

## U3A Historic Environment Group November Report

Our November speaker was our member Bill Heyes. Exactly one year ago Bill had presented a fascinating general selection from his extensive collection of early local photographs. This month he chose to focus in on one of Barnard Castle's most celebrated early photographers, Elijah Yeoman. As always a packed room was there to hear Bill's talk which fell into two halves. For half an hour he presented an illustrated outline of Elijah's life, posing and seeking to answer a number of questions; Bill then handed out some very interesting books and boxes of Elijah's work for us to look at in groups.

Born in the village of Horsehouse in 1849, the adult Elijah is first recorded as working as a butcher by 1871. Whether this is accurate or not (Bill is not convinced) he certainly moved to Galgate in 1879 and married a Devonian lady, Honor Varder, in the following year. By 1874 he was working as a Photographer in association with his brother John, but appears to have struck out on his own by 1877 before taking over the business of Bainbridge, Photographer, on Galgate in 1879. An early photo of the premises shows evidence of many photos for sale, and Elijah spent the next decades recording the people, buildings and events of daily life in Barnard Castle. Always an innovator he adopted the 'Platinum' method of processing in the 1890s which mitigates against the usual fading of photographs, resulting in the extremely high quality of many of Elijah's prints.

This was apparent when we were passed the selection of Elijah's photographs for scrutiny. So interesting were these that we later finishing the meeting than with any talk since the group first met. A highlight for the railway enthusiasts was a beautiful original album Bill had purchased which formed a presentation volume from the North Eastern Railway company to the civil engineer Joseph Cabry upon his retirement in 1891. The early photos of railway bridges, locomotives and general scenes were of the highest quality with many of them previously unknown to our two resident 'experts'. Other groups were given boxes of views of 19<sup>th</sup> century shops and residential buildings; the sharpness of these original photographs allowed us to assimilate much greater detail and information than would have been the case if Bill had simply shown us smaller slides of each. We are grateful that he was prepared to entrust these precious objects to our care (and made sure that all traces of the coffee and tea were cleared before he handed them out).

This was another top notch talk and exhibition by Bill who stayed late to answer a host of questions. I hope he will return in future to continue our education regarding the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century development of Barnard Castle.

Tim Meacham.