Around about Rothbury
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This short booklet is intended as a taster, pointing to a few places near Rothbury that may be of interest. And for the delectation and delight of those visiting or, for that matter, live here.

For more detailed information regarding any of these places I would recommend our old friends wikipedia, google or geograph
1. Anton's Letch

To the west of Rothbury lies Anton's Letch; a small stream trickling down from the moors, across West Hillside Road and down to the Coquet.

Close to the stream, along a pleasant wooded lane, are a number of modern houses which include 'Anton' in their name; Anton's Leap, Anton's Dell etc.

So who was Anton?

The story is that Anton was an itinerant priest and tax collector, around 1600, who had been trying to extract what he considered his due from local farmers: in particular a Farmer Green, but with little success.

Now Farmer Green was a canny man who always kept an eye out for undesirables, and to his mind a tax collector was the most undesirable of all. On this fateful day he spied Anton from afar and promptly did a runner (so to speak).

Anton was not best pleased and decided to extort his due in kind. He rode around the farm, trampling down the cabbage patch, pulling down fences and finally riding through the midden and away.

After suffering these acts of vandalism Farmer Green took umbrage and gave chase. Over the hill he rode from Thropton along the old road, following in the tracks of Anton. As they approached the burn Anton who was by now in some, justified, fear of his life leapt over, was thrown from his horse and was clubbed to death. Hence the name: Anton's Leap!

Farmer Green was promptly excommunicated by the church but never brought to trial. On his death he was buried in unhallowed ground on his farm at Thropton.

In 1943 when houses were being built an old headstone tucked away under an apple tree was incorporated into the wall of No. 1 The Meadows where it remains to this day, hidden behind a few bushes at the front of the house..

The inscription is rather worn by time but reads;
"John Green of Thropton died April 11 1731 aged 92 years. 
Roger son of John Green of Thropton died Nov. 30 1765."

The story appears to be true although the dates are anomalous. John Green would have been born in 1639, some 39 years after Anton was supposed to have lived and if we assume he was about 20 when the deed was done, the discrepancy grows to about 59. So maybe the miscreant was his father, but if so, why was John Green buried in unhallowed ground and where was his father buried? Will we ever know the full story?

A footnote: On numerous occasions many claim to have seen the ghost of John Green walking along the main street of Thropton and always on nights of special joy and celebration. Sceptics may comment on this but perhaps he continues to celebrate the demise of a tax collector?

Just a few yards down the lane towards Rothbury lies the disused Cove Quarry. For many years the blacksmiths shop at the entrance to the quarry was the abode of a drover named Kayfer. A friendly and popular chap he died in 1950 and the whole village turned out for his funeral. It is said that the procession of mourners was still crossing Rothbury Bridge when the coffin reached the cemetery.

His real name was Bill Wilson but once when he was asked by a local school teacher what "K" stood for, he replied "K for sugar" and was known by that name for the rest of his life.

The house next door is called "Kayfer": a nice touch!

The stone hut had an interesting life: from dynamite storage to blacksmiths to Kayfer's abode and finally in the late 1950s it was used as a refuge for itinerant climbers.
There is a nebulous link here to Wholehope and Old Rookland once the chosen venues of Youth Hostellers, walkers and skiers in the 50's.

Look at the signs on the door. Not too easy to see in this picture but the top sign reads "Rookland Private" and it is known that Old Rookland was once used by a breakaway group of hostellers from Wholehope.

Is there a link?

I am indebted to Trevor Hipkin for much of the information on Youth Hostelling in this area. If anyone can provide additional information or can add to this or the story of Wholehope it would be greatly appreciated.

2. Potts Chair

A little further west past Anton's Letch, along the country lane and just inside West Hills Farm cross the field on the left to Potts Chair.

Local lore suggests that the carved stones might have belonged to a Saxon King and Queen but unfortunately they have been dated at around the 17th century and Dippie Dixon quotes it as being the work of a man named Potts.

Whatever the truth, it is a pleasant place with two "thrones"; King and Queen! A peaceful spot, and it does not take much imagination to imagine ancient warriors surveying their kingdom.

Today the view from the King's throne is somewhat spoilt by the massive sycamore tree directly in front. But the view past it to Simonside, the Sacred Mountain, is still magnificent.
3. Face in the Rock

A little further on and just before the camp at West Hills is another local oddity: a face carved in a stone on the hillside. Although everyone knows of it and its location, very little else is known. Who carved it and when? And why? Any ideas! Cup and Ring Marks again? Effigy of the King? After all it is only a hundred yards or so from the throne. Or just a carving to while away an idle afternoon!

