



Newsletter of the South Shields Local History Group



Issue 145
March 2020

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Introduction

In this month's edition, we've articles on the Cyprus Hotel and old BBC North East TV programmes featuring local historical figures. We continue the story of James Evans the Elder and learn about the fascinating Richard Scott, while in the latest instalment of 'Stories of Old Shields' we encounter 'Robert Green, The Axeman of Westoe'. The Word plays host to a book launch 'Eileen: The Making of George Orwell' and the Wednesday Heritage Club presentation in April is a play based on the St. Hilda Colliery Disaster. And finally, we have an update on our Women at Work display.



Lost TV Gems!

The search is on for copies of old BBC North East TV programmes on VHS, Betamax, cine or any other format. From the 1970's onwards, BBC North East produced a number of drama documentaries about real people and real events - using a mixture of documentary techniques including narration, voiceovers and archive footage; as well as dramatised sequences with actors to bring the story to life. Details of four of the programmes are listed below.

Darling Grace: The Wreck of the Forfarshire (BBC North East, 3 February 1978) was the first of three programmes about Grace Darling who, with her father William Darling, helped rescue survivors of the Forfarshire, a steamship which ran aground on the Farne Islands on 5 September 1838. The programmes, which were written and produced by Roger Burgess, were only shown in the north east. This first programme uses a mixture of filmed documentary footage and dramatised sequences to tell the story of the shipwreck, with Barbara Hickmott playing the 22 year-old Grace Darling and South Shields actor Alan Hockey her father.



A wood carving of Grace Darling (1815-1842)
(Image courtesy of the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle)



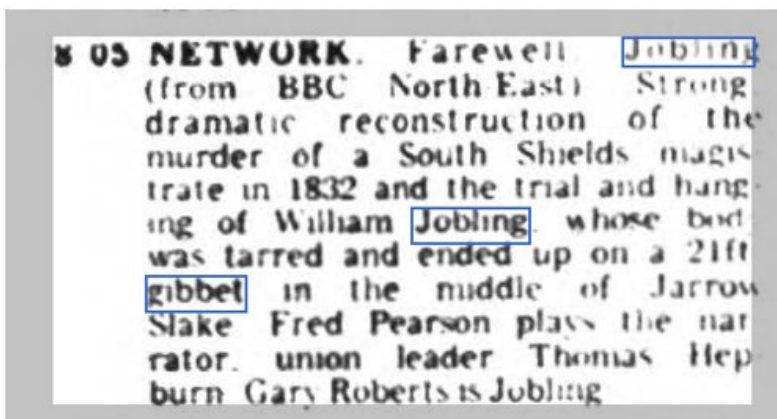
Alan Hockey
(Image via Wikipedia)

Mr Swan's Electric Light: The Story of a Great Inventor (BBC 2, 28 November 1979). It tells the story of Sunderland born scientist and inventor, Joseph Swan, who gave the first successful demonstration of an incandescent electric light bulb on 3 February 1879, ten months before Thomas Edison demonstrated his electric light bulb.



The Railway King: The Rise and Fall of George Hudson (BBC North East, 13 December 1971, networked on BBC 1 on 6 April 1972). The story of the wealthy entrepreneur, and politician George Hudson (played by Joseph O'Connor). In the early 19th century “the Railway King” developed the railway network in the north east until financial difficulties led to his downfall. George gave his name to Hudson Street at Tyne Dock, South Shields.

Farewell, Jobling (BBC North East, 4 February 1977; BBC2, *Network*, 4 June 1977), a film by Arthur Appleton, about a Jarrow pitman, William Jobling (played by Gary Roberts), who was executed for the murder of the South Shields magistrate, Nicholas Fairles in 1832. The story is told by Thomas Hepburn (played by Fred Pearson), the first leader of the pitmen in the north east.



