

Rail-roaders got steamed up

TEESDALE HERITAGE GROUP

CHRIS Lloyd, Assistant Editor of The Northern Echo, was the speaker at our January meeting. With the title of his talk being a potty potted history of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, it was perhaps not inappropriate that Mr Lloyd should begin with a reference to Solomon de Cruz, a Frenchman who predicted that steam would one day move everything and was promptly put in a lunatic asylum. A mixture of straightforward fact, legend, surmise and what could be described as romantic fiction punctuated Mr Lloyd's account of the railway.

The importance of coal in County Durham meant that there was a necessity to find means of transporting large quantities of the product as economically as possible. To this end, the Dixon family had plans for a canal to move coal from

Cockfield Fell to the Tees and then the coast, but this never materialised and a further suggestion of a railway from Bishop Auckland to Darlington with a canal from there to Stockton also failed. Any form of transport on a large scale needed a great deal of money, as well as expertise, for it to be a success and it was Jonathan Backhouse and Edward Pease who were able to supply the means to build a railway between Stockton and Darlington. Opposition to the railway took various forms, including an attempt to overwhelm Backhouse's Darlington bank with more promissory notes than he had gold to redeem. Backhouse, through the Quaker network, was able to find the gold, but supposedly lost a wagon wheel transporting it and only just managed to reach Darlington in time. There is a story that George Stephenson, subsequently engineer of the railway, walked barefoot for part of his journey from Northumberland to Darlington to meet Edward Pease, but another version says Stephenson only removed his footwear to come into Pease's presence.

The first rail of the Stockton & Darlington railway was laid by the chairman, Thomas Meynell, but he did not make a speech. Young boys are said to have sold copies of Meynell's speech at one penny each, to a gullible Stockton populace - a blank sheet of paper. Alarm at the possible explosions which could result from the use of steam was widespread and there was talk of the trouble the railway would cause for farm animals. However, there are still structures visible which reflect the early history of the railway, but although the building of the Stockton & Darlington Railway changed the face of North East England, of the world, Mr Lloyd felt that the area had sadly forgotten this part of its heritage. Mr Eric Carter, president of Teesdale Heritage Group, thanked Mr Lloyd for his informative and entertaining talk.

Our next meeting is in Middleton-in-Teesdale village hall on Wednesday, February 12 at 7.30pm, when Mr John Wearmouth will give a talk entitled Yesteryears. Visitors are welcome (£1 incl refreshments.)

Fine fellowship

TEESDALE FELLOWSHIP

By Margaret Bayles

A GOOD company of people assembled at Middleton Methodist Chapel for the fellowship meeting held a fortnight ago, when Mrs Maria Stokeld took the chair, and introduced Mr Donald Marsdon from Cumbria, who was our speaker. He related his thoughts on St Paul's letter to the Colossians, while he was held a prisoner in Rome. Mrs Christine Marsdon was the soloist, contributing two solos, accompanied by Mrs Ruth Tallentire, who was the pianist for the evening. Mrs Pearl Tallentire and Mrs Sheila Walton provided the refreshments. Tonight (Wednesday) at 7.30pm the speaker will be Mrs Ruth Dent, and the singers Mr and Mrs John Dent, of Langleydale.

Choc heaven

PIECEBRIDGE WI

By Josie Smith

MRS Bainbridge opened the meeting on January 9, welcoming 10 members. The roads were very bad with ice, and so some of the members found it very difficult to attend. We were told that Mrs Allen and Mrs Milner were in hospital recovering from operations. We all wish them well, and hope they will be back with us very soon. We were reminded to bring back the heart research donated jewellery envelopes to the next meeting; also that the annual fee is now due. We read through the County letter. One member was going to the cookery demonstration on January 21, and we were thinking of ideas for the summer outings.

