

Cockermouth Post 2014

POST ARTICLE – JANUARY 2014

Several weeks ago Mitchell's Auction Company sold a grandfather clock that carried a brass plaque, commemorating the fact that it had been presented to the new Cockermouth Cottage Hospital by the Reverend C L Rudd in 1902. The clock was bought back by the original makers of the clock, Charles Frodsham & Co., of London, for the sum of £5,200. Richard Stenning of the company subsequently contacted the us to find out more about the history of the clock and the Rudd family.

The Rudd family owned Derwent House (the present Trout Hotel) for many years. John Rudd (1742-1800) and later his son William (1780-1841) were both attorneys in the town, and one of William's sons was the Reverend Charles Louis Rudd, born in 1839. We know from one of his descendants, Geoffrey Harris, that in 1873 the Reverend Rudd went to Hempstead by Holt, a small village in Norfolk, where a new vicarage was built and the interior of the church there furnished at his personal expense. One year later he also financed the building of an infant school in the village. The church is filled with items commemorating members of his family. Many people in the village have queried the source of the Rudd family fortune and Mr Harris has recently come across an intriguing, if rather gruesome, explanation that dates back to the days of slavery.

The Gentleman's Magazine of 1803 reports the murder of Thomas Trohear Rudd (son of Mr Rudd, Attorney of Cockermouth), and his wife Mary (daughter of Mr Henry Jackson, shipbuilder of Whitehaven) at the Skiddaw plantation in Jamaica. The couple had just enjoyed breakfast with their little boy aged 2, and Captain Read, a visitor:

"About 8 Mr Rudd left the table to go to some negroes who were at work in a wood about 100 yards from the house. He had not left the room many minutes when a shrieking was heard. Captain Read and Mrs Rudd immediately rushing out of the house, the first object they beheld was two of the negroes with billhooks in their hands, covered with blood, and running towards them ..."

Captain Read survived this murderous attack but Mrs Rudd and her husband were not so lucky. Their poor son survived, only to die on the journey home to England a few months later. The murderers were caught and executed, and a memorial placed near the scene of the murders, recording how Mr and Mrs Rudd were murdered in the prime of their lives. Presumably, a considerable inheritance would have been left to the Rudd family back in England. Thomas Trohear Rudd, uncle to the Reverend Rudd, had been christened at All Saints' Church on 22nd November 1772.

And all this information arising from the sale of a clock in Cockermouth! The clock was removed from the old Cottage Hospital, which will shortly be demolished, and we are very keen to record any memories of the hospital before they are lost forever – please get in touch!

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE FEBRUARY 2014

As well as being one hundred years since the outbreak of World War One, 2014 also marks the 70th anniversary of the DD landings and the Battle of Arnhem in World War Two, which Cumbrian servicemen and women played an important part in. Many local people lost their lives or were wounded in those events, and in the past we have touched on the lives of some of those people.

On a lighter note, 2014 also marks one hundred years since the appearance of the Brownie movement, started by Agnes Baden-Powell, sister of Lord Baden-Powell. Our picture shows Brownies in Rodham's Schoolroom, Brigham Road in 1960. We have relatively little information about the history of the Brownies, Guides and Scouting movement in Cockermouth, even though it is a movement that plenty of children in the town will have enjoyed in the past and continue to belong to. We would very much like pictures to copy and information to record on these and associated groups, so please look and see what you can find. What kind of activities did you get up to? Did you enjoy being away from home at some of the many camping activities?

Looking online for information about the Brownie movement, I was surprised to discover that Brownies were originally known as Rosebuds when the movement began in 1914, wearing blue outfits, similar to the Guide uniform. Apparently, little girls didn't much care for being known as Rosebuds and the name was changed to Brownies (with a consequent change in the colour of their uniform) in 1915. Juliana Horatia Ewing had written a book called 'The Brownies' in 1870, in which the characters Tommy and Betty learned how they could either be helpful 'Brownies' or lazy 'boggarts'. I must admit that aspiring to be a boggart has a certain attraction, but maybe that's just my awkward side! I do remember the excitement of being attached to the 'Fairies' when I started at my Brownie group in the dim and distant past, and conscientiously stitching the badge with the golden fairy logo on it onto my uniform. Maybe you can help out with the names of the other groups in Brownies – I do remember Pixies and Elves, but what were the others? Nowadays, I note that Pixies and the like have been replaced by Badgers, Foxes and other such animals. In 1987 along came Rainbows for five to seven year olds, and in 2002 a make-over for the Brownie uniform – away with the brown sack, and leather belt, and in with the modern trousers and hooded top. Let us have your stories so that we can record them and preserve those memories.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – APRIL 2014