A TV listing from the Evening Chronicle, 4th June 1977



Thomas Hepburn

Tommy Hepburn is introduced in the studio (with Fred Pearson wearing period costume and speaking with a broad Geordie accent). The programme cuts to location filming to show the reconstruction of what happened on that fateful day on 11th June 1832 when William Jobling encountered Nicholas Fairles. Hepburn’s narration continues over the dramatized scenes and he argues that Jobling didn’t murder Fairles; and his subsequent hanging and gibbeting were an attempt to break the pitman’s union. (The real murderer – Ralph Armstrong absconded and reportedly fled to Australia).

If you have copies of any of these or know of ‘organisations’ that do, please have a word with your newsletter editor or email jim.mulholland@blueyonder.co.uk Thank you!



Women at Work

I'm delighted to report that this month's informal meeting featuring a video of Shields lass Jenny Johnson talking about her life in the town including working in a munitions factory during WW1, proved to be a very enjoyable evening. Special thanks go to Heather and Jackie who shared their own working experiences and that of relatives in the retail sector. Among the topics discussed were Allen's department store at Laygate and the shops of Frederick Street, which provided hundreds of jobs for women.



Above: Laygate in the 1960's. (Image courtesy of the Shields Gazette)

During the course of our research into our 'Women at Work' display we've identified two aspects to the project. Firstly, the broad background of jobs undertaken by women and secondly 'specific local people' such as Amy Flagg, Anne Seymour and Jenny Johnson – but we need more! If you could add to the research in these or any other areas, please approach a member of the committee or better still, come along to our informal on Monday 6th April at Cleadon Park Library, 5.15–6.45pm.

Submitted by Jean Stokes

Robert Green, the axeman of Westoe

In working on the late medieval sanctuary records of Beverley and Durham I am often reminded of the critic who characterised the Icelandic sagas as 'stories of angry farmers with axes'. The following is a local example which illustrates the point.



"On 24th August 1493 Robert Green from South Shields came to the cathedral church of Durham and there, when the bells had been rung, immediately applied for sanctuary. He stated that on 1st August he had come from home and had been attacked in the Close in Newcastle by Robert Nicholson of Winlaton, where Robert and several of his followers, all armed with weapons, had ambushed him. He had therefore struck Robert twice on the chest with a Scottish axe and inflicted wounds which proved fatal. It was on account of this crime that he applied for sanctuary, for the safety of his person and for the protection of his assets in the area between Tyne and Tees. Witnesses: Dom. Robert Milner, master of the grammar school of Durham Abbey, William Hullett, groom and guardian of the horses of the lord Prior of Durham, and William and Thomas Green, husbandmen from Westoe."

In his history of '*The Borough of South Shields*', George Hodgson mentions Robert Green as one of a consortium of 8 persons who in 1489 had taken a six year lease of a parcel of land known as Shelehewgh, newly enclosed and belonging to the vill of Westoe, and of 2 acres of land belonging to the tenants of Harton, at the annual rent of 36s 8d payable to the prior of Durham, with the obligation to do and perform all the customary services appertaining to this land. Frustratingly Hodgson does not quote the source for this information but I am reasonably confident that this is the same person.

The common picture of sanctuary is of a murderer, dripping with blood and clutching his sword, frantically knocking on the door of the cathedral while being closely pursued by relatives and friends of his victim. While this may be true in some instances it is not the case in the majority of applications. Robert Green took over 3 weeks to travel to Durham. He clearly had time to return to Shields and talk to his family, then to travel to Durham with his relatives William and Thomas who could witness his formal confession and perhaps support a claim that he acted in self-defence, but why was he carrying a battle-axe while walking through the streets of Newcastle and how did he fight off what, on his evidence, was a whole gang of assailants? He may well have had his own armed band, perhaps including William and Thomas, and the whole episode looks suspiciously like a 15th century version of gang warfare. One puzzling circumstance is why he became involved in this dispute with a man from Winlaton; life then was usually very local and Winlaton is some way from Shields.