Mrs Bainbridge introduced our speakers, Mrs Harrison and her friend. They gave us a very interesting and entertaining talk on *Thorntons chocolates - The Chocolate Heaven from 1911*, when the firm first started. Now they have a very big range of sweets and chocolates in beautiful packages and boxes, also celebration offers of wines and flowers with chocolates, and also a diabetic chocolate range. They kindly gave us chocolates to try, and most of the members bought some of the tempting selection. Pat Crack organised a word game for SMM and D Mounsey won the prize for the highest score. The results of the competition for a homemade covered chocolate box were: 1, J Pounder; 2, E Brown; 3, J Smith.

The next meeting will be on February 13, and the speaker will be Mrs P Taylor on *Life in the Yemen*. The competition will be for a pot plant.

Regaled with glorious gardens of China

GAINFORD AND DISTRICT GARDENING CLUB
By Jo Bird

JENNY Gilmour is a professional landscape gardener who has travelled extensively in the far east, spending a year in China, so she was well qualified to talk about Chinese gardens at the January meeting.

Jenny explained that the Chinese symbol for a garden is a rectangle representing a courtyard, within which is a central square representing a pond of water, with lines at the top representing the home, opposite the archway entrance at the base. This is the style of many traditional gardens. Jenny showed us slides to illustrate her talk, showing that all the features on willow pattern china are characteristic features in Chinese gardens, such as the zig-zag bridge to stop evil spirits. Wealthy people were able to use large areas of the landscape for gardens, retaining natural features of rock, pine trees, and water. Ponds are often covered with lotus flowers or contain carp, and pavilions or temples were built within gardens from which the garden could be viewed, or for meditation.

Use is made of light and shaded areas, and formations of honeycomb limestone are used, usually with bonsai trees. Plants are grown in plant nurseries to be brought out when in flower, and returned when their season is over.

Plants and flowers are important in Chinese life and are the symbols for the seasons, with spring being symbolised by orchids, summer by bamboo, autumn by chrysanthemums and winter by winter jasmine.

We were reminded that many of our well-known garden plants originated in China, including the blue poppy, delphinium, buddleia, viburnum, peony, rhododendron, and many more. Hundreds were brought back in seed form by Ernest Wilson, who gave his name to them in the latin form, 'wilsonii'. The winding path of English gardens was also an influence from China.

On Tuesday (February 11) Mark Riddle will be talking to us about Darlington Floral Displays. This is very timely to pick up some tips and find inspiration for making the best of our own baskets and tubs in coming months. The meeting begins at 7.30pm at Gainford village hall, and visitors and new members will be welcome.

Gallery's good team works well together

THE CASTLE GALLERY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Chairman's Report on the past year

THE gallery has been used for exhibitions during 40 weeks of the year. Artists included several who have shown works in the gallery in earlier years, and one newcomer who intends to hold another exhibition in the coming year.

Local groups which displayed also included one using the gallery for the first time and which has booked a return visit.

Other exhibitions have included slides and prints entered for the Teesdale Calendar, and, as part of the town's Christmas Festival, Mr Parkin Raine showed a collection of photographs of Bygone Barney which was very popular.

Works by pupils of Teesdale School were also shown - a reminder to local art teachers that during weeks when

the gallery is not otherwise occupied, schools may use it free of charge.

In making arrangements for all these exhibitions the gallery committee is grateful for the work done by officers and staff of the Witham Hall itself, and the committee was very pleased to be able to help the Witham Hall Development Fund by the gallery's successful prize draw.

The gallery's committee is small but its members are all very willing and co-operate well with each other, and were sorry that Stephanie Grant had to resign this year because of her other commitments; the committee acknowledged with thanks her good work in making the gallery more widely known.

Practical improvements have been made to the gallery: The lighting of the north wall has been much improved through the generosity of Mr Parkin Raine, and Miss CM Mason has kindly given a folding table. Redecoration of the gallery will take place in the first half of

Scenes on a snowy night

ROMALDKIRK WI
By Maureen Lind

JANUARY 9 was a very slippery, cold, snowy night, resulting in a reduced attendance at our first meeting of the year. We were given a warm welcome and good wishes for the New Year by our president, Doreen Braithwaite. Ann Dant, secretary, read correspondence, including an invitation from Newbiggin WI to join them for a meal at the Three Tuns on February 10. Members were asked to consider making an animal from recycled material for the county meeting on April 8. Eggleston Show was also discussed thoroughly; we were urged to bring our ideas and choice of *A Far Country* to the next meeting. Speaker John Wearmouth gave us an excellent show of his slides of upper Teesdale, from the Radar Station on Dun Fell, travelling down the dale, showing us familiar scenes but from different view points. My favourites were the flowers and the damsel flies. Doreen thanked him for coming and sharing his time and photography skills with us.