It is best seen in the evening when the sun is low and the shadows pick out the features.

4. Rothbury Stone Circle

If you enjoyed these take a stroll along Hillside West towards Potts Chair and the Face in the Rock. Before you reach these take a left turn towards Pondicherry.

And just round the corner is a new stone circle on the right.

Well it wasn't there last year!

5. Lordenshawes

Access is from the B6342 road from Rothbury in the direction of Hexham and then along a track towards Simonside. You will find a car park on the right with a notice board and signs pointing the way. However a more interesting walk from the centre of the village, taking in Whitton Tower and Sharpe's Folly (discussed elsewhere) may be more rewarding.
Lordenshaws is supposed to be a corruption of 'Lower Dean Shaw' and Chambers dictionary tells us that a 'dean' is a small valley whilst a 'shaw' is a small wood. Today there are few woods or forests on these hills, but perhaps there were in the past.

This iron age camp stands some 879 feet above sea level and whilst its three circular ramparts are not particularly well preserved the fort itself is larger than usual. At nearby Garleigh hill are two watch towers that have been associated with the camp, and three more on the higher points of Simonside.

The remains of the old deer park walls can be found nearby which probably accounts for the poor state of the iron age fortifications when Robert Fitz Rogers built the deer park in the thirteenth century.

The area is alive with prehistory; dotted around are the remains of burial mounds; most of which have been excavated many years ago.

Just to the west of the camp can be found a large rock with cup and ring marks. Known generally as rock art these markings are a very important and mysterious part of our heritage. Although similar marks have been found all over Northumberland the meaning and purpose are still very much a mystery. Today we know little about rock art or the people who created it.

Markings usually consist of concentric circles, small hollows and horseshoe shaped grooves of great antiquity. The general opinion being that they are Neolithic, dating from somewhere between 4,000 and 2,000 BC.

Over the past few years there has been a concerted effort to survey and record rock art in Northumberland and Durham together with an overview of the area in which it is found. The results were published in a web site and database for further detailed analysis.

And for interested scholars Stan Beckinsall who is considered to be the foremost authority has published a number of books on the subject.

A visit to Lordenshaws is a must. It is one of the
most important archaeological sites in the Northumberland National Park.

Similar markings have been discovered in other areas of Britain and there are even claims of cup and ring marks as far away as Australia. Were they fertility symbols or the iron age equivalent of Crop Circles?

For more detailed information access web sites:

www.dur.ac.uk/prehistoric.art  www.durham.gov.uk
www.northumberland.gov.uk  www.english-heritage.org.uk

6. Carriageway

To reach the carriageway just follow the narrow path adjacent to the COOP in the centre of Rothbury. Up towards Hillside, and then take the footpath to Cartington up past Blaeberry Hill to the Carriageway.

The first part of the pathway is known at 'The Nick', 'The Narrow Nick', and occasionally 'Fat Man's Squeeze'. It leads to St Helen's Well and the Pilgrim's way' following a track to Holy Island. However St Helen's Well is no longer marked on the map but enclosed in a metal shed it lies on Chapel Hill and is the spring water that still supplies South Cartington.

This first part of the walk is the most strenuous, but the view from the top is well worth the struggle. From there on it is all down hill, in a manner of speaking.

Just as you climb over the stile there is a largish rusty container with cables running up the hill towards the mast at the top. Debris left after completing its useful life feeding supplying TV to the village! Wonder if the same fate will fall on the multitude of wind farms dotted around the countryside when they are finally discarded.

The Carriageway is a five mile circular walk with fabulous views. A stony track constructed as part of the Armstrong Estate, leads from Cragside through a wooded
hightop to the moors beyond. The track skirts the top of the hills and drops gently down to Primrose Cottage and thence to Debdon where it re-enters Cragside.

Other routes take you down to Thropton or past Westhills to Hillside East. Or Pennystane quarry, where "pennystanes", sometimes known as quoits were once trimmed.

For now follow the Carriageway and enjoy the walk.

Views from the top include Simonside to the south, Caistron Bird Sanctuary to the west, and Cheviot. Threading its way along the valley is the River Coquet. Cartington Castle can be seen over the trees, and a little further away you can see Biddlestone Quarry whose unique red stones grace Pall Mall in London.

Along the route are cairns and standing stones, traces of forts and Old Rothbury just below the summit. For good measure there are the remains of a private tennis court on the lower track and just past Gimmerknowe is the hidden lake.

Just to the north of the Carriageway is Target Hill, used prior to and during both world wars. There is little trace apart from the remains of the old target winding gear. Operators were protected from stray ammunition by two inch thick iron plates, still in place and knee deep in water.