The procedure for obtaining sanctuary was to strike the knocker on the north door of the cathedral, thus gaining entrance to the building. On the admission of an applicant the bell in the Galilee chapel was tolled to give notice that someone had taken sanctuary. Once witnesses had been summoned the applicant would then stand in the nave of the cathedral, ring another bell to announce his intention, and then make public confession of his crime before his formal admission to the privilege of sanctuary. This privilege overrode all other rights, so that a friend or relative seeking revenge for the victim would himself be subject to the death penalty for breaching the sanctuary by killing or abducting the applicant.

It is likely that, on returning to his home at Shields, Green confessed his crime in the first instance to the curate of St Hilda's Church and that he was instructed to perform the penitential act of making a short pilgrimage to Durham and to start the expiation of his crime by spending time in the cathedral, living on a modest diet and praying regularly for forgiveness. The rules of sanctuary allowed him to obtain protection in the cathedral for a maximum of 37 days. During this cooling-off period he may have been able to come to some agreement with the relatives of Robert Nicholson, perhaps some financial compensation for the murder, and he probably then returned home to Shields to continue with his work as a husbandman on the land leased to him and his associates by the Prior.

We might wonder why he fled to Durham for sanctuary. The bishop of Durham was his secular lord and had power of life and death over him for the murder. It is an extraordinary instance of the power of sanctuary that he was able to seek safety in the church controlled by the bishop and prior. The reference in his confession to his seeking to protect his assets between Tyne and Tees may well have been aimed at assuring the prior that he would continue to be a good tenant and pay his rent, in the hope that the prior would intercede with Robert Nicholson's family in the interests of seeking a peaceful resolution of their dispute.

If anyone has information regarding the people and the events depicted in this series of articles on 'Stories of Old Shields', please contact our editor.

Submitted by Tim Griffiths

The Cyprus Hotel

In her book 'South Shields in 50 Buildings', Caroline Barnsley writes about the Cyprus Hotel, situated on the corner of George Potts Street and Chichester Road. The architects were M. Wall and Sons of Albany Chambers, King Street. The plans for the building were approved on 2nd August 1900 and included a cellar and a ground floor with a buffet and a billiard room, as well as a sitting room and a newsroom. The third floor was used for people to live in - it consisted of 3 bedrooms, a living room and an indoor bathroom and toilet.



(Image courtesy of <https://www.southtynesidehistory.co.uk/>)

The site was owned by the executors of Mr. John Turnbull, who owned the Victoria Brewery in James Mather Street, in South Shields. John Turnbull had been in the brewing business for over 30 years and his initials are seen in the fascia of the public house. The ornate building was completed in 1901 and is a wonderful example of late Victorian architectural extravagance,

Submitted by Andrew Grant



The James Evans Story (Part 3)

Introduction

Part 2 concluded with a reference to James Evans the Elder's sponsorship in 1771 of his son James Evans' indentures with *Richard Scott*. In this section apart from continuing with the life story of James Evans the Elder, I am also including an extract from my biography of Richard Scott, a fascinating local figure whose association with the Evans father and son is of some significance.

Ann Evans

I am still trying to establish what happened to James Evans the Elder for a period of approximately 25 yrs., from 1745-1765. Based on the fact that the most common name of the female children, grandchildren and generations that followed was that of Ann Evans, the possibility that James Evans the Elder's wife was Ann, seems a distinct possibility. He had at least two children, James Evans and Ann Evans yet I have failed to find registration for either of them; this may be because their christenings were in a non-conformist church from which the records have been lost. The earliest record of an *Ann Evans* dying in South Shields was in 1769; possibly the wife of James Evans, however, in the Bishops Transcripts she is described as a widow.

I recall the name of *Ann Evans* in living memory - *Ann Evans Young* (1876-1963), my Great Aunt; wife of *William Emmett* photographer. For over 200 years the name of *Ann Evans* occurs in my family tree.

So far, I have identified only one possible marriage between a *James Evans* and an *Ann*: -

James Evans mariner m Ann Johnson, widow St George's in the East, London 18 Sep 1743.

