



CHERRYBURN TIMES

The Journal of The Bewick Society

THE COALPORT ANIMAL SERVICE

BARRY NEWLAND



'*The Rase (sic) Horse*' dish from the Coalport *Animal Service*, c.1800-1805, private collection. Image courtesy of D.J. Houlston.

The survival of pieces from the now so-called Coalport *Animal Service* is tantalizing in that little is known about it, other than the white china or blanks were made by John Rose's Coalport Company in Shropshire circa 1800. Apart from that, the decorating establishment and artist or artists are unknown and little is known about its history until some pieces made an unexpected appearance in 1970. However, of particular interest to readers of this Journal, will be the fact that a different animal is depicted and named on each surviving piece and these animals are copied from Thomas Bewick's *History of Quadrupeds*, 4th edition, published 1800. All the wood engravings of the animals selected for portrayal were in earlier

editions, with the exception of the 'Long-Armed Ape', which was not included until the 4th edition.

There had been a long tradition of earthenware pottery-making in the Coalport area possibly dating back to Roman times and, from 1772-1775, porcelain-making at Caughley, before John Rose came on the scene. John Rose (1772-1841), a local farmer's son, reputedly served his apprenticeship at the Caughley porcelain manufactory on the south side of the River Severn. Aged 21, he left and set up in partnership in Jackfield, again on the south side of the river, before moving to the 'new town' of Coalport on the north bank in 1795. The company prospered, enabling it to purchase the Caughley works in 1799 and manu-



John Rose (1772-1841), by an unknown artist, oil on canvas, private collection. Image courtesy of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

facturing continued on both sites until Caughley was closed down in 1814, with production transferred to Coalport. The company underwent many changes of ownership during Rose's lifetime, but he retained control over production until he died in 1841. The company continued into the 20th century, when the works were closed down in 1926 and the company transferred to Stoke-on-Trent.

Coalport decorated a lot of their porcelain at the factory from the outset. An advertisement in the *Shropshire Journal*, 2nd and 9th October 1799 read: 'Workmen wanted in the gilding, enamelling and blue painting lines: twelve good hands of each work with constant employ.' However, the company also used independent decorators and it is thought that in this instance, the order for the *Animal Service* would have come from one of the many firms involved in the retailing of ceramics in London at the time. One of the best known and likely is Messrs Mortlocks of Oxford Street who sold Coalport to the nobility and public at large. Whether the order from them was in response to a commission or purely speculative is not known, neither is the decorating establishment chosen by them for finishing the service.

While the decoration is 'most unlike' the known work of Thomas Baxter's London Studio, the watercolour by his son of his father's 'Painting Room' done in 1811 and exhibited at the Royal Academy, is of great interest. Firstly, on the wall there is a notice: 'New Price List. Coalport White China.' And secondly, on the work bench, an assortment of Coalport tea wares of that period can be seen including, in the foreground, a known Horatio Nelson commemorative plate signed

by Thomas Baxter and dated 1806. Also, the painting gives a good overall impression of an independent decorating studio of the period. Wherever the service was decorated, the studio would have a small library of books for reference and to give inspiration to the decorators when required. In this instance, Thomas Bewick's *History of Quadrupeds* must have been one of the books.



'*Painting Room of Mr Baxter, No.1 Goldsmith Street, Gough Square, London*' by Thomas Baxter (1782-1821), watercolour, 1810 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The dessert service would originally have consisted of a centre dish and a selection of side dishes of various forms (shell, square and lozenge), tureens, plates and possibly a pair of ice pails. The actual extent of this particular service is not known; obviously the make-up would have been determined by customer requirements. However, as the source for decoration is Bewick's *Quadrupeds* of 1800, which depicted far more than 200 animals, there was scope for a very large service indeed and without the fear of duplication! A Colebrooke Dale (i.e. Coalport) 'old coloured Japan' decorated service was offered for sale by Christies, 4th January 1808, consisting of centre dish, 12 comports (side dishes), two sugar/cream tureens, 24 plates and two ice pails, which gives an idea of the possible composition of the *Animal Service*. And an advertisement in the *Salopian Journal*, 11th March 1801, by Thomas Brockas' Coalport China Warehouse, Shrewsbury, listed dessert services priced between 12 and 35 guineas (about £900-£2650 today if my calculation is correct).