The moors themselves show the scars of trenches used for training, and holes where bombs fell during the war years. If you look towards Simonside you might also make out the pillboxes, also remnants of the war and classified as listed buildings.

In the old tennis court on the lower track you can find a circular stone. It is thought to have formed part of the Newcastle Magistrates Court, Police Station, and Fire Station which was demolished in 1933 and brought to Rothbury by a Mr. Newbiggin. The stone bears the remains of a female head and shoulders and could pass for a Queen's Head. The face has been removed but the shoulders and necklace remain. There were supposed to be four: the other three grace the garden at Hillside West
On top of a large boulder is inscribed the words:

"I.POW SGT MARCHETTI"

Along with the plethora of pill boxes strewn around the valley this is yet another reminder of the war years and when Rothbury boasted a Prisoner of War Camp. From all accounts they seemed to enjoy it and some relocated after the war

Continue the walk to Primrose Cottage, towards Cragside and the Alnwick road before returning to Rothbury.

7. Thrum Mill

A mile east of Rothbury via the beautiful riverside path known as "Lover's Walk", and along the banks of the River Coquet stands the Thrum Mill: sometimes known as Rothbury East Mill.

Just past a few sandstone houses, the mill is on the right. A Grade II listed building.

After many years standing derelict and boarded up it was sold and converted into a private house. In fact you may even have seen the restoration program on TV. A grand job and one to be proud of, with the wheel once more operational!

The 10 ft external wheel was originally used to drive the mill stones which are still in place together with some of the original gearing. A few minor items were transferred to Heatherslaw Mill (the last example of a working mill in Northumberland) during the 1970's.
During the 18th century the bed of the river was lowered to facilitate the passage of salmon upstream. Over the years the river took its toll and the wheel largely disappeared. Only the shaft remained: askew and looking a little sorry for itself.

The name "Thrum" most probably derives from the sound of rushing water as it pours through the narrow rocky channel.

Although the dictionary tells us that the 'thrum' is the loose end of a weaver's thread, the former derivation is most probably correct as the sound of the waters certainly suggests a 'thrumming' or 'drumming' sound, and the mill itself was formerly used for grinding corn.

The name was first mentioned in the 17th century when the parish register indicated the burial of

'Ann, wife of Thos. Dixon, Thrum Mill 10th March 1693'.

The Thrum is celebrated in Wilson's 'Tales of the Borders' being the scene of Willie Faa's exploit when the gypsy king leaps across the Thrum with the heir of Clennel Castle in 'The Faa's Revenge'.

The channel is only a few feet across and it is not unknown for the brave or foolhardy to attempt to emulate Willie Faa's exploit.

A few iron studs on either side of the channel are all that remains of a former bridge.

In summer it is not uncommon to see the young and hardy leaping into the current from nearby rocks or to ride the waves through the narrow channel. Many are with families who visit every year as part of reliving their own youth. Look at the names carved on the rocks spanning many years. You might recognise a few.

8. Longhorsely Old Church.

Longhorsely is a small village on the A679 halfway between Rothbury and Morpeth: one that you might miss if you blink as you pass. A pub, a bend, crossroads, a green,
and you are through and well on the way to Coquetdale. In the last few years Longhorsely has expanded with many new houses just off the main road. There is a good pub. a pele tower, a couple of churches, a village green and a football pitch, whilst for those with an inquisitive bent there was a farm where llamas, wallabies, ostriches, parrots and even a camel sometimes strut their stuff. All these could be seen from the road on a good day. And of course you know that Bero, the self raising flour was a product of local grocer Thomas Bell. So Longhorsely is an interesting place with an interesting history.

But I digress: What about Longhorsely's old church standing alone in a field well away from the village? Access to the church is via a pathway across the fields just opposite a newish development of houses in, would you believe? "Church View" and just behind the bus stop. Or for that matter a hundred yards further on towards Morpeth and through a gate.

Built in 1783 on the site of a previous Norman church it boasts a battlemented bell turret at the west end, and a battlemented chimney on the east. The chancelled arch is of an odd ogee shape and has panelled sides. It is claimed that the altar table and rails were made from an oak tree found in a peat bog at Linden East Farm in the early 19th century. Behind the altar is an unusual window with transparencies of bible scenes in brown and yellow against a blue background.

An inscription states that it

"was designed and executed in diaphanie by the late Sarah Elizabeth Ames of Linden in this parish who died on the 29th of February 1868".