Dialects bring a wonderful richness to our language and the Cumbrian dialect is a topic close to many local people's hearts. I recently came across a poem in dialect, written by Alexander Craig Gibson (1813-1874), all about 'Lal Dinah Grayson' of Cockermouth:

***Lal Dinah Grayson's fresh, fewsome, an' free,
Wid a lilt iv her step an' a glent iv her e'e;
She glowers ebbem at me, whatever I say
An' meastly mak's answer wid "M'appen I may;***

Thou thinks I believe the', an m'appen I may!"

***Gay often, when Dinah I mannish to meet
O'Mundays, i't market i' Cockerm'uth street
I whisper "Thou's nicer nor owte here today"
An' she cocks up her chin an' says, "M'appen I may!
There's nowte here to crack on, an' m'appen I may!"***

There are eight verses altogether, with the author building himself up to ask Dinah to marry him, but wondering when they get to the 'love, honour, OBEY' part of the wedding service how he will stop "M'appen I may' slipping through in Dinah's response!

A dip into William Rollinson's Cumbrian Dictionary reveals a treasure-trove of evocative words. Here are just a few: clarty, bait, crack, moudy(warp), kecks, fratching, dookers, lowp, ratch, twine, blether, black-kites, mizzlin', and everyone must have 'scopped a scrunt' at some point! From my own childhood in Birmingham I remember being labelled 'kak-handed' (left-handed), told to stop 'blartin' (crying), or to keep out of my mother's 'tranklements' (bits and pieces – Cumbrian 'trantelments'), and my grandfather in Staffordshire took his 'bait-box' down the mine every day. It's fascinating how these words, or adaptations of them, migrate around the country.

We had an email from Kevin Davidson in America, whose grandfather and great-grandfather were living in Cockermouth (between 1890 and 1915), and they were members of a band, almost certainly the Mechanics' Band. When he visited his grandfather as a boy, Kevin was given what he was told was a Cumbrian greeting. We have been able to work out the gist of it (to be honest and fair in your dealings with everyone until you meet up with your old friends in Cumberland again), but if anyone out there can give a precise translation, he would be very pleased to know it:

***For thee fay tak ye by the hand
Till the fay mak ye shoot
And allus alike indurs or oot
And as lang as yer jannick, ye never need dou't
Till ye meet with good friends of old Cumberland***

This came from John William Davidson (1890-1969), formerly of Cockermouth and later of Long Island, New York, as told to his son Harold Davidson. We look forward to hearing from you.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – MAY 2014

There is presently a debate about the future of All Saints' Church in Cockermouth and I've felt a growing concern that this lovely building, a key part of Cockermouth's identity and history, should even be being considered for closure. I appreciate that the maintenance of old churches, with a falling church-going population, is a major concern for those responsible for

such buildings, but All Saints' is about so much more than the building itself, or the people who may or may not use it for worship.

If you take a walk around town, or view it from afar, the spire of All Saints' Church will be visible from many locations, the Church standing serenely on top of a hill, with its delightful churchyard and grounds around it, a picture in springtime when all the daffodils are in bloom. Looking at its history, a church has stood on that site for hundreds of years, certainly from the time of Edward III in the fourteenth century and quite probably before that. The picture shows the old All Saints' Church that stood from 1711 to 1850, when it was destroyed by fire. Back in those days, before the existence of local government, the church was very much the centre of the community, concerning itself not only with maintaining the church but also with matters concerning the town itself. For example, in January 1847 there was a notice to the effect that a Public Vestry meeting would be held in All Saints' to consider the necessity of having a Local Act for Paving, Lighting, Watching, Cleansing and Improving the Town and Township of Cockermouth ('Wordsworth's Birthplace', John Bolton).

It was to All Saints' Church that William Wordsworth came as a boy (and where his father is buried). He received his early education in what was then the Old Grammar School, now the Saints' Rooms. William writes:

I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast when I was going to say the catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter. I remember also telling her on one week day that I had been at church, for our school stood in the churchyard, and we had frequent opportunities of seeing what was going on there. The occasion was, a woman doing penance in the church in a white sheet. My mother commended my having been present, expressing a hope that I should remember the circumstances for the rest of my life. "But," said I, "Mama, they did not give me a penny, as I had been told they would." "Oh," said she, recanting her praises, "if that was your motive, you were very properly disappointed."