What makes this service so special and interesting is that the animals depicted are faithfully copied from Bewick's engravings, with each animal named on the

underside of each piece. The animal images selected range from the exotic to the indigenous and domestic. For this reason, one cannot believe that they were chosen other than at random. Of the pieces seen prior to 1995 the work of two different artists has been discerned. All of the animals from Bewick's black and white wood engravings are painted on the service in coloured enamels, but in largely rather fanciful landscape settings. There was of course the need to make a composition fit a central reserve and artists' licence was used. The plates are 213mm diameter and the largest piece, the centre dish, is 329mm long. The individual shapes are typical of this early period. The central 'animal' cameos are surrounded by a wide cobalt blue band, enriched by a highly decorative and unusual gilt border. In its heyday the complete service would have been quite stunning and probably made a good topic for conversation at the dinner table. The distinctive gilt border is replicated on another service of the period, but in this instance central cameos are painted with garden flowers, a more typical Coalport subject.

At the present time, it remains a mystery as to what happened to the completed service since its creation. Whether it remained in London, found its way into the provinces or even overseas is not known. However, in 1970 several pieces were offered on behalf of Mrs. Thilen from Sweden to the local authority run Clive House Museum in Shrewsbury. Due to their importance, they were acquired with the assistance of the Museum and Galleries Commission and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. When the collection was initially put on display in the museum it generated considerable interest. The pieces purchased then comprised a centre dish, decorated with the 'Polar



Sauce tureen and cover showing the 'Stoat' and 'Ferret', from the Coalport *Animal Service*, c. 1800-1805. Image supplied by Shropshire Council, Shropshire Museums.

or Great White Bear' (*Quadrupeds* page 295), sauce tureen ('Badger', page 281, and 'Ferret' page 248), tureen cover ('Stoat', page 246 and 'Weasel', page 242) and tureen stand ('New South Wales Wolf', page 319), shell dish ('Long-Armed Ape', page 452), square dish ('Tiger', page 206), lozenge dish ('Hart-beest', page 98), and plates depicting the 'Mongooz' (sic) (page 445) and 'Genet' (page 268). The collection is now on display in the new Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery (SM&AG) which is administered by Shropshire Council. In 1971, two further plates depicting dogs were offered to the Museum, but not purchased. In 1972, these plates and another showing the 'Domestic Rabbit' were loaned to the Museum for exhibition but later returned to the lender, who it



'The Stag or Red Deer', detail of square dish from the Coalport *Animal Service*, c.1800-1805, and its corresponding engraving. Private collection. Plate image courtesy of D.J. Houlston.

is thought may have been the then Curator. However, an illustration does exist of the plate depicting the 'Domestic Rabbit' complete with its own 'incongruous' plate (page 376) and the caption accompanying it refers to 'a number of dogs' as well; Bewick illustrated 24 dogs in the 4th edition. Over and above the SM&AG collection, others have come to light in the last few years.

Firstly a plate with the 'Greyhound Fox' (page 307) sold on the internet, followed by a lozenge dish with the 'Rase (sic) Horse' (page 6), sold initially at Lyon and Turnbull's Blair Sale 14th/15th March 2012 and subsequently on the internet; a square dish with the 'Stag or Red Deer' (page 135) - one of Bewick's best known images - sold on the internet, and two further plates, 'Domestic Cat' (page 231) and 'Tow (sic) Horned Rhinoceros' (page 179) both sold by Trevanion and Dean on 10th January 2015. Geographically these later pieces came to light in London, Edinburgh and Shropshire. All of the pieces in the SM&AG are in fine condition. The 'Stag' and 'Rase Horse' dishes are in good condition; these dishes were on loan to the National Trust and exhibited at Cherryburn during 2014 and 2015. The most recent plates show varying signs of usage. The most likely explanation for the differing conditions of the pieces is that on the death of the original or of a subsequent owner, the service was split up for family division or sold and broken up; the result being that some pieces may have ended up behind glass in a display cabinet being appreciated for what they are considered now, works of art, while the more recently discovered plates continued in use intermittently. There may well be other pieces yet to reveal themselves, of course, and further information about the service may come to light which will increase our knowledge of the service's origins and history.

Thomas Bewick visited London for the first time in 1776, before the service saw the light of day. His second visit was many years afterwards in 1828. On his



The Domestic Cat' plate from the Coalport *Animal Service*, c.1800-1805, private collection. Image courtesy of D.J. Houlston.

first visit, he surely would have been aware of the ever-changing fashions in the decorative arts. In which case, during his lifetime, was he ever aware of the service? We simply do not know, but as Iain Bain tells me '*I wish I could produce evidence that Thomas Bewick had some direct connection with or knew of the production of the service.*' A wish I fully endorse! What Bewick's reaction to it would have been is another matter. Would he have taken exception to the blatant plagiarism of his work? Would he have been flattered? Perhaps, even, he would have liked to have owned it! Time may tell.

