

NORTHUMBRIAN CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

President: Prof. Heather Cordell www.northumbrian-cambridge.co.uk Hon. Secretary: Em.Prof. Gilbert Cockton

'And Now For Something Completely Different' :



AGM & annual lecture

**The Literary and Philosophical Society,
Westgate Road, Newcastle
Wednesday, 1 October 2025**

The Northumbrian Cambridge Association's Annual General Meeting will begin at 6.00, and will be followed by a buffet and refreshments. The Annual Lecture, which will be given by Bill Griffiths FSA, Head of Programmes and Collections, North East Museums, will begin at 7.30.

Bill's lecture is entitled, *"And now for something completely different: marking 1900 years of Hadrian's Wall"*. In it, he will explore the organisation, contents, and legacy of the wide-ranging festival that was



Hadrian's Wall : looking towards Peel Crags

organised in 2022 to mark the 1900th anniversary of the foundation of Hadrian's Wall. This looked not only at its Roman heritage, but the meaning of the wall to the communities that lived along its line.

Bill began his career as a field archaeologist and has excavated at several sites along Hadrian's Wall. He was closely involved in the development of Segedunum Museum, becoming its first curator. He then moved into strategic management roles in museums, including leading regional museum development and cultural learning programmes.

Bill retains a keen interest in Roman Military Archaeology and has been involved with many sizable engagement programmes on Hadrian's Wall, including chairing both the 2017 Hadrian's Cavalry project, and the 2022 1900th anniversary festival for the Wall. He is a Vice Chair of the Hadrian's Wall Management Board.

The closing date for bookings is Monday 15 September 2025.

Summer Barbecue

Ovingham

Saturday 30 August 2025

NCA President Heather Cordell is once again welcoming members to her home for the third NCA summer barbecue. Further details are available online.

Christmas lunch

County Hotel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Friday 5 December 2025

We have booked the County Hotel once again. Further details and a booking form will be circulated in due course.

Future events

We haven't organised an autumn concert this year as we have been unable to identify a suitable performance. It may be more appropriate in future years to adopt a more informal, ad hoc approach. Your thoughts on this, and on any other possible future activities or events, would be welcome.

New Chancellor

Chris Smith, the outgoing Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, becomes the 109th Chancellor and will hold the office for ten years. Lord Smith is a former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and later Chairman of the Environment Agency.



Past events

Annual dinner: Blackfriars Restaurant



Blackfriars, Newcastle's oldest eating place

We held our 95th anniversary dinner on 27 March in the atmospheric setting of the banqueting hall at Blackfriars, a former Dominican monastery. The menu was excellent and a good time was had by all.





Past events

Summer Walk 16 June 2022

On the 16th June, for our Summer Walk, eight members, led by Hilary Dunnighan, walked 6km in the beautiful countryside around the historic village of Bowes with extensive scenic views across Scargill Low Moor with Stang Forest and Mickle Fell (the highest point in County Durham) in the distance. Sightings of curlews, lapwings and hares was a bonus!

However, before we started walking, we made a short diversion to see what was the village school (now a private house) known as Shaw's Academy – depicted as Dotheboys Hall, with its headmaster Wackford Squeers, in Dickens' *"Nicholas Nickleby"*.

Afterwards we enjoyed a very enjoyable late lunch at Café Bowes in the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle.



Visit to Ad Gefrin 5 July 2025

Ad Gefrin. Northumberland's newest heritage attraction, offers two forms of gold - Anglo Saxon treasures and malt whisky. We began our visit with a guided tour of the distillery. After ascending the spiral staircase in the circular entrance hall, which has the feel of a giant whisky barrel, we were given a detailed tour covering all the distillery's processes and production areas.

We began with barley, our guide showing us the difference between normal barley and malted barley. He explained the mashing, fermentation, and distillation processes and we marvelled at the big mash tuns, the Douglas fir washbacks, and the glinting copper stills, where the fermented barley mixture is distilled into a colourless spirit at about 60% alcohol by volume, ready for maturation.

We then went downstairs, where the distilled spirit is put into barrels and stored for maturation, before moving into the bonded warehouse where casks, which are imported from America, are piled high. The spirit has to be matured for at least 3 years to legally be called whisky. As Ad Gefrin first started distilling in December 2022, it is not yet able to sell its own single malt whisky.

Finally, we went to the tasting room, where a whisky expert guided us through a tasting of the product against the backdrop of a digital wall display depicting Northumberland's landscape through the seasons

After lunch in the Bēodern bistro, members visited the Anglo Saxon great hall and museum display, then dispersed, some to visit some of the other heritage sites in the area, including the site of the original excavations at Yeavering.

Return to Cambridge

NCA member Malcolm Pearce writes:

Our visits are infrequent so why were we in Cambridge in June? Firstly, there was the biennial Buckingham Society luncheon for legatees of Magdalene College. A time for meeting others with fine food and wine in Hall.

Secondly, the Scott Polar Research Institute and the British Antarctic Survey offered advice for a trip south in 2026.

Thirdly, we had returned for Magdalene's May Ball, the only all white-tie affair in Cambridge this year. What better way to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary? The cold winds of economic reality cancelled the May Balls at Clare, Robinson and Downing. In addition, several alternative 'June Events', at Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex as well as Fitzwilliam's 'Garden Party,' were also sacrificed.

Magdalene was high in price but outstanding in value. We began with champagne and oysters in the Master's Garden. A string ensemble and a soprano serenaded us before we enjoyed a five-course meal in an open marquee. After dinner the entertainments began as did the flow of more food and drinks as we eased our way into the later evening. Luckily, we had an exclusive retreat, the Fellowship's Senior Common Room, with its own supplies of cheeses, sweetmeats, ports and whiskies. We enjoyed enviable views into both first and second courts. Later forays around the grounds as well as candlelit punt rides along the river helped to pass the time. Before long we were well beyond midnight. As the tribute acts and traditional ceilidh energetically took us into the quickly lightening hours of early morning the façade



of the Pepys' library was fully revealed.

At 05.00 early breakfasts and reviving coffees were served while softer music continued all around. By 06.00 those left, most as it turned out, were prepared for the traditional survivors' photograph. Taken from on high by the clock tower, the Pepys' Library provided the perfect backdrop. Just before 07.00 we were shepherded off college premises, the short distance to Magdalene Bridge. 'Bridge', 'water', and 'May Ball' mean only one thing – students diving into the river. There was slightly more decorum than usual and 'skinny dipping' was less in evidence but certainly evident.

Other early-morning river-users including an all-ladies eight, were brought to a stand-still. Some good-natured words were traded though one oarswoman was on safer ground than the swimmers so to speak. When informed that she needed 'to enjoy herself more' her reply was: 'I was at the Magdalene May Ball last night too and I still have the time and energy to be rowing at first light unlike some people'. Proof positive that Cambridge produces the most rounded of people or to misquote Doctor Johnson, "one who is tired of Magdalene College, Cambridge *must surely be very tired of life*"

