

## Geography Report

Jane Harrison

In July, sixteen of the group joined Jane Harrison for a walk around Richmond to look at the town's historical geography. She focussed on how the town's site and situation had influenced its development.

We began by comparing the modern layout, shown on the display board next to Trinity Church, to John Speed's map of 1610. It was surprising how little the shape of the market place and network of surrounding roads had changed in 400 years.

The origins of Richmond go back to at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when Alan Rufus, a Breton nobleman, built his castle at "Riche Monte". It was an excellent defensive site, on a steep-sided promontory overlooking the river Swale. Richmond became the administrative centre for the "Honour of Richmond" and soon developed as a market town, receiving its first royal charter in 1155.

We headed along Castle Walk – once a fashionable Georgian promenade – and saw the remains of the defensive wall built to resist Scots raids in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Below was The Green, where once there were tanneries, corn and fulling mills and a brewery, all using the river as a source of power and water. Richmond's textile industry specialised in the manufacture of knitted woollen stockings and sailors' caps until woollen production moved to the West Riding. The fulling mills, which cleansed the wool, were gradually replaced by paper mills.

Mining and processing of minerals in Swaledale, such as lead and copper, also contribute to the town's wealth. The movement of goods and people was assisted by the network of post roads and later turnpike roads which converged on Richmond.

Returning to the market place, we considered the role of tourism in the town's development. During the Georgian period, the race course, the theatre, the assembly rooms (now the Town Hall) and military musters, all encouraged visitors to the town. Hotels, such as the King's Head, opened to cater for them. Better and wider roads were constructed to cope with carriages and sedan chairs, and the water supply was improved. New houses were built along Newbiggin and Frenchgate.

By comparison, the Victorian period was one of more limited growth. The geography of the site continued to hinder expansion to the south of the river. A second bridge across the Swale was only constructed when the railway came to Richmond in 1846 and the modern road to Catterick Garrison was only constructed in 1916.

Time precluded a look at modern Richmond in any detail and afterwards some of us headed off for well-earned refreshments in the King's Head!



Next meeting: Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September. 2pm. The Witham. Professor Martin Pratt (of Bordermap Canada) will speak on “The next Cold War? Boundaries and geopolitics in the Arctic.”