A personal note

I moved to Shropshire, a county unfamiliar to me, in 1965, to work on Telford New Town. I was at that time also unaware of the area's rich industrial history. But thanks to making the acquaintance of the late Bill Dickenson, a local dealer in ceramics, I learned much. My interest in Thomas Bewick is much more recent however, and stems from the purchase of a 'grangerised' copy of his *Memoir* from Quaritch's *Memorial Edition*, published 1887. With the *Animal Service* my two interests come together, but that said, I am an enthusiastic amateur, not an authority on Coalport or Thomas Bewick! The Ironbridge Gorge in which Coalport is situated was within the designated boundary of the proposed New Town. The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust (IGMT) was set up in 1967 for the '*preservation of historic buildings and development of museums with particular reference to the Industrial Revolution.*' The Telford Development Corporation, during its lifetime, worked alongside the IGMT in this work. The Local Authorities played their part too. In 1986 the Ironbridge Gorge (home of the world famous Ironbridge 1779, an ancient monument in the care of English Heritage) became one of the first of a group of seven UK sites awarded World Heritage Status by UNESCO. The IGMT now administers 10 museums, including the Coalport China Works Museum and cares for five Ancient Monuments. If you have not visited the area, rightfully known as 'The Birthplace of Industry', please do. There is much to see.

I would like to record my debt to the sources listed below and to acknowledge the information provided by Emma-Kate Lanyon of Shropshire Council and for the opportunity to discuss the service with her and Kate Cadman of the IGMT. Also, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Iain Bain and Geoffrey Godden (who sadly died in May this year), for responding to my letters. In conclusion, any errors are of my own making.

Sources

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‘LIKE ALL GOOD BOYS’

Book Review: *The Art of Thomas Bewick*

PETER QUINN



Donald, D, 2013, *The Art of Thomas Bewick*, Diana Donald with contributions by Paul F. Donald, Reaktion Books, London. (Illustration shows pp.122-3.)

The Art of Thomas Bewick bears the dedication on its title page ‘For Iain Bain, first among Bewick scholars.’ Modern day reappraisal of the work of Thomas Bewick began in the 1970s with the landmark work of this book’s dedicatee. We celebrated Iain Bain’s scholarship in *Cherryburn Times* Vol.6 No.4, Winter 2013-14. Now in the early years of the 21st century we enjoy a new set of books on our library shelves. Jenny Uglow’s *Nature’s Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick* (2006, London: Faber) provides a biographical starting point for many finding their way to the work of Newcastle’s foremost wood engraver. The Ikon Gallery’s *Thomas Bewick Tale-Pieces* exhibition of 2009 reminded many of the artistry of the vignettes. Nigel Tattersfield’s *Thomas Bewick: the Complete Illustrative Work*. (2011 London and New Castle, Delaware: The British Library, The Bibliographical Society, and Oak Knoll Press.) is the authoritative catalogue, a tremendous resource based upon a close examination of the available sources. Tattersfield’s pursuit of the workshop output places Bewick’s major works within the context of the day-to-day running of the engraver’s business. This world was celebrated recently in his *Thomas Bewick: Graphic Worlds* (London: British Museum Press.)

To the casual observer it might seem strange that we needed another book on Thomas Bewick. Indeed a long, elaborate and highly illustrated book extolling *Thomas Bewick the Artist* might seem at odds with

recent efforts to come to terms with *Thomas Bewick the Trade Engraver*. Professor Donald tackles the doubters head on in her Foreword:

‘The predominant interests of most Bewick specialists have been biographical, bibliographic or technical. Conversely, historians of science and of the visual arts have had little to say about Bewick’s place in the scheme of things.’ (p.9)

For instance, Bewick is not mentioned in the *Cambridge History of Science*. He is also missing from the books on the depiction of the landscape and the rural poor published since the 1980s. As long ago as 1984 Rosen and Zerner pointed to the ingrained hierarchical thinking which relegated Bewick to the margins of scholarship. Their work was for long unique in its attempt to draw attention to the significance of Bewick’s illustrations within the wider context of European Romantic culture. (Rosen C and Zerner H, 1984 *Romanticism and Realism, The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston.)

