time cook and nanny for the children at weekends and a full time gardener and odd job man – Mr Weatherburn - who lived in the cottage to the west of the big house. For weekend trips out they had a green Morris Minor 1000 shooting brake and even though they were “rich” they joined in the local village activities and encouraged their sons to play with the local boys. I've been taken on summer picnics up the Aln valley and to the seaside by them often – they knew how to “weekend” in style.

John, Mark and I had many adventures together roaming the village, climbing the trees and plodging in the river. We built a raft from old oil drums, but after it fell apart a couple of times in midstream, soaking us, Mr Fenwick bought a small rowing boat that we used for expeditions up and down the river Aln. The willow trees along the banks make very good bows and arrows for small boys playing Cowboys and Indians.

When my grandfather, George II, died in 1956 we moved into his house at 2 The Croft and it had an inside loo – ahhh relief! Mary Brown, who had lived with her father, moved into the bungalow at 7 The Croft which had just been newly built. The houses at The Croft had originally been built with coal-fired boilers in the kitchens for washing clothes and I remember that this was removed before we moved in.

At the age of 11 I started to attend Wooler school, travelling there every day on the United bus. In those days we always had snow during the winter and quite often we had a few days off school because the bus couldn't get through. When this happened the best place to sledge was down the Tower bank – from the Police Station (The Old Court House)

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down past the water pump house (built by my grandfather Albert Johnson with my "help") and down to the wooden bridge across the river.

### *Joining the Scouts*

Reaching the age of 11 also meant that I could join the Boy Scouts. The scouts met at the school every Friday night and were run by the schoolmaster John Carr who lived in the small schoolhouse attached to the old school building. There were two "patrols", Panthers and Tigers, and I eventually achieved my First Class Scout's badge and became patrol leader of the Tigers. The main reason for us boys to be in the scouts was because we could go camping, since most of families didn't go away for summer holidays in those days. I remember summer camps were held as far away as Bridlington, Carlisle and Dunkeld in Scotland. The troop owned three large eight-man tents and we had a main camp in the summer, occasionally one at Easter and we even camped during the winter once, an event suitably called "operation coldfinger". Mark Fenwick, now chairman of Fenwicks, was one of the scouts and attended many camps too. Travel to the campsite for the boys and equipment in those days was in the back of a hired cattle wagon, suitably cleaned out. Because there was no way to communicate with the driver and cows and sheep don't need comfort breaks during the journey, a milk bottle was always the last – and most essential – bit of equipment to be loaded.

*"Travel to the campsite for the boys and equipment in those days was in the back of a hired cattle wagon, suitably cleaned out.. Because there was no way to communicate with the driver and cows and sheep don't need comfort breaks during the journey, a milk bottle was always the last – and most essential – bit of equipment to be loaded.*

### *Growing up*

During the 1960s four teenagers, my age, turned up in Whittingham; Theresa France, Angus Burdon, Martin Davies and Judith Phillipson. Theresa was the oldest daughter of Constable France, the last policeman to live in the police station (which had once been a pub called "The Masons Arms"). Angus was the son of Mr and Mrs Burdon who had bought Dixon's shop. Martin was the oldest son of Captain Davies who had bought the house next to Dixon's shop, although he boarded at Hexham Grammar during term time so we only saw him during the holidays. Finally Judith was the daughter of Mr Phillipson who had bought Dixon's shop field and installed a small caravan there that they visited at weekends. He later built the house he now owns in the field overlooking the river Aln. Judith's school friend Jane often joined them for weekend trips and is now married to Mr Smith's son Vivian.

During the 1960s I often worked at weekends and during the summer holidays for Mr Smith at Castle Farm to make some pocket money. I did just about everything you can do on a farm from driving tractors to milking cows and spent many a summer day behind Mr Smith on his combined harvester – he drove it up and down his field cutting corn and taking occasional pot shots at rabbits with his shot-gun, whilst I frantically filled bags of corn on the platform behind. Tractors are only supposed to run in one gear, having to stop to change to another. However once my father had explained the intricacies of the tractor gearbox and how to "crash" change gears without stopping - just like they did on old cars before the introduction of synchromesh gearbox's – I think that Mr Smith's tractor's had more than their fair share of gearbox wear and tear.

