

Grahame Stables – Secret Barnard Castle

The A66 has been an important trans Pennine route since ancient times and there is a wealth of history associated with it. Andrew Grahame Stables who was born and brought up in Barnard Castle was the speaker at the second u3a face to face meeting and related some of the stories along the route.

In 1934 William Joyce, a prominent fascist and Nazi propagandist, visited Barnard Castle and spoke to about 60 people in the Witham Hall, attended by 2 blackshirts. He was also known as Lord Haw-Haw and was the last person in England to be hanged for treason.

The Iron Age fortifications at Stanwick were the powerhouse of the Brigantes, the most important tribe in pre-Roman Northern Britain. The site is about 4 miles long and covers an area of 776 acres. One of the reasons the Romans moved so quickly to the North of England and beyond could have been to overcome the powerful influence of the Brigantes. In the 15th century, one of the most important horse racing tracks in England was on Gatherley Moor near Melsonby. Although there is no evidence of the track today, there are still large racing stables there today.

Andrew showed some lovely old photographs in years gone by of a very quiet A66 at Stainmore, showing Rey Cross, the old boundary stone which was moved across the road during the road widening programme.

The old Roman Road crosses the Tees in Barnard Castle upstream from the Castle, although no conclusive evidence has been found of a bridge or ford. Andrew suggested that the Romans would have had fortifications nearby to protect the crossing but this has not yet been found either. Perhaps it lies under the castle?

At the time of the Napoleonic Wars a volunteer force called the Teesdale Legion was formed and Andrew showed a fine photograph of the troop in their uniforms outside the King's Head Hotel. In 1804, Mr Prudah from the Deepdale Mill recited, and possibly wrote, a poem 'Gathering of the Teesdale Legion'. The Teesdale Legion became part of the Durham Light Infantry in 1809. The 'colonel brave' referred to in the poem was JBS Morrit after whom the Morrit Arms is named. Andrew finished his talk by reciting this poem, perhaps the first recitation since 1804. Andrew's book 'Secret Barnard Castle' has recently been published by Amberley.

The vote of thanks was given by Tim Meacham.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 26th August when David Bell will be speaking on 'The Plague Doctor'.

For more information about u3a, visit the website www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk

Ian Reid