Perhaps those blind-spots can be explained, if not excused:

‘There is the immediate difficulty that his [Thomas Bewick’s] oeuvre is so strikingly sui generis – a compound of scientific observation, artistic impulses, personal memories and reflections, and the expression of moral convictions.’ (p.10)

In order to get to grips with this output the scholar

needs to be ready to tackle disparate fields. These include for instance natural theology, natural science, bird illustration, graphic art, changes to the countryside, opinions on animal cruelty. Professor Donald attempts just that in a series of well-observed, meticulously researched essays on the significance of the work of Thomas Bewick, plotting his art and his contribution to natural history in such a way that attempts to do justice to the complexities of Bewick's position, background and way of working.

The scope of the book is indicated by its chapter headings:

Introduction: The Man Behind the Book.

One: 'Truth is to bend nothing, but all to her': Bewick as a Naturalist.

Two: 'Endless Conjectures': Bewick's Tail-pieces

Three: A Mind 'impressed with the feeling of humanity': Bewick's Scenes of Animal Life

Four: 'Know Your Bewick': The Victorian Inheritance.

Professor Donald provides her own descriptive summary of her book's chapters:

'The Introduction outlines Bewick's career as a wood engraver, the intentions behind his writing of the memoir and his political and religious views, which are subsequently shown to be crucial to an understanding of his imagery. Chapter One is an analysis of Bewick's status as a naturalist, especially in the delineation of birds in their respective habitats: the various ways in which this imagery was construed and applied to different purposes by his contemporaries, and its contribution to a distinctive discourse that represented empirical field study of nature as an antidote to specious 'theory'. Chapter Two focuses on Bewick's tail-pieces or 'tale-pieces', showing both the originality of his unvarnished depiction of country life, and the unsuspected complexity of his attitude to the changes brought about by the enclosure of the commons. Chapter Three examines his depiction of the lives of domestic and captive animals. Bewick often castigates mankind for abuse of these creatures, but he also explores the latter's capacity to symbolize human traits in the form of fables – a role inflected by the anxieties of the artist's contemporaries as to the relationship between human and animal mentality. Chapter Four traces the development of Bewick's reputation in the Victorian period, and the various ways in which his work was interpreted by scientists, poets, novelists, engravers and aestheticians. Finally there are two appendices. The first is a table that offers a commentary on the representation of species in Bewick's *History of British Birds*, in the light of present day ornithological knowledge. The second is an analysis of what is known of the modus operandi in Bewick's workshop, specifically with regard to the putative role of his apprentices in the design and execution of some of the engravings.'" (Foreword p.10)

In addition *The Art of Thomas Bewick* benefits from a highly detailed Reference section (pp 271-315) showing mastery of the available source material. This reviewer for instance was recently grateful for the extensive note on the Bewicks and the coal trade (p. 271 note 11) as it encapsulates all the recent research into

the Bewick family's coal mining activities.

Professor Donald writes about Bewick after a university career: she was Head of the Department of Art History at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has a formidable reputation as a researcher and writer on prints, images of animals and the natural world. Readers may already know her *Picturing Animals in Britain, 1750-1850* (2007) or *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts* (2009).

A couple of illustrations show something of the richness of her approach. In order to introduce Bewick's motivation for writing the *Memoir* Professor Donald examines his obsessive preoccupation with 'transience and mortality.' We are led through Bewick turning over and talking to his own father's skull; Bewick walking alone in the graveyard at Tynemouth; Bewick's memorials of departed friends; and his collection of silhouette portraits, 'shade likenesses'. (p.31-33)

In Chapter Four Professor Donald examines (pp.195-200) the 'indirect channels' by which the 'images created by a Newcastle 'jobbing tradesman-engraver' entered the mainstream of Romantic literature in Europe, and helped inspire Schubert's profound musical expression of desolation and despair.' The path she takes begins with Charles Kingsley's letters to Bewick's daughters and to Thomas Dixon; Dickens, Tennyson and Clarkson Stansfield are invoked; Charlotte and Branwell Brontë's enthusiasm for Bewick vignettes leads to the German fascination with the outcast or wanderer particularly in the form of the poetry of Wilhelm Müller, the poet of the Schubert song cycle, *Die Winterreise*. Müller it appears was an enthusiast of British wood engraving, Bewick was lauded in German literary reviews, Bewick had contemplated organising a German translation of *British Birds* and his works were sold in Germany by a bookseller in Hamburg.