### *Fireworks*

One of the annual events of the Whittingham calendar was Guy Fawke's night – November 5th. Mr Smith used to build a large bonfire from hedge cuttings in the field behind Dixon's shop and the Women's Institute would serve tea and hot dogs and everyone would attend to watch the firework display. I remember one year a small band of young conspirators sneaked away from the main event and pooled all the gunpowder from their tupenny "Might Atom" bangers into a big jam-jar with the intent to really blow up something, since

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*"We chose the bus station as our target, lit the fuse and retired behind the Ravensworth statue for safety ..."*

Guy Fawke's had dismally failed. We chose the bus station as our target, lit the fuse and retired behind the Ravensworth statue for safety and bang – a flash and a big cloud of black smoke emanated from the bus shelter. However the shelter was a stout affair and survived the attack, having been built by my grandfather Albert Johnson – although a few burn marks were visible for years after. Just imagine if Guy Fawke's had actually set off his gunpowder – maybe nobody would have noticed either?

The other annual event was of course Whittingham Games. This was usually held in the field next to the Castle Inn pub and still had lots of athletic sports events and Cumberland wrestling in the 1960s. John Fenwick and I had a yearly battle for honours in the model making section, but for us boys the best bit was after the games were over. We would turn all the trestles and tables in the marquee into a bike racing circuit with banked corners and race each other until the workers came to pull down the tent.

### *Exit from Whittingham*

George Brown II was known to have left Whittingham for a short time in the early 1900s. George III also wanted to leave, to move down south to work on aeroplane engines before WWII, but George II refused to let him go because his sister Margaret had by then already left for the south and "one was enough".

I left in 1967 to study for a B. Sc degree in mechanical engineering at what is now Coventry University, which I passed with first class honours much to the delight of George III. During the 1960s there had been a TV program called "The Trouble Shooter's" about oil company executives flying around the world on planes and helicopters which was my favourite, so I decided to try to get into the oil business myself. I applied for a job with a company called Schlumberger which makes electrical measurements in oil wells – this allows the oil company to know how much oil there is and at what depth. Much to my surprise I was hired and soon found myself working out of Stavanger Norway flying in helicopters to the Ekofisk oil platforms in the middle of the North Sea. These were a huge engineering enterprise, produced the first oil from North Sea and are still operating today. Since then I worked for Schlumberger in the Middle East (Dubai, Greece, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) and then back to Aberdeen before joining BP in 1984.

My job in BP London was as a petrophysicist - a posh title for the guy who analyses the data Schlumberger measures - and I eventually became head of BP's petrophysics group at their research facility at Sunbury on Thames before they retired me. Then I joined a small company called Sensa that installs fiber optic monitoring systems in oil wells to measure the flow of oil from the reservoir, as head of data interpretation. Schlumberger bought Sensa in 2001 – so I am now back with the company I started with. During my career I've travelled extensively round the world, Vietnam, Alaska, Houston, Norway, Abu-Dhabi and Azerbaijan and others this year alone, published more than two dozen papers in technical journals, been awarded six patents, just completed a year as a "Distinguished Lecturer" for the American Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) and even recently published a technical book on data interpretation in oil wells.

Like my father I am a motor racing enthusiast, although cars rather than bikes, and I've attended most of the British Formula 1 Grand Prix since 1972, often with my younger brother Ian who is also a motor racing fan. Since 1990 I have been settled with my family in Beaconsfield, a popular commuter town half an hour from London. It is a lot more hectic and expensive to live down here than up in Whittingham and unfortunately it doesn't have a river to plodge in – but at least I do have an inside loo (well four actually).