The winners of the competition for a Teesdale landscape photograph were Maureen Lind and Rosemary Alford. The meeting ended after tea and biscuits were served by Rosie Smailes and myself.

Next meeting is on February 13, with Barbara Marr from The Butterwick Children's Hospice. A dressed peg will be the competition.

Bill's musical marvels

THE BARNARD CASTLE & DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

AN entertaining and melodious presentation opened our programme for 2003 when Bill Cummins demonstrated clockwork music and explained some of the history of the machines he talked about.

Until the middle of the 19th century, home entertainment usually meant singing and playing an instrument, often a piano, but then music boxes came into popular use. The origin of the music box was in Switzerland, developed from the repeater watch which produced a particular sound every quarter hour. This device was a useful indicator of the time in the dark before matches were invented and was sufficiently accurate for the age in which it was used. The first music boxes had a cylinder, or barrel, fitted with pins which caught on a comb and produced notes in the same manner as did a repeater watch. To prevent continuous vibration of the notes a damper was fitted under each tooth of the comb. This was commonly of brass but in very early music boxes a feather was employed. Mr Cummins said that if the damper was not working properly the machine "chirped like a chicken" and this had often led to oil being applied mistakenly, resulting in a music box flooded with oil to no purpose.

Early music boxes were hand made and the correct positioning of the pins was determined by a careful listener who adjusted them as necessary if each note was not quite correct. More accurate than later machine-made instruments, these boxes could be dated by whether they had a key on the outside. The cylinder was eventually replaced by a disc which became an item of mass production, many being made in Leipzig. Unique to music boxes is the construction of their corners, a type of dovetail joint, and many are beautiful pieces of workmanship.

A once fashionable novelty was a music box housed in a photograph album. As with many other domestic items which lost their popularity these albums - and perhaps music boxes in general - were neglected and discarded making it now difficult to find one in good condition. Music boxes were incorporated in clocks and provided a more pleasant way of attracting attention than the raucous alarm noises produced today.

Much amusement was caused by a musical match box, a modern toy made in Japan. Mr Cummins' talk brought back memories to several of his listeners, and he answered a number of questions. The chairman, Mrs Dale, expressed the thanks of the large gathering for an enjoyable afternoon.

The next meeting, on Monday, February 10, in The United Reformed Church Hall at 2pm, will be addressed by Cliff Brown and his subject will be Prospect House, Bowes and the Yorkshire Schools. Visitors are welcome (£1.50 including refreshments).

Rainforest riches

STARTFORTH WI

OUR first meeting of the New Year opened with the president, Rita Liverseed, presenting birthday posies to herself, Margaret Hall, Norma Bowe and Christine Thistlethwaite.

After the business meeting, she welcomed Dr Richard Warren, who spoke of his 25 years working to preserve a piece of the Brazilian rainforest; 96% of the rainforest is estimated to have been destroyed by loggers who decimate the timber, and by farmers and developers. Dr Warren has been studying the orchids of the rainforest, and he is shortly to publish an illustrated book documenting the species of the area. He is also conserving several hundred species in his laboratory. He is involved with the Rio Atlantic Forest Trust, which aims to protect the forest, to study the flora and fauna, and to investigate forest regeneration patterns. Rita Liverseed thanked him for his talk, which was backed up by slides demonstrating the variety of orchids and their habitats.

The competition for an ornament with a flower decoration was won by Norma Bowe; 2, Jan Craig; 3, Melise Spencer, Iris Barker, Jill Gray and Christine Thistlethwaite. The best bloom was won by Margaret Hall. Our AGM was on February 3.

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