(Wordsworth, A Life in Letters', by Juliet Barker)

Whether we need two Anglican churches in Cockermouth is another debate (Christ Church began life in 1865), but All Saints' Church is a focal point in the town, an important part of what makes Cockermouth a good place to live, and why people like to come here to visit it. Just imagine if it were abandoned; fast forward a few years to a vandalised building, looking the worse for wear, with people complaining about an eyesore and wondering why we let such a gem deteriorate in this way. There must surely be alternatives to what is being considered regarding All Saints' future. Please make your views known if you feel the same way.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE - JUNE 2014

As well as marking the outbreak of WWI, this year also commemorates the D-Day Landings of WWII. By the time you read this, ceremonies will have taken place to remember the crucial D-Day landings which began on June 6th 1944. This marked one of the greatest war-time invasions in history. Operation Overlord, as it was called, had had to be put back twenty-four

hours because of bad weather. Many soldiers were hit by gunfire as they tried to wade ashore from the landing-craft. Once onshore they had to contend with hidden mines and other explosive devices, together with very little cover for protection from gunfire. There would have been many Cumbrian soldiers amongst these troops – was a relative of yours there? We would very much like to hear about their experiences. Or maybe they were involved in the Battle of Arnhem, another crucial battle, which took place in September 1944. Please get in touch if you are able to pass on information or photographs.

About a month ago I visited a small village in eastern Germany to interview a German former prisoner-of-war, Wolfgang Koeppe, who was held at Dalston Camp, near Carlisle from 1946 until early 1949. His is quite an unusual story in that he was encouraged to attend the School of Art in Carlisle, then based in Tullie House, once his talent as an artist had been recognised by the Camp Commandant and an Education Officer in Carlisle. Interestingly, he told me that he had been captured, aged just eighteen, at the D-Day Landings. He, like some of his colleagues, was in control of a very large cannon, pulled by a team of twelve horses. He had had very little training and recalls one incident, prior to the fighting, when they were taking the cannons to be put in position, but the team of horses in front of him could not hold the weight of the cannon as it went down a steep hill and tried to negotiate a bend in the road. The horses and cannon were pushed right through a house, demolishing it and killing many of the horses. When they reached their emplacements and the landings began he remembers the intensity of the shell-fire and noise, and the terror of waiting to be killed. He survived but was taken prisoner, shocked by what he had experienced and plagued by recurrent nightmares. His eventual return to the Russian-occupied sector of East Germany was difficult for many years but he eventually was able to earn a living as an artist.

Planning for our summer exhibition, 'The Gathering Clouds of War', commemorating WWI, is well under way, but we would also like to include stories relating to the D-Day Landings and Arnhem, so please get in touch.

Gloria Edwards

AUGUST 2014 – EXHIBITION ON WORLD WAR ONE

Our exhibition on the early years of World War I, and the period just before its outbreak, has now got under way and we hope lots of people will come and visit.

We look at some of the soldiers from the town who went away with such high hopes, never to return, and we have a few first-hand accounts of the war, written from the trenches. We include the story of a soldier awarded the Distinguished Service Order by King George V, and two members of the Musgrave family. There is also an account of a Christmas truce in December 1914, when German and British soldiers exchanged cigarettes and chatted. One British soldier was even offered some Christmas pudding if he would venture into German lines to try it – since the said Christmas pudding was not immediately obvious, the German soldier was told in no uncertain terms what he might do with his pudding! We have a letter sent from a group of young men, all from Christ Church Bible Class, encouraging other young men in the town to come out and join what seemed to them like a Pals' Battalion. There were

some men who objected to the war and became conscientious objectors, including someone from Cockermouth, whom we have identified simply as 'Adam'.

Many Belgian refugees came to Cumbria, including Cockermouth, and there is an account of one of those families. The town was a flurry of activity with different groups seeking to raise funds and send essential items out to the men at the Front. Cockermouth Castle became an Auxiliary Military Hospital with twenty beds available to care for convalescent soldiers. The men came from many regions and one of the Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses had the foresight to ask the men to write or draw something in her autograph book, which also has some good photographs of the men and nurses. The new Cottage Hospital became a store for the many items that were collected and sent overseas. The new Grand Theatre offered free entry to performances to the convalescent soldiers, whilst the girls and little boys of Harford School, which moved up to St Helen's during the war years, were busy raising funds for the war effort. The Suffragist movement called off its activities in the fight for Votes for women for the duration of the war, so that they might play their part in helping the war effort. And women did play their part, stepping into all manner of work to fill the gaps left by men who had gone off to fight.