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### *George Brown V – my son*

Yes there is a George V, my son – we named him James George Brown and he was born in 1988. It's too early to say what he will get up to in his life – but I'm sure he will do well.

### References

- (i) Mitford 2000 – A history of the village for the last 2,000 years. Mitford Historical Society
- (ii) Dixon, David Dippie *Whittingham Vale* 1895
- (iii) George Brown II Obituary - Berwick Journal, 1956
- (iv) Around and About Northumberland – Glen Aln, 1943
- (v) Miss Mary Brown profile by Jane Hotspur, Alnwick Gazette, June 13 1980
- (vi) The Rudge Enthusiasts' Club – <http://www.rudge.co.uk>.



*Whittingham Games, 1937*  
Jack Liddell of Haydon Bridge receiving the trophy in the wrestling event from Mr George Brown.

## Five Alexanders and a Castle (Part 2) by Bridget Winstanley

We ended the last instalment of this article (*Records & Recollections* New Series Vol. 1 No. 4, June 2005) with a birthday party and we shall begin this one with the Alexander whose birthday it was – but not until we have said a word about his mother.

### *Mary Isabell Browne*

We left Mrs Mary Isabell Browne, wife of Alexander (3) Henry and daughter of Cadogan Hodgson Cadogan of Brinkburn Priory, making a "neat little speech" at one of the parties to celebrate the 21st birthday of her son Alexander (4) known as Alec. Within a few years of this time, in 1898, she was to be widowed and move from Callaly Castle to Lorbottle Hall. She was not to remain a widow for long, however, for in 1901 she married Lieut. Col. Raleigh Grey, later Sir Raleigh Grey. Sir Raleigh had extensive lands at Riversdale in Zimbabwe and this established the family's connection with Southern Africa. The story of Raleigh Grey, who took part in the Jameson Raid, will be told in the next issue of *Records & Recollections*. Suffice to say here that he is buried in Whittingham churchyard, together with Mary Isabell. They both died in 1936, he in February and she in October. He was 75 years old and she was 86.

### *Alexander (4) also known as Alec*

We now move the focus on to the next Alexander of Callaly Castle who was born on 25 March 1871 and died in Cape Town on 4 January 1961 in his 90th year<sup>(1)</sup>. Alec was to inherit – and spend – a vast fortune. As we shall see, he lived at Callaly for a relatively brief time, moving to France in 1925 and then to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa.

### *A Nasty Accident*

We have heard all about his coming of age celebrations (*Records and Recollections*, June 2005) but we know that he actually turned 21 in March, several months earlier than the parties. The reason for the delay is explained in an undated press cutting, probably of 1891<sup>(2)</sup>. We may surmise that it was late summer, for wasps appear in the narrative.

"On Wednesday evening, about half-past six o'clock, just as the guard were mounting, the encampment of the 3rd Northumberland Fusiliers, at the 'Little Havens,' on the Pasture Land, were alarmed by a loud report, and a volume of smoke was seen rising in front of the tent occupied by Lieutenant Alexander Browne, in the officers' lines. It was immediately found that the young lieutenant had been preparing a sulphur 'squib' for the purpose of destroying a wasp's nest, and while applying a little dry powder to it from a tin, the latter exploded, blowing him over and inflicting serious injuries. The Regimental Surgeon being absent from the camp at the time, Dr Clark Burman was sent for from Alnwick, and that gentleman was in attendance on the sufferer about twelve minutes after the occurrence. Meanwhile Colonel the Right Hon. Earl Percy rode into the town and obtained a closed carriage, and in this, accompanied by Major Lord Algernon Percy, the sufferer was conveyed to Alnwick Castle, where he received the kindest and most careful attention. Besides injuries to his face and left foot, it was found that the young Lieutenant's right hand was so seriously hurt that amputation of the thumb was necessary. Lieut. Browne is only 20 years of age, and the greatest sympathy is felt for him by his brother officers, as well as by the men of his company, by whom he is held in the highest respect. He still remains at Alnwick Castle, where he has been visited by his father, Major A.H. Browne, of Callaly Castle, and other members of his family and friends. We understand that

*"The young lieutenant had been preparing a sulphur 'squib' for the purpose of destroying a wasps' nest ...and the latter exploded, blowing him over and inflicting serious injuries."*



## Five Alexanders and a Castle (Part 2)

the noise of the explosion was distinctly heard by several of the allotees working in the gardens in Denwick Lane.”