'Müller's rejected lover – a stranger everywhere – sets out on his winter journey into nothingness, skirting frozen rivers, losing his hat in the wind, struggling through snow in which he sees the footmarks of hunted animals. He is turned away from villages by snarling guard dogs and strays; his only company is a crow which, he imagines, is waiting to feast on his corpse. A deserted graveyard seems to invite him in, and by moonlight he fancies that spirits are leading him astray; through a signpost which 'no-one has ever returned'. Finally, on the edge of madness, he falls in with an old hurdy-gurdy player whom he encounters at the edge of the village, playing away without any audience – his little collecting plate 'remains ever empty'...' (p.198)

In Chapter Three we are offered a complex series of insights into the depiction of animals in Bewick, ranging from the earliest illustrations through to the late Fables and the old horse 'Waiting for Death'. Analysis, critical examination and close enquiry are the hallmarks of Professor Donald's approach. Frequently she confronts contradictions within Bewick's beliefs and expressed opinions. For instance in Chapter One his old vision of nature – balanced, serene and permanent – is contrasted with gathering doubts from

new geological discoveries. In Chapter Two Bewick's enthusiasm for improvement is examined in the light of his political opinions and his personal belief in the value of the bygone rural life. Chapter Four faces the complex set of contradictions which formed the Victorian response to Bewick. The building of a Bewick myth, its relationship to the regional identity of the North East, the legacy of Bewick to poets and writers throughout Europe and the popularity of wood engraving are all addressed.

Since its publication this reviewer has frequently used *The Art of Thomas Bewick* to confirm information, resolve queries and re-think well-worn themes. It is both reliable and inspiring. I recommend it to all members of the Bewick Society. In Chapter Four Professor Donald quotes Charles Kingsley's *Water*

Babies:

'and, even if you do not care about the salmon river, you ought, like all good boys, to know your Bewick.' (p195). Perhaps today we should coin a new phrase: '*Know Your Donald*'.



THE BEWICK PRIZE

2015 AND 2016



Awarded annually at the Society of Wood Engravers exhibition, the Bewick Prize recognises work following in the wood-engraving tradition of Thomas Bewick.

The 2015 Prize was awarded to Peter Brown for *Jackdaw* (95mm x 75mm, reproduced actual size, above). Working for many years as an illustrator, since 1992 Peter has illustrated 'The Feather Report', a weekly column in *The Times* about birdlife in Britain. Mainly working in wood-engraving and Japanese wood-block, he teaches classes and workshops in both media.

Peter is inspired by wildlife and the landscape, "There is always something to find remarkable and something to take away at the end of a day of walking in the countryside. The scenes encountered lodge in my memory and re-emerge in pictures and prints."

The winner of the Prize for 2016 is Ian Stephens with his print *Boundary Lane* (88mm x 57mm, reproduced actual size, below).

Following a career teaching and in commercial studios, Ian has been a freelance illustrator and graphic designer since 1990, working in a variety of media but predominantly in wood-engraving and printmaking. A member of the Society of Wood Engravers since 1984, he was the Society's Chairman from 1992-95 and is an Honorary Retired Fellow of the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers.

Ian describes his work as "...chiefly concerned with the landscape; its form, its uses and its denizens." In its intricacy, detail and quality, Ian's work is among the finest examples of contemporary wood-engraving.



DR FRANK ATKINSON CBE

Founding Chairman and President of the Bewick Society

13 APRIL 1924 – 30 DECEMBER 2014

HUGH DIXON



Frank at Beamish, c.1989.

The many tributes published after Frank Atkinson's death at the age of 90 in December 2014 concentrated understandably on his progress in the museum world, his extraordinary energy and vision and above all his leadership in the creation of the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish. Cherryburn, if mentioned at all, was noticed as a retirement tailpiece. Yet 'The Man who made Beamish' was also, in very large measure, the man who made Cherryburn. It is that aspect of his achievement, central to this tribute, which might interest members of the Bewick Society and readers of *Cherryburn Times*, because he founded both.

The happy accident which brought Frank and Joan to live in The Old Vicarage at Ovingham in 1982 had far-reaching consequences. Frank knew Thomas Bewick's illustrations with their wealth of information about country life in late Georgian Northumberland; but he was not immediately aware that his new home (actually a very old house) had so many Bewick connections. Cherryburn, although on the other side of the Tyne, was in Ovingham parish. St Mary's at Ovingham was the Bewicks' church; it was where Thomas was baptised and married, and where the whole family are buried. More significantly the vicarage was where Jane Wilson had been employed as a young housekeeper before marrying John Bewick, farmer and

pit manager of Cherryburn, and becoming Thomas's mother. Her duties, though she was still a teenager, evidently went well beyond housekeeping. The vicar, the Rev. Christopher Gregson, kept a small school in the house; and Jane was sufficiently educated to be able to help in hearing the boys' Latin exercises. Later Thomas himself was a pupil at Ovingham. While he inherited practical skills and love of the countryside from his father, it seems to be from his mother that Thomas gained a respect for books and learning. Here was a curious parallel with Frank, whose mother was a teacher while his father was the practical one, a plumber and builder, with a mining background and a fascination for mechanics. So, when the Cherryburn campaign began only two years after the Atkinsons arrived in Ovingham, Frank had a knowledge of Thomas Bewick's work and also an affinity with his background. He had, too, a range of other skills honed during a busy life and a career in museums. Cherryburn was lucky to have such a person in the right place at the crucial time.

