

## Teesdale u3a Monthly Meeting – 28 October 2021

You did not need to be a cricket fan to appreciate Stephen Brenkley's talk to Teesdale u3a at their October meeting. Stephen was educated in Barnard Castle and has recently retired following a very successful career in journalism as the cricket correspondent for the Independent. He decided to immerse himself in the history of Barnard Castle Cricket Club and after 4 years research he has published a book entitled 'Small Town, Big Dreams: The Life and Times of Barnard Castle Cricket Club'. The book is not just about cricket but has evolved into a social history of the town.

Stephen began as a reporter for the Evening Dispatch (pink 'un) when he was 14. In those days this necessitated standing outside a telephone box waiting for it to become vacant, in order to dictate a match report over the phone. Often, the timescale was so short that Stephen hadn't actually watched much of the game.

The first local cricket match report was in 1840 when Barnard Castle lost to a Durham side and then claimed that Durham had marked the pitch 2 yards short. The behaviour of players then was not always gentlemanly and in 1849 when 4 Barney players were run out, the D and S Times subsequently reported its dismay at the coarse and offensive language used against the umpire. Perhaps things have not changed so much.

Over the years, many of the leading players for the club were also prominent men in the town. Many believed in the importance of education not only in schools but also for lifelong learning. Such men included George Barker who is credited with establishing the annual meet in the early days of cycling. It was billed as the 'premier cyclists' meet of the world'. He also managed the workhouse and was forthright in his efforts generally to improve the lot of the poor in the town. There were many other cricketers who helped put the town on the map as well as making the cricket club into the force it is today.

Stephen couldn't finish without making reference to a recent visitor to the town, a Mr Cummins, whose grandfather lived in Thorngate House and established a cricket record himself whilst at school.

The vote of thanks was given by Nicky Grace. The next monthly meeting will be held on Thursday 25th November when Gemma Lewis, Curator of Durham Castle, will be speaking about the Museum of Archaeology.

For more information about u3a, visit the website [www.teesdaleu3a.co.uk](http://www.teesdaleu3a.co.uk)

Ian Reid