It is interesting that living members of the family believed that his thumb was lost in a shooting accident.

### *A Move from Doxford to Callaly*

For the next piece of information about Alec, we must depend on the memory of his son Alexander (5) Simon Cadogan Browne, known to his family and friends as Simon. Alec moved at some time before 1895 (perhaps on his marriage or the death of his grandfather Alexander (2), both of which happened in 1894) to Doxford, another of the family homes in Northumberland. It was here that Simon and his brother Anthony were born and where he lived until they moved to Callaly in 1901 three years after the death of Alexander (3) Henry. There may have been some reluctance on Alexander's part to make this move. We are told by Simon that the move was forced upon them by problems with the water supply at Doxford. The story is worth telling.

“Why we moved from Doxford at that particular time was because Sir John Haggerston, who owned Ellingham then, had altered the water supply, and our Doxford water supply actually started at Ellingham. Then he buried a dead horse close to our supply, so we had to move very quickly”<sup>(iii)</sup>.

### *Travelling in Style*

Simon recalls that as a child the family travelled in some style.

“My grandfather (my mother's father) lived at Newbrough, near Fourstones. Then he moved and rented a lovely house on the River Fal near Truro. We used to go down in the summer for about six weeks, and we took the whole household with us. There was my mother, father, my mother's maid, my father's valet, a footman to look after my mother's maid, my nurse and a nurserymaid.

We travelled in a saloon – a thing like a dining car, with two third class carriages at the end. We started from Whittingham station and went to King's Cross where we stayed at the Great Northern Hotel. The next morning the saloon was taken round to Paddington Station where it was attached to the Cornish train. My father used to keep a private cab and a pair of horses in London in which my father and mother travelled to meet us at Paddington. Then we all went on to Cornwall.

At that time, my father also had a steam yacht, quite a big one, 225 tons, which he used to lay up at Budle Bay which belonged to the family, for the winter. He travelled south in that sometimes. My mother, however, hated the sea, and she always said she ought to be looking after the children so she avoided a sea passage”<sup>(iv)</sup>.

*“There was my mother, father, my mother's maid, my father's valet, a footman to look after my mother's maid, my nurse and a nurserymaid”.*

### *Hunting and Cricket*

Another early memory is of his father's passion for sport. He was master of the Percy Hunt, and would spend the winter at Manor House in Alnmouth in order to be closer to the kennels at Greenrigg. Another of his preoccupations was cricket. In order to make a cricket ground at Doxford, where the family lived until 1901, he altered a public road.

“In those days private house cricket was a great thing, and at Doxford we had a very good cricket Eleven. The main event was to play Howick and in order to win, my father managed to get Rhodes and Hurst, the two Yorkshire cricketers, who were put

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on the Estate roll as gardeners. Of course they never went near the gardens – all they had to do was teach the staff to play cricket<sup>(v)</sup>.

### *Wasted Votes*

Alec was also interested in politics and as a landowner in many parts of the country, he had a number of votes. In the 1905 election a month was allowed to enable people to vote in all the areas where they had property, and Alexander was away for a fortnight voting for Balfour (Conservative). Despite his efforts Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (Liberal) won in a landslide.

