



County Durham History & Heritage Forum



News from the Forum, Issue 7, August 2010

Welcome to issue seven of the Forum's newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading the articles and that you will join the members at some of the events listed. Please keep your news coming in. The new 'season' will soon be upon us so let's hope the summer break will have been restful and we hope to see you on 20 November for the talk and AGM, if not before. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome two new group members: Bowes Local History Group and Coxhoe Local History Group.

Discovered in the attic...



This watercolour sketch of The Vane Arms at Thorpe Thewles was discovered by the great grandson of Frank Thompson in the attic of his house in the south of England. It is one of 36 watercolours of the north of England that have not previously been published, a record of how familiar places have changed over the last century.

Frank Thompson lived in the city of Durham and travelled widely across the north of England. His watercolour sketchbook is a record of late Victorian and Edwardian England

from York northwards to Northumberland, including, amongst others, views of Richmond, Aycliffe, Darlington, the Yorkshire Dales, Whitby, Newcastle and York. Frank Thompson was a well-known watercolourist, exhibiting four times at Royal Academy exhibitions. His work is held at The Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle as well as the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts and the Royal Society of British Artists.

Thanks to Frank's great grandson, all 36 prints can now be seen on Thorpe Thewles History Group website, www.thorpe-thewles.org.uk with details of how to order high quality prints.

Each one costs £10.00 and is about 6 x 8 inches in size, printed on thick archive quality paper. Examples can also be seen at Grindon Parish Hall. They are not available anywhere else – so this is a really exclusive offer!

Mark Smith, Thorpe Thewles History Group

Bowes Local History Group – Heritage Open Day event.

On the second Saturday of September (11th) Bowes Local History Group will be putting on its usual event for Heritage Open Day, which will consist of an exhibition at the Parish Hall (9.00am to 6.00pm) focusing on Bowes' two major claims to fame - the Edwin and Emma story and the connection with Dickens through Dotheboys Hall - as well as the village's medieval and Roman past, which is new this year.

The Ballad of Edwin and Emma, by David Mallet, appeared in the mid 18th century and was based on a true-life Romeo-and-Juliet romance which took place in Bowes in 1715. Rodger Wrightson and Martha Railton were the son and daughter of rival local publicans, forbidden to meet by Rodger's parents so they conducted their affair on the moors outside the village. As a result, Rodger caught a chill, and although near death's door his parents would not allow Martha to visit until near the end, and even then they were not left alone together. When Martha heard the news of his death, she herself collapsed and died of a broken heart, and the parents relented sufficiently to allow them to be buried in the same grave, where they remain to this day.

The Dickens connection is that, having heard of the exploitative 'London school' industry around Bowes, and of one master in particular, Charles Dickens and his illustrator Phiz visited the village in 1839, lunched at The Ancient Unicorn and visited William Shaw at his academy at the west end of the village. Suffice to say that they didn't get on, and Shaw was immortalised as 'Wackford Squeers' of 'Dotheboys Hall'. Shaw's academy was only one of half a dozen such establishments in the immediate vicinity of Bowes, however, and Shaw was by no means the worst of the masters.

As well as the exhibition, guided walks around the village will take place at 11.30am and 3.30pm, covering both topics and ending up at the grave of 'Smike' in the churchyard. They last about 1½ hours.

We would be particularly interested to meet anyone with roots in and around Bowes. We have an extensive collection of local photographs with many unidentified faces which you may be able to help with, and we will also have a scanner running on the day, so that any photos you bring can be scanned into the collection without you worrying about getting the originals back!

Article by Cliff Brown, Bowes Local History Group

Local History Workshop

The Brancepeth Archives and History Group are holding a local history workshop in October to which they would like to invite members of the County Durham History & Heritage Forum. The session 'Brancepeth Parish in the 17th Century' will be based on the Brancepeth Church Seating Plan which was destroyed in the church fire. Dr Dorothy Hamilton, who will be running the workshop, made a hand copy of the plan back in the early 1990s as part of her postgraduate research on Brancepeth. The workshop will help you to understand why the Brancepeth seating plan was made and what it can tell us about life in the seventeenth century parish of Brancepeth which extended as far as Crook, Willington, Tudhoe, Brandon and Langley Moor. See the Events page for more information.