Once qualified as a shipwright, James may have moved to work on the Thames:-

When there was no work on the Tyne, the London Freemen allowed Newcastle shipwrights to seek work on the Thames, however there was no such reciprocal arrangement, and this did on occasions create consternation. (The Shipwrights Company of Newcastle upon Tyne).

cont...



Other possibilities are that James Evans moved to the south coast, e.g. to Hampshire where some members of the Young family of the West Docks settled in the pre 1770 period. His eventual son in law, Richard Kelly in 1790 sailed as a Master on the ship MaryAnn originating in Emsworth in Hampshire. It is the lack of local parish records which suggests that James did not initially settle in South Shields and work for example in the yard of Robert Wallis (1702-1781).

Apprenticeship

The next reference to James Evans the father and son in *Surtees* concerns the validity of James Evans junior's actual apprenticeship.

27 December 1771

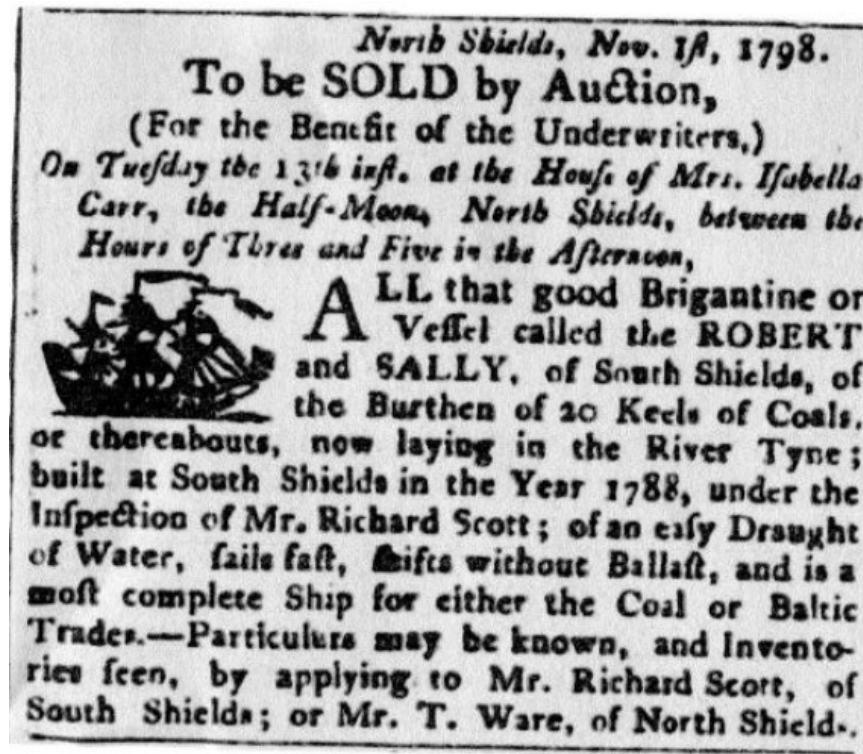
64. Ordered that notice be sent to James Evans of South Shields apprentice To Richard Scott that the Company intend to oppose his freedom and that the money be paid for inrolling his indenture will be returned. And the reason or such opposition is because Richard Scott does not reside in Newcastle and has not licence to settle in South Shields. (p.64).

This was almost a year after James Evans Jnr. commenced his apprenticeship. Presumably the matter must have been resolved as the apprenticeship was completed and a sum of £3 2s 2 ½d (approx. £560 at today's value) was paid for his release. In 1782 disbursements were paid as follows:-

17 April By cash paid to the following brethren p. by order of this day 1 guinea each.....Rich. Scott, Thomas Scott, T. E. Headlam, James Storey, Jas Wilson, James Evans, Matt. Pringle & Geo. Smith (p.168).

Richard Scott was not only a Shipwright; he was a Master Mariner, Shipowner and Entrepreneur. He did have an interest in the construction of ships as borne out by the following advertisement in the Newcastle Courant, dated November 1796:-

cont...