### *Marriage and Divorce*

In 1894 Alec married Edith Mary Cookson of Newbrough. This marriage ended in divorce in 1910. Edith was considered to be a beauty, although the numerous pictures that we have of her show her as striking (like his second wife she was very tall – six feet tall, it is said) but by no means conventionally beautiful. She was, according to family legend, extremely concerned about her dress and appearance, and was late for everything. It is said that she occupied the “white bedroom” above the drawing room at Callaly, and was able to quietly observe the guests below from the nearby minstrels’ gallery with her devoted maid Pratt. Together they would decide whether there was any guest below who looked better dressed or more attractive than she did and if necessary she would make adjustments to her appearance to ensure that she was not outshone by anyone. After the divorce Edith joined her parents at Trelissick, a beautiful house on the River Fal in Cornwall<sup>(vii)</sup> now owned by the National Trust. She died in 1923 at the age of 53 and is buried at Newbrough. Alec and Edith Mary had two sons, Simon and Anthony Henry Montague. By his second wife he had another son, born in 1929.



Miss Edith Mary Cookson at about the time of her marriage to Alec Browne

### *Life after Callaly*

In 1925 the Trust now running the estate handed it over to Alexander (5) (Simon) and Alec and went off to live in Pau in France where he hunted with the Pau hounds. In 1926 he married Lady Enid Doreen Grace Stanhope, granddaughter of the 9th Earl of Chesterfield. Simon recalls that he had to leave in 1940 when the Germans occupied France and that unfortunately the Pau Hounds came to an end. According to his granddaughter’s memory<sup>(viii)</sup>, however, he arrived in Rhodesia much earlier in the 1930s. Here he joined his mother and stepfather, Sir Raleigh Grey, who owned several estates amounting to more than 32,000 acres. He died in Cape Town, aged nearly 90 in 1961. Until the family trust threatened withdrawal of funds, Alec and his valet lived at the Mount Nelson Hotel in the Gardens area of Cape Town – probably the most luxurious and expensive hotel in Southern Africa<sup>(ix)</sup>.

### *Alexander (5) Simon Cadogan Browne known as Simon*

#### *Schooldays*

We now come to the last of the Alexander Brownes to live at Callaly Castle. This was Alexander Simon Cadogan, known as Simon within the family. He has left us some vivid and rather sad recollections of his schooldays.

“I was sent away to school; first of all to Wellington House, Westgate on Sea, and I’ve never been more miserable in my life. I’d had a congestion of the lung when I was a small child, and in those days at Wellington House, one had to wear a cotton shirt.

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My mother said I couldn't possibly wear such a thing and that I must have a flannel one. So I was sent with a flannel shirt and this cotton thing on top. When the other boys saw I was kicked from one side of the place to the other, and I was absolutely miserable.

So I determined to run away! They had a game called 'Knock-about' when they kicked a football about. It was in September or October – I had survived one term – I watched this game on this occasion, and saw that everyone was interested, and I thought "Now is the time!" I put my collar up, put my little red hat in my pocket and I stalked away. I thought as I passed the Master's house that someone had seen me. Anyhow, I went to the station where I knew there was a train about 12.50 which went to London, and there it was.

I got into a first class carriage. I was a little worried, so I got in under the seat. Then I heard a tremendous commotion going on outside. There was a lot of chatter, and I thought it was about time the train started, but it didn't. I heard them opening doors all the way down, until finally they came to my door, and a porter said, "Here he is", and pulled me out from under the seat. I was taken back and beaten until I could hardly move<sup>(x)</sup>.

Another travel memory involves his normal travelling arrangements after he had settled down at Wellington House. The last train from Newcastle had left for Whittingham by the time that the train from the south on which he travelled home for holidays. This problem was solved by running a special train for him<sup>(xi)</sup>.

