

Teesdale u3a

A full house of almost 140 members attended the November meeting of Teesdale u3a, to hear Connor Emerson, Engagement Development Officer at The Beamish Museum, speak about "Remaking Beamish". The museum aims to tell the story of everyday life in the North East of England. There are 3 guiding principles: putting people first, genuine community engagement, and self reliance by encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit.

"Remaking Beamish" is the biggest development in Beamish's history. The project is bringing a new era to the museum in the form of a 1950s town and farm, ensuring that there is at least one ongoing project that is "in living memory".

Existing buildings from throughout the region are being used to create the town on a site known as Spain's Fields, where the local farm has been carefully recreated.

The 1950s town includes a variety of "exhibits". There is a hairdressers from Bow Street, Middlesbrough which was originally a toy shop and where you can still call in and have a 1950s hair style. Number 2 Front Street was the house originally occupied by the artist Norman Cornish in Spennymoor. Walter Wilson's adverts showing old money feature here.

There is also John's Café from Wyngate, Middleton's Fish and Chip shop from Middleton St George. Several properties from the Red House Estate in Sunderland have been relocated, including a semi detached council house and a police house. There is a bowling pavilion from Billingham, an aged miner's house from Marsden, South Shields, a welfare hall from Coundon, Romer Parish's toy shop from Middlesbrough, a TV repair and record shop with listening booth, the The Grand Cinema from Ryhope, and a playground.

An enormous amount of research has been undertaken in order to present and describe these exhibits. This includes inviting the local community to contribute to the stories, provide ephemera and to act as volunteers. In addition, an examination of local newspaper reports and classified adverts has provided lots of relevant information.

This was a fascinating and informative presentation from Connor who is obviously very committed to bringing alive the area's history. It was clear that the audience was engaged as many have lived though the 1950s and are familiar with the places identified. There is no meeting in December and the next meeting will be held on Thursday 23rd January 2025, when David Phillips will be speaking on "Paintings that Pose Questions - a Personal Choice".

Ian Reid

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