Richard Scott possibly worked in a supervisory capacity in James Evans the Elder's Market Place Dock where James Evans Jnr. was indentured to him.

Richard Scott (1746-1805): Richard was a Master Mariner on at least one of James Evans the Elder's ships, "Kitty" which in 1775 in Lloyd's register is shown as having James Evans as Master with the location of the ship in North England. Records of ships prior to 1788 are difficult to find.

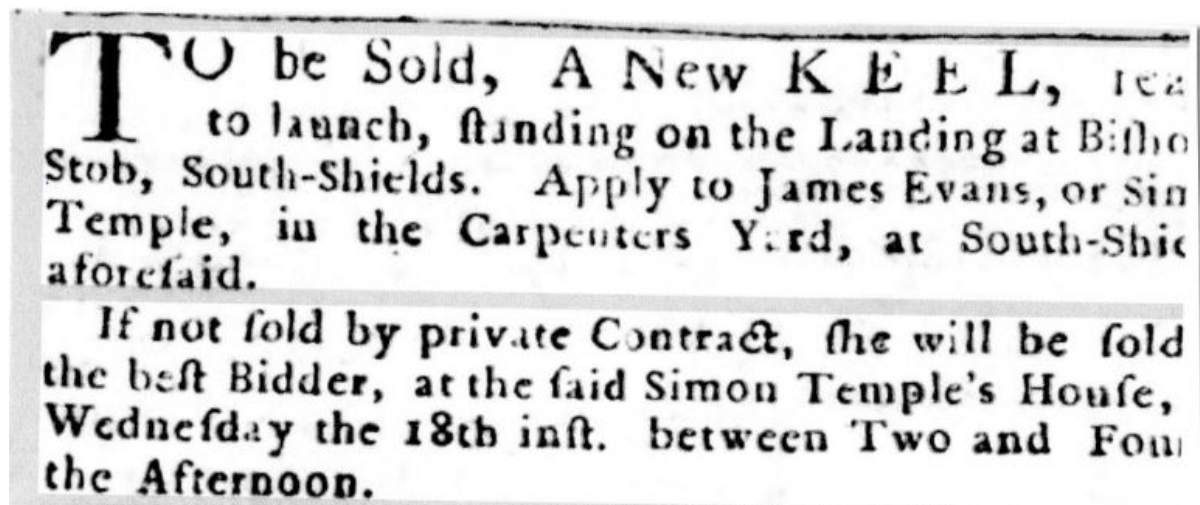
"The Kitty" of this port, Richard Scott, master arrived yesterday from Greenland with four sizeable fish: but the crew left her to avoid being pressed. (Newcastle Courant-Saturday 31 July 1779)

It is fascinating to recall the terror sailors had in being impressed to join Royal Navy ships and a credit to Richard Scott that he prevented his seaman from being targeted. By 1798 he was a leading Master Mariner and Shipowner and member of a significant group of shipowners and masters including John Wardle (1739-1803) also of South Shields & a member of the Law Library, founded 1788.