Born near Barnsley, Frank's schooling finished just as war began. A hurried science degree at Sheffield University, with compulsory attendance at the Officers Training Corps, led not to the paratroops, as Frank had hoped, but because of poor eyesight (Frank had worn

glasses since boyhood) to 'reserved' war work researching into coking and by-products. After the war Frank was offered a scientific post with the new National Coal Board but chose instead to follow a youthful passion for collecting. In a good museum tradition, Frank's appointment as Museum Assistant at Wakefield Museum and Art Gallery followed voluntary weekend work helping with collections and exhibitions. The salary was meagre and the post seems lowly but he was one of only two professionals; the other, who was also his chief, was in charge of the art gallery on a different site. Effectively Frank was directing the museum; he soon showed how industrious, inventive and resourceful he could be. It was these qualities, combined with an ability to work effectively with chairmen and managing committees, which resulted in swift career steps. By 25 he was Director at Wakefield and three years later was appointed Director of a group of three museums in Halifax including Shibden Hall, which eventually became the West Yorkshire Folk Museum.

Although he was in Halifax for only six years his time there was significant in several ways. Travelling on a Carnegie grant in Scandinavia he realised how folk museums, already well established there, were not just popular but important in recording local customs and traditional crafts then rapidly disappearing in the machine age. He saw that visitors were interested and inspired by everyday items of the past and could take a pride in the achievements of their forbears. Leaning on a bridge handrail at Skanson, the pioneering museum at Lillehammer in Norway, in what Frank regarded as his road-to-Damascus moment, he realised that the north of England deserved such a museum; this was to become a driving ambition for the rest of his career.

Just as important was his appointment of a Museum Assistant, Joan Peirson, a farmer's daughter who had studied at Leeds College of Art. Between labelling specimens and recording judd walls and coal gins, they found time to marry and start a family. The partnership was to last over sixty years. In 1958 they moved to the north east when Frank became Director of the Bowes Museum. At his first meeting with the management committee Frank outlined his proposal to extend the appeal of the museum beyond its French and Spanish glories to an open air museum which could attract local people. To his delight the proposal was welcomed and even a site identified. So, although the eventual site was different, the idea of Beamish was already there. Despite many difficulties and obstacles – and alongside more regular achievements at the Bowes – Frank started collecting everyday objects from the past, domestic, rural and industrial. A regional working-party representing several local authorities was set up with Frank as its museum adviser. By 1966 sufficient progress had been made to establish 'Friends of the Northern Regional Open Air Museum' and four years later, now with the site secured at Beamish Hall and scattered collections needing attention, Frank was able to step aside from the Bowes to begin work as Director of Beamish Museum with three members of

staff! The success of Beamish is the stuff of museum legend. In its first year the museum attracted more than 50,000 paying visitors, and subsequently went from strength to strength. Frank realised that working exhibits – tram rides were immediately popular – encouraged reminiscence and participation. Volunteers enjoyed sharing their expertise, augmented staff in many routine maintenance and specialist works, and added worth to visits. Frank's retirement in 1987 coincided with Beamish being named Museum of the Year. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Durham University, and in 1995 he was appointed CBE in the New Year's Honours.

When Frank retired from Beamish, his staff and friends presented him with an original print from an engraving by Thomas Bewick showing an old, starved horse exposed to bad weather, and entitled '*Waiting for Death*' (see *Cherryburn Times* Vol 4 No.6 Spring 2004 front page). While Frank appreciated both the craftsmanship and the joke, the latter very soon proved unfortunate. On the day of his farewell party he received a message to see his doctor; lung cancer had been diagnosed and within a week he had a lung removed. Although he made an excellent recovery, '*Waiting for Death*' was an unfortunate reminder of a traumatic time; Frank first lent and eventually gave it to Cherryburn. Besides, it would have been hard to find anybody less likely to wait. Frank was not a waiter but a doer. Even in retirement he had many projects but for a while the greater part of his energy was directed towards Cherryburn. There was much to do.