He was happier at Eton though it is clear that he was no scholar. Thanks to a sympathetic house master he was permitted to do woodwork instead of Greek which he candidly admits that he could not do. Even here it seems to have been necessary to give the handicrafts master a half crown at the end of the term in order to get good marks. Thanks to this he ended up "almost in the sixth form!"<sup>(xii)</sup>

### *Army Life and Marriage*

After Eton he went to Sandhurst. This was just before the 1914-18 war. He was gazetted and went first to Ireland and then to the front. He married in 1919 and was sent back to Ireland where his wife Dorothy Mary joined him. He recounts a story about life in Ireland:

"In the middle of the night she wakened me and said someone was trying to get in at the front door. There was a tremendous rattling at the door. ...

My soldier servant was allowed to sleep in the house, so I went and got him. We were both very frightened, because it was pretty dangerous at the time – people were being shot everywhere. We opened the window carefully but couldn't see the front door. Then we had a conference. I took the poker and he took the shovel – we got to the door – then the question arose as to who was to open the door.

"I'll open the door, sir" he said, and he took hold of the door and quickly stood behind it, leaving me standing there in the open. And what do you think it was? A donkey!"<sup>(xiii)</sup>

We have a picture of Dorothy in later life (see page 15) looking homely and comfortable with her family, who remember her as an extremely shy and nervous person. Others remember her as a mainstay of the Women's Institute in Callaly. Members invariably addressed her as "ma'am".



Simon and Anthony Browne as children.

*"I'll open the door, sir", he said, and he took hold of the door and quickly stood behind it, leaving me standing there in the open. And what do you think it was? A donkey!*

## Five Alexanders and a Castle (Part 2)

### *The Beaufort Hunt*

Later, but while still in the army, Simon used to hunt with the Beaufort Hunt and later became the Hunt Secretary. In 1925 when he was required to take over Callaly Castle, the Duke of Beaufort agreed that he could spend the summer at Callaly while returning to his job with the Hunt in the winter. Commuting was complicated:



"We used to move up to Callaly with everyone except the grooms. First of all we came in cars. There were the two girls (Mrs Buckle was brought up with my daughter), the governess, two canaries, three cats, and about five dogs, and the cook, butler, housemaid, footman, etc. Then we got a horse box, and brought everything together, my wife and I bringing up the two cars. We stayed at Callaly all summer and went back south again for the hunting season.

I used to hunt six days a week. In one particularly open season, there were only two days, Christmas Day and Good Friday, when I did not go out hunting. It was hard work but a wonderful experience.

However, after a few years, it all became too difficult, and I came back to live permanently at Callaly, when I became Joint Master with the late Duke of Northumberland".<sup>(xiv)</sup>

### *Callaly in World War 2*

Quite early on in the 1939-1940 war, Simon was called up. He came home on leave one day and found a policeman waiting for him to tell him that the War Office was taking over Callaly Castle and that, in his own words, he would have to "clear out". Callaly Castle became a hospital for the duration of the war under Mrs Leather-Culley as Commandant.

There is a characteristic footnote to this.

"Some time after I came back from the war, we were out with a shooting party, and suddenly a battery of gunners came charging up and started shooting in the middle of our beat. Of course they frightened everything off.

I said to the man in charge, "Really, you might have waited until after we'd gone", to which he replied there was a war on. I said that there was no war going on here, but he replied, "Ah, but there's still a war going on in Japan". So he finished his exercise and spoilt our shoot".<sup>(xv)</sup>

Miss Nancy Binney has added some further details to the picture of Callaly Castle during the war years. In addition to being a hospital it was a battle school – no doubt it was trainees from this institution who disturbed Simon's shooting in the incident described above. Miss Binney's family who farmed at Ryle Mill used to supply turnips, potatoes and "twenty-two and a half couple" of rabbits a week to the hospital, battle school and officers' mess which was further up the road to Rothbury. They also supplied the boys' school which took over Eslington Hall for the duration of the war.