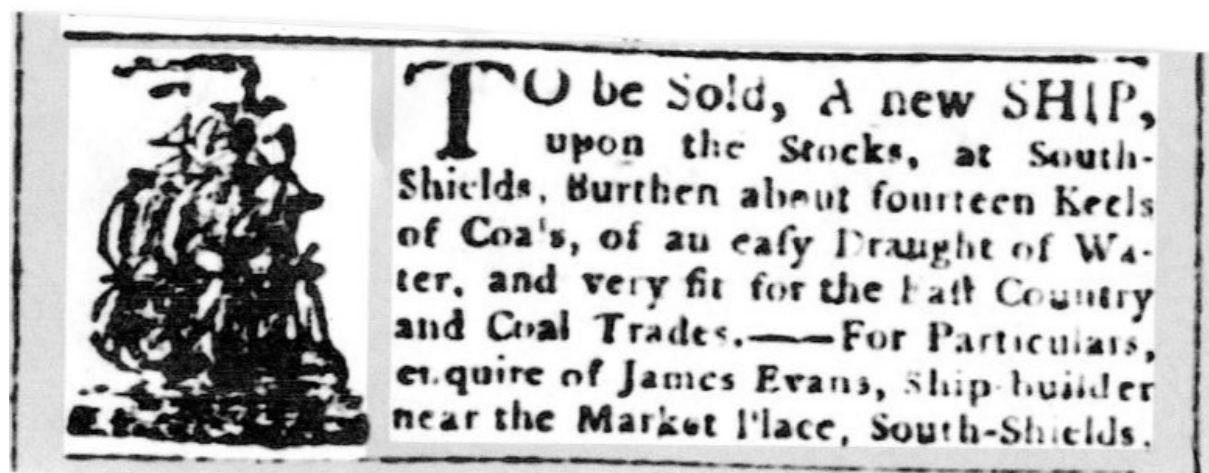
cont...

Ships

None of the ships advertised for sale built by James Evans between 1772 and 1786 are named. There were only 4 ships during this period; this matches a period of inactivity relating to the Wallis's by Amy Flagg "indeed they repaired or broke up more ships than they actually built". In the British Newspaper Archive (BNA), I have identified some of the ships:

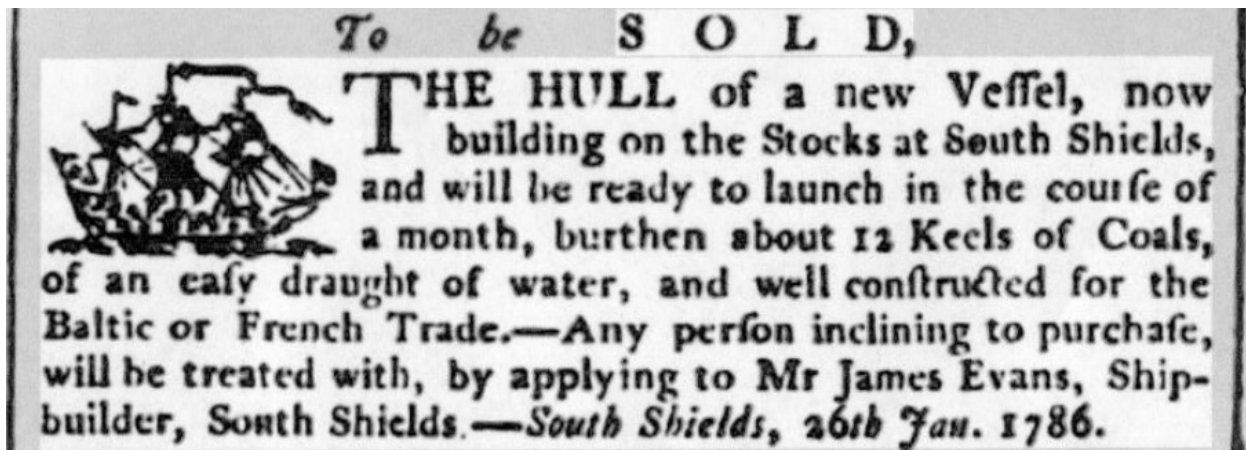


Newcastle Chronicle, 7th March 1772 (BNA)