Cherryburn had been home of the Bewicks for two centuries before being sold to Professor George Clemo early in the Second World War. Following the Professor's death the property was being offered for sale. Frank teamed up with Douglas Mennear, Tynedale Deputy Chief Planning Officer, and a keen Bewick enthusiast, to see if the place could be secured and presented as a museum shrine (as Frank defined it) to Northumberland's greatest artist. All Frank's experience and contacts ("Curators have to be careful about having private collections but I collect people - with skills.") came into use.



Cherryburn in 1984, photo from D.W.S. Gray Archive.

It was Frank who formed the Thomas Bewick Birthplace Trust – with a board of willing trustees of such distinction that there could be no doubt as to the importance of Thomas Bewick and, consequently, the significance of saving his birthplace. Frank would see problems not as hurdles but as challenges and opportunities. He loved to make progress and had the deepest suspicion of layers of authority and delays caused by intervals between meetings. He often proceeded as he thought best and took full responsibility. Fellow TBB Trustees remembered attending meetings and discovering what had been achieved rather than what needed their approval before starting. But, it seems, Frank’s reputation for getting things done, and done well, was always taken into account.



Work gets underway at Cherryburn, 1984

Frank recruited Elizabeth Anderson, the highly successful fund-raiser for Beamish, to set up the fund-raising programme. Support was soon forthcoming. Eventually over £500,000 was raised to buy the property, carry out repairs, and make the place suitable for visitors. It was Frank, too, with expert help from Iain Bain, one of the Trustees and the foremost Bewick authority, who secured grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), National Art Collections Fund (NACF) and other charitable funds to acquire two important collections – over 150 original Bewick printing blocks from his *Quadrupeds*, *British Birds* and *Aesop’s Fables*, and an outstanding collection of books relating to Bewick. These formed an impressive foundation for the Cherryburn collection. Their presence, well publicised, encouraged others to donate books and other Bewick memorabilia. Furthermore, most of the blocks were in good condition and could be used to make prints for sale.

With much to report and recognising the importance of good, regular communication Frank set up *Cherryburn Times*, under the initial editorship of David Bell, as a newsletter keeping supporters informed, encouraging further help, ensuring that all gifts were acknowledged and that progress was fully recorded.

Frank realised that the museum needed to be living. In contrast with the inevitably rather static presentation of the Birthplace, and with help from Iain Bain, Tony Tynan, of the Hancock Museum, and Chris Bacon,

Master Printer, the Press Room was established in an old barn with regular printing demonstrations. Animals were acquired to give the farmyard ‘atmosphere’ and to fill the triple-decker ‘poultigery’ (Frank invented the word) with pigs below chickens below pigeons. There were sheep in the fields and bees in the garden. The animals needing tending so Keith Benbow, as Warden, and his wife, Ann and their three children were installed in the new house. Keith was an adaptable craftsman; one minute he was learning to print, the next he was dispatched to Rye to study street-cobbling so he could supervise the re-surfacing of the farmyard.

Frank was aware of the importance of wide publicity. It probably helped that the Lord Lieutenant of the County, Viscount Ridley, a Bewick enthusiast and artist, was Chairman of the Trustees, but Frank’s greatest coup was to have Cherryburn officially opened in June 1988 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, who brought out the sun and the smiles and much admired the pigs. Her message of delight and congratulation was printed under the Royal Arms on the front of *Cherryburn Times*. Part might be carved above the entrance to Cherryburn:

‘May those who come here from our own country and from overseas find interest and enjoyment where the genius of Thomas Bewick flowered and where he made such a valuable contribution to English art.’

The following year Cherryburn received a Museum of the Year Award for the Museum achieving the most with smallest resources. But, alas, the resources were proving too small. While the fund-raising had reached its target, initiation costs had mounted and it had not been possible to establish an investment fund. Although visitor numbers were reasonable, they were not producing enough income to cover costs. Frank and Anne Beresford, the Trust Secretary, both trying to be retired, were working full-time to keep the place going. So Frank, looking for other ways of keeping Cherryburn open, managed to get Tynedale Council to turn a major loan into a gift and in 1990 negotiated a transfer to the National Trust. By then, to foster the goodwill and interest which had been generated by the Thomas Bewick Birthplace Trust, the Bewick Society was established with Frank as its first Chairman. One of its specific aims was, and remains, to support Cherryburn, and part of the agreement with the National Trust was that Bewick Society members would have free access. *Cherryburn Times* became the Bewick Society’s Newsletter.