Simon's story continues:

"The stables used to be where the servants' quarters are now in the house. In 1890 my grandfather moved them up to where they now stand. We are now living in what was the servants' quarters in the castle, as it is warmer in the winter time, but is quite amazing how on a wet day we can still smell the ammonia from the horses, even now after some 85 years."<sup>(xvi)</sup>

## Five Alexanders and a Castle (Part 2)

Simon died in 1987, eight years after his beloved wife Dorothy, to whom he had been married for 61 years. Both are remembered with great affection. They are buried in the Browne family crypt in Whittingham churchyard. Also buried in the churchyard, but not in the family crypt, are Simon's grandmother Mary Isabel and her second husband Sir Raleigh Grey. Grey is sufficiently interesting a character to warrant an article of his own.

### References

- (i) Memorial plaque in the South Transept, St Bartholomew's Church, Whittingham.
- (ii) This press cutting is not identified, but like the cuttings from the *Alnwick & County Gazette* and *Alnwick Mercury* was supplied to the author by Alan Winlow who found it among the scrap books of his grandfather.
- (iii) Browne, ASC: Talk on the Browne Family at Callaly, 1976. *Records and Recollections: the Journal of the Aln & Breamish Local History Society* 1978 Autumn 1978 vol. 2 no. 6 p. 4.
- (iv) Browne, ASC: Talk on the Browne Family at Callaly, 1976. *Records and Recollections: the Journal of the Aln & Breamish Local History Society* 1978 Autumn 1978 vol. 2 no. 6 p. 4.
- (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. 3.
- (vi) *Ibid.* p. 5.
- (vii) Personal communication: Mr and Mrs M.A. Kerr
- (viii) Personal communication: Mrs M.A. Kerr
- (ix) *Ibid.*
- (x) 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. 4.
- (xi) *Ibid.* p. 5.
- (xii) *Ibid.* p. 4
- (xiii) *Ibid.* vol. 2 no. 2 p. 5.
- (xiv) *Ibid.* p. 5-6.

Right: This and the preceding picture show the centenary meet of the Percy hunt in 1970. The people in this picture are from left:

Col. RH Carr-Ellison (MFH West Percy), Mrs Carr-Ellison, Mr RMC Jeffreys (MFH Milvain), Mrs Jeffreys, Mr Peter Roundell, Mrs Roundell, Mrs Browne, Duchess of Northumberland, Lord Ralph Percy (now Duke), Major ASC Browne, Sir John Milburn (MFH West Percy), Duke of Northumberland, Lord James Percy.



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Neil MacKichan

Richard Sharp

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## 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.

#### 2006 Programme

**8 March** Dr JA Hellen on German Prisoner of War Camps in Britain, 1945-1948.

**12 April** To be announced.

**10 May** Sarah Wilson talking about, and showing pictures from her book (see right).

**14 June** AGM - speaker to be announced.

**13 September** JM Almond on History from Gravestones.

**11 October** Steve Bangs on History from Folk Songs.

**8 November** - speaker to be announced.

#### A Book to Buy:

**Reflections: the Breamish Valley and Ingram** by Sarah Wilson, published by Northern Heritage, 2005. ISBN 0-9544777-6-6. Obtainable from booksellers, price £12.99 or from the publisher, telephone 01670789940.

This delightful and lavishly illustrated book brings alive the rich history of the Breamish Valley. It is full of recollections and anecdotes of the hill folk of the area, rich and poor, and evokes the geography and weather of this most beautiful portion of the Cheviots. Although it claims to be a picture of only the last 100 years, it records a great deal of archaeological information going back some 8,000 years in the course of describing the digs that have taken place in the last decade.

Sarah Wilson says in her preface that recording oral history was a priority. She has, however, set this against a detailed factual background of contemporary events over the century.

Some of the chapter headings give a flavour of the book - In the Cheviot's shadow, Low Blakehope, Alnham Moor, Linhope, Hartside and Greenside Hill, Early days in the National Park, The Hill Shepherds' Homes, A Walk Around St Michael's Church, Ingram Show, the Valley in Wartime, The Brandon Estate - and so on. This is definitely a book for anyone with an interest in local history. B.W.