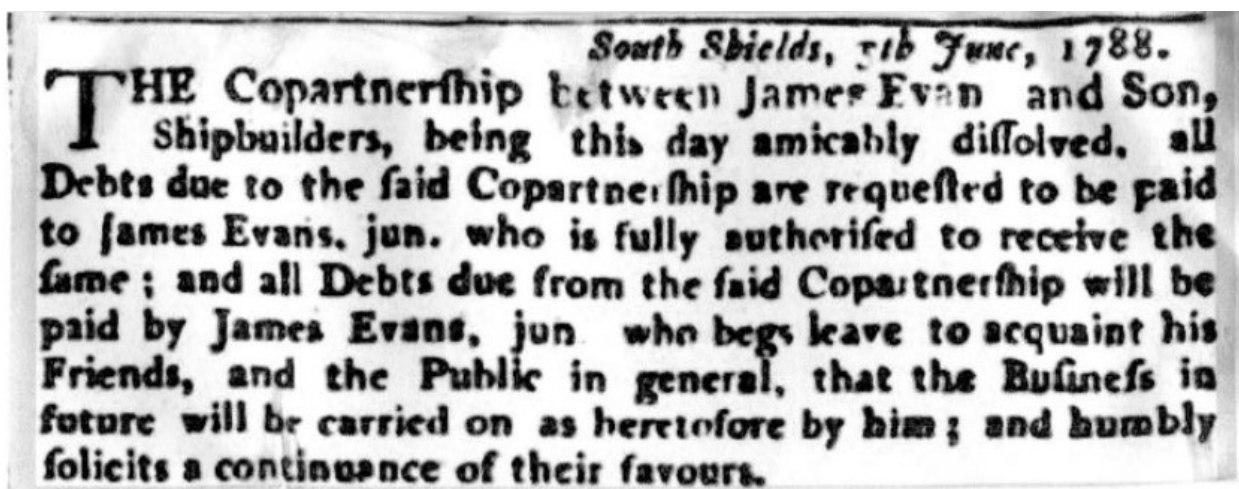
The above ship was advertised several times in the Newcastle Chronicle between the 14th October 1781 & the 21st October 1782 at which point it was presumably sold.

cont...



The above advertisement also featured more than once including in the *Newcastle Courant*, 6th May 1786 (BNA)

The Retirement of James Evans Elder



Newcastle Courant, 14th June 1788 (BNA)

Before this announcement, James Evans Jnr. (his only issue) had taken over most of the responsibility of the business. In the next instalment, I will conclude my writing of James Evans the Elder and move onto his son.

Finally, if anyone has information regarding the Evans Family and their associates, please contact our editor.

Submitted by Heather V. Thomas



Wednesday Heritage Club

First of all a report from the recent March event, which was Dr. Dan Jackson, talking about his book 'The Northumbrians'. Dan has a very engaging style and a 'down to earth' approach, and the book is very well researched and a serious study.

Well over 100 tickets were sold for the event, almost a full house, however we live in 'strange times' and the actual number attending was around 80, but people certainly enjoyed the experience.

April event as usual – 2nd Wednesday - 8th April will be a first for the Wednesday Heritage Club - a play - The Tenth Bord.

This will be a play chronicling the tragic events of 1839 – St Hilda Colliery Disaster. I attended a previous event marking the 175th anniversary, which took place in St. Hilda's Church. It was a very moving tribute and the fact it was taking place in the church had a great impact.

Last year there were a number of events marking the 180th anniversary and these included the first reading of 'The Tenth Bord' play, produced by a local amateur group. The Word is of course very close to both the Church and the Pithead. Initial sales of tickets are very encouraging, so tickets are available now from The Word @ £1.50.

May, as I am sure you will all be aware, will be the 75th anniversary of the end of The Second World War in Europe. Some years ago my wife, Hildred, along with Dave Walker delivered a number of performances based on the local war damage photographs of Amy Flagg under the title 'Humanity and Courage'.

The Family History and Heritage Librarian, Catrin Galt and myself will therefore be presenting both some of this material together with additional photographs and commentary. I hope that we can do justice to the bravery shown by the people of Shields in those dark days. Tickets will be available from 8th April.

Submitted by David Whale



Eileen: The Making of George Orwell

Venue: The Word from 2.00pm – 3.30pm on Saturday 28th March. Tickets cost £2.

