

Teesdale U3A – Report of Monthly Meeting – October 2019

Local historian Chris Lloyd was the speaker at the October meeting. His topic was Lewis Carol and how the north east played an important role in defining the characters in his books, notably Alice's adventures in Wonderland. His real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.

Chris began by referring to Lewis Carol's brief visit to our area on his way back from a holiday in the Lake District, when he reported on the 'wretchedness' of Bowes and on a tedious tour round the Castle led by the resident hermit when he had to suppress his desire to laugh out loud until he had left the Castle.

Lewis Carol went to school in Richmond and later to Rugby and he was an exceptional student. He spoke with a stammer and it is possible that Dodo in Wonderland is a caricature of himself. When he was 11 years old his father became rector of Croft, a post he held until his death in 1868. He was buried in Croft churchyard. Croft was prosperous at the time since people came in large numbers to drink the sulphurous smelling spa water, believing it would improve their health.

At the time, farmers were growing enormous vegetables and rearing large cattle including the enormous bull called the Comet. In the book Alice drinks a potion and becomes thinner and thinner. There were two important families in Croft, continually feuding. Is this where the idea of Tweedledum and Tweedledee came from? There is also a cat with an enormous grin in the church just like the Cheshire Cat. In the Rectory there is backwards writing on a pane of glass and a cellar like a rabbit hole, both of which are included in Wonderland. Nearby there are sink holes called Hell's Kitchen. Could they be the inspiration for Alice's subterranean world?

In his nonsense poem 'The Jabberwocky', the Jabberwock is killed by a 'beamish boy' with a 'vorpal sword'. In real life tradition has it that the Sockburn Worm was killed by a brave knight using a large falchion that is now in Durham Cathedral and used on ceremonial occasions, including a presentation to the Bishop of Durham. In this poem we are also introduced to the wonderful words burbling, gallumping and chortling.

This was a fascinating and entertaining talk and the above is only a selection of the north eastern references. The presentation was full of facts and nonsense that reminded us of the rich cultural heritage in our area. The speaker clearly loved his subject.

The vote of thanks was given by Tim Meacham.

The next meeting is on Thursday 28th November when Dr Michael Leach, wildlife photographer and author is speaking on 'What a funny way to make a living'.

For more information about U3A contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304.

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