POST ARTICLE – SEPTEMBER 2014

The first of our World War One commemoration exhibitions has now been put to bed. Thank you to everyone who worked hard to put it together, and to those who visited or loaned items for display. We're now in the process of going through all the comments and questions, and if you have requested copies of photos or other information, we will get back to you.

One item that we were loaned, and able to get information and images from, was a wonderful autograph book, owned by Sister Mary Orr Edgar, who worked at Cockermouth Castle as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse, and who had the foresight to ask her charges to contribute to her autograph book, with the date and their regiment. The men had been wounded over in France and Belgium, and were sent for convalescence to Cockermouth Castle, which could look after twenty men. Since most of the signatures date from the end of 1917 to early 1919, it is probable that many of these men survived the war, but it would be interesting to know if they all survived.

In the book there was also a photograph of large numbers of convalescent soldiers at a venue in Workington (looking remarkably like the upstairs of the Carnegie Theatre), awaiting the 'Royal visit'. It would be nice to discover exactly when that was. If you happen to come across it, we would love the details – it takes a long time to go through just one month's worth of newspapers!

The first group of men arrived in March 1917 and money needed to be raised to run the convalescent hospital, which the town responded to with great enthusiasm – events included limelight lectures, and a 'musical masque' given by the staff and pupils of Harford School. The men were allowed out of the Castle between set hours, and townspeople were allowed to invite them home for tea, contrary to a misconception that this was not allowed, resulting in disgruntled townspeople sending letters of complaint to the newspaper. The men were also

offered free entry to the Cinema, and political clubs in town. People tried hard to make the men feel welcome.

I'll finish with one poignant extract from the autograph book, written by Jock Clark of the Scottish Rifles (8.12.1918):

THE WIDOW'S MITE
A rifle cracked in the trenches
Shrapnel screamed overhead
Some men of a Scottish regiment
Picked up a comrade dead
A bullet-hole in his stomach
His tunic flooded with red.

A knock rang out in a suburb
A woman answered the door
The telegram from the War Office
Fluttered down on the floor
And another widow is fighting
To keep the wolf from the door.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – DECEMBER 2014

Many people will have heard of the Christmas truce of December 1914, when soldiers all along the western front laid their weapons aside for a brief ceasefire. Soldiers from both sides played football together and swapped cigarettes in a gesture of goodwill. Despite initial wariness, in case this was a trick, men came together to shake hands and sing carols. Soldiers also took the opportunity to retrieve the bodies of comrades who had fallen in no-man's land. One man who died in hospital on Christmas Day 1914 as a result of wounds was John Conway, a former pupil of the Cockermouth Industrial School

In the West Cumberland Times of Saturday, 2nd January, 1915 there is an account of a Christmas truce that took place:

"Men from both sides mingled together, exchanged souvenirs, or cigarettes, smoked together, and even walked about with linked arms. In one place a hare was chased both by British and Germans, and the latter were fortunate enough to secure it. Saxons and British also contended against each other at football, and it is stated that the Saxons won. Some British soldiers sang hymns for the Germans, and the Germans also lifted up their voices in song for the benefit of British hearers. Photographs were taken of the foes who, for the day, at any rate, were on fraternal terms. One of the most impressive things that occurred was the burial of the dead, and a joint service, in German and English, for the gallant men on both sides who had laid down their lives for their respective countries. It was, therefore, in one part of the stricken field at least, a hallowed and a gracious time."

Every officer and man of the Army received a card of good wishes from the King and Queen, and a present from the Princess Mary. A special Order of the Day sent words of greeting from the Commander of the British Expeditionary Force. One wonders how his greetings would have gone down with the men in the trenches, where the weather was reported to have become 'deplorably wet', and it was found to be impossible to hold the whole line of the trenches due to their being waterlogged. Later in the month of January 1915 there was frost and snow, followed by a thaw, when the weather was 'wet and miserable'. It is salutary to remember the men who had to endure these conditions, as we celebrate Christmas in the comfort of our own homes with friends and family.

Gloria Edwards