Richard Blair, the adopted son of author George Orwell and patron of the Orwell Society will be joining us at The Word alongside Sylvia Topp, author of the novel 'Eileen: The Making of George Orwell'. Sylvia will be launching and discussing her book, which is the never before told story of George Orwell's first wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a woman born in South Shields who shaped, supported and even saved the life of one of the 20th century's greatest writers. The event will also include Jarrow-born Tom Kelly 'in conversation' with Richard Blair and there will be an opportunity for the audience to ask their questions. There will also be a showing of Gary Wilkinson's 'Wildflower' film, about Eileen O'Shaughnessy.

As the adopted son of George Orwell, I am honoured to be invited to be patron of this society. Since there is no blood relationship, I have followed a very different career path. My upbringing and training is in agriculture, followed by a period working for a well known tractor company. Redundancy in the mid-eighties led to a complete change, which involved the ownership of a holiday complex. Following the sale a few years ago I am now fully retired and am in a position to give more time to all things Orwell, including the Orwell Society. I hope that it will provoke, not only light-hearted and serious discussions about Orwell himself, but also about the issues he took passionate interest in'. (Robert Blair)

Sylvia Topp began writing seriously in her forties, creating an eclectic variety of articles and short stories. A compilation of her work will soon be in print. She was the long time wife and partner of Tuli Kupferberg, a Beat poet who later was a co-founder, in 1964, of the Fugs, a legendary rock and roll band. Together Sylvia and Tuli wrote and designed over thirty books and little magazines, including *As They Were*, *1001 Ways to Live Without Working*, and *Yeah* magazine. Sylvia has worked in the publishing world since college, starting as a copy editor on medical journals, then moving to freelance editing at major literary publishing houses. After that, she joined the staff at *The Soho Weekly News* and later *The Village Voice*, ending her publishing career recently, after sixteen years in the editorial department at *Vanity Fair*. She is now retired and planning a memoir of her life's adventures.

The online blog <https://garyalikivi.com> is full of interesting articles featuring different aspects of life in the north east including details of the 'Westoe' book by Dorothy Fleet.

Submitted by Gary Wilkinson



Notice Board

Our next monthly speaker meeting will take place on Monday 20th April, while our informal meeting is on Monday 6th April.

The South Tyneside Branch of the Northumberland & Durham Family History Society meet on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at St. Hilda's Church 'Visitor Centre' at 1.30pm. The next meeting is on the 18th March is entitled 'Central Gateshead Disappears' and is a presentation by John Boothroyd. The following month, on the 15th April, Anthea Lang is the speaker and the title is 'Oh I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside'.

South Tyneside Library Service offers FREE access to a wide range of websites, such as <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> for national & local newspapers, as well as <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> and <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/> for family history records. For more details contact 'The Word' at <https://theworduk.org/> or Cleadon Park Library at <https://www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/34338/Cleadon-Park-Library>

And finally, on behalf of the group, I'd like to thank Adam Bell for his very interesting and highly entertaining talk at last month's meeting. To check out *What's On* at South Shields Museum, please visit <https://southshieldsmuseum.org.uk/whats-on>

Contacts / Membership Details

If you have an article, a request for information or anything to do with South Shields' History that could be included in the newsletter, please leave details with our Editor James Mulholland at any of our meetings or email jim.mulholland@blueyonder.co.uk Membership of the group is only £5 per year and this entitles you to free entry to the group's monthly speaker meeting ('a history talk') and a copy of our monthly newsletter. We hold all of our meetings at Cleadon Park Library, The Primary Healthcare Centre, The Nook, South Shields. Parking is Free. The 'informal meeting' takes place on the 1st Monday of the month and our monthly Speaker meeting on the 3rd Monday – both between 5.15pm - 6.45pm (except for Bank Holidays or at Xmas when we have a fun quiz at the New Ship on the second Monday of the month). For more information and to keep up-to-date with group activities, please visit our website www.southshieldslhq.org.uk

Chairman: Alan Newham Library Liaison Officer: Catrin Galt Museum Liaison Officer: Adam Bell Patron: Janis Blower