Frank continued to steer the Bewick Society as Chairman and later as its first President. When the Society decided that a good way to spread the Bewick gospel was to make a video, it was Frank who approached his old BBC friend, Roger Burgess, who had made a film about Frank called ‘*The Man who made Beamish*’ – the title was later adopted by Frank for his autobiography (1999). Roger and Paul Paxton and their presenter John Grundy, all from the team which had produced the highly successful *Townscape* series of programmes for the BBC in the late 1980s,



Frank Atkinson and the Queen Mother at the opening of the new 'Cherryburn Museum', 25th June 1988.

regrouped to make an excellent Thomas Bewick video (now available on Youtube via the Bewick Society website www.bewicksociety.org/Downloads.html). It was typical of Frank to know the right people for a particular job.

While embracing new technologies, Frank published articles and books in the traditional way throughout his career, from a piece on 'Colour and Movement in Museum Display' for the *Museums Journal* while he was still at Wakefield, through to the rich output of his retirement. His autobiography, already mentioned, is much more than a memoir; it provides a telling account of the limits, struggles and progress of local museums over sixty years. By contrast his properly parochial *History of Ovingham* is a model of its kind; it is difficult to imagine either being surpassed.

Another significant legacy resulted from Frank's later involvements. From his retirement until 1994 Frank was a Commissioner of the Museums and Galleries Commission. For most of that time he was Chairman of its Registration Committee which developed a scheme for Registration, later called Accreditation, of museums to indicate the attainment of nationally approved standards in management, collections care, delivery of information and visitor services. Cherryburn was a Registered Museum from the start. It is less often realised that Cherryburn was the first Registered Museum owned by the National Trust which in 1990 was agonising (perhaps it is still) over whether properties could be museums or not. Cherryburn set a timely example and a fair proportion of the National Trust's houses and buildings with collections are now Accredited Museums.

Unapologetic, of course, about coming from Yorkshire, Frank actually saw the advantage of observing the region as an outsider, and having an ability to see regional qualities more clearly than if he had been local. His vision, at Beamish and no less at Cherryburn, was to give the people of the north east a pride in their background and an understanding of the significance of the region's history and achievements. In Thomas Bewick Frank found a kindred spirit, a person with an instinctive understanding of the northern landscape and sympathy with its people.

With his eyes enlarged by spectacles, ready smile, receding hair line, and hair with a mind of its own, Frank often resembled a surprised and delighted owl. Wisdom he certainly had, and quite often he engineered reasons for surprise and delight. His curatorial approach was based on an underlying, driving belief. Understanding the past was not to be limited to the study of the great and powerful or even the exceptional. Ordinary people have history too and, not surprisingly, ordinary people, given a chance, find their own history interesting, enjoyable and instructive. And an understanding of the past can bring hope for the future.



POSTSCRIPT: A PLACE IN THE SUN FOR JULIA BOYD

NIGEL TATTERSFIELD

In the last issue of the Cherryburn Times, Nigel Tattersfield dedicated an account of Julia Boyd as a valediction to the late David Gray. Having visited New Zealand in the meantime, he now adds a postscript. For the accompanying photographs, he is indebted to Chris Pearson of Parnell in Auckland.

Following the diagnosis of her illness as a tumour, not long before Christmas 1891, it must have been painfully clear to Julia Boyd that the overwhelming likelihood appeared to be that Auckland was her final destination, in this world at least.

That being the case, she decided to make the best of it. As the records reveal, she purchased a double plot for herself in the newly-established Anglican Church cemetery at Purewa, at that time on the eastern outskirts of Auckland, with instructions that she was to be buried in the middle of her double plot. It is amongst the earliest graves at Purewa, tucked deep on a warm north-facing slope, shaded by a Morton Bay figtree.



The site is marked by a tall Celtic cross, replete with panels of knotwork and Greek key-patterns. Sculpted from fossiliferous limestone, it was undoubtedly polished when first erected, but exposure to the elements over the years has rendered it rough to the touch. Bearing in mind Julia Boyd's delight in all things antiquarian, it was almost certainly cut to her design and specification.

The face of the cross faces east. At its base, now cleared from decades of leaf mould and topsoil, is the legend:

'In loving memory of Juliana, daughter of the late Edward Fenwick Boyd of Moor House in the County of Durham, born at Urpeth in the said County, February

19th 1846, died at Auckland New Zealand, January 10th 1892'.

The back of the cross faces west, but is no less elaborately carved. At its base is the inscription:

'A devoted daughter & sister lies here alone in sure hope of a joyful reunion with those she loved'.



Alone she certainly was, and far from family and home. However, nearly a century and a quarter have now lapsed and on a sun-filled, late summer's afternoon, with the melodic calls of tui and kereru carried on the breeze, this small patch of earth in faraway Purewa seems the perfect place to rest in peace.



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