This rather inaccurate (today) description comes from "Northumberland, England's Farthest North" Special Coronation Edition 1953: just over 50 years ago and certainly within living memory. And whilst there has been a church here since Norman times; probably even before that, today only the remains of a few walls and inscriptions are to be found.
So what happened?

Well, the church in one or another of its resurrections has had a chequered history: The first building was described as having a low Norman arch with marble pillars and a bell that was installed in 1725. It was later destroyed by William Wallace during one of his cross border raids in 1293 and it is uncertain as to what happened in the following years but it was certainly rebuilt in 1783 and dedicated to Saint Helen.

In 1798 the chancel was built by Mr Wallis Ogle of Causey Park who also offered a vestry, but this latter offering was declined. The altar table and rails of black oak were added in 1826 by Charles Bigge of Linden.

The church was used continuously until the 1960's though only during the summer months toward the end of the decade. In the winter months services were held in a building known as the Parish Room in the village.

The church was remote from the village and had neither electricity nor gas. It was very cold, dark, and damp. It was lit by carbide lamps and heating was provided by an early form of calor gas heater which was scarcely sufficient to remove the chill.

The congregation was small and the expense of maintaining or improving the church building was prohibitive. It was finally decided not to continue with repairs or maintenance but to adapt the Church of England School, in use since 1751. A new school was built and the old school was consecrated as St Helen's Church.

Mr & Mrs Cairns were the last couple to be married in the old church in 1965 and the first service in the "new" church was on the 4th November 1966.

The old church was gutted and the roof removed. In 1981 the stones, slates and doors were used to build a porch in the new church (or old school). The walls were stabilised so that the church was left, in the words of a local councillor, "as a romantic ruin".

A plaque on the wall reads

"In Memory of the Revd Joseph Middleton A.B. Vicar of this Parish 12 years"
who died the 10th December AD 1790 aged 84"

The remains of the old carbide generator may still be found, lying in the corner of the churchyard.

The roof is gone: the stained glass windows are gone: the walls are all but gone: the pews are gone: and where the congregation once gathered to worship, weeds sprout from cracks. Trees around the church have grown and today it is difficult to spot the church from the road.

It seems a sin to have allowed such a beautiful church to have been dismantled and discarded in such a way! Is this progress? And what happened to the stained glass windows, the pews, the altar rails, the altar table or the other interior furnishings?

And why this was allowed to happen in an age when other old buildings must be maintained and venerated. Remember the ugly but now listed 1930s styles? Even the world war pill boxes dotted around the valley have listed status.

All these are preserved for posterity: why not this once beautiful and historic church?

I am indebted to Bill Ricalton for his photographs and information regarding this church

9. Edlingham

Tucked away in a narrow green valley about 10 miles from Rothbury heading towards Alnwick lies the small village of Edlingham. And a pleasant little place it is too. A few houses, a castle, a church, and a viaduct all conspire to make it a most agreeable place to spend some time.

In 1682 the village was known far and wide as the home of Margaret Stothard known as the Witch of Edlingham" who although accused, famously by John Mills of Edlingham Castle, escaped the usual fate of witches. John Mills' testimony seemed slightly unreliable as he
"... did heare a great blast of wind goe by his window and ....... something fell with a great weight upon his heart and gave a great crye like a cat ....... there appeared a light at his bedd foot ..... and did see Margaret Stothard or her vission.......

The author George Mark was not too impressed with the village when he wrote in 1730 that it was "most unagreeable to the traveller, having nothing to recommend it, if we exclude the church, which is in tolerable order as to appearance". Unable to contain himself he continued to complain about "the intolerable roads", "the frightful moors" and "the lack of good spring water.

Maybe he just had a bad hair day! Because today the village is considered "a jewel in our heritage crown, encapsulating medieval power, social history and architecture in its church and castle".

The name Edlingham comes from the Anglo-Saxon and means the home of Eadwulf. It was one of four royal Northumbrian villages given to Cuthbert in AD 737 by King Coelwulf and some 600 people lived nearby. Quite a few more than today!

In the middle of the 12th century, John de Edlingham built a two storey house near the burn and the defences at that time included a moat fed from local springs. In 1296 Sir William de Felton fortified the house by means of a strong palisade inside the moat with a gatehouse on the north side.

Over the years the building was improved and the defences further strengthened by a gate tower. From about 1400 the house was referred to as a castle.

It passed to the Hastings about 1420 and thence to the Swinburnes in 1519 who were accused of hiding priests, although none were ever found.

Over the intervening years up to the present time the need for defences steadily abated and faming became of greater importance, with the ground floor rooms converted into barns and housing for animals. Decay set in and the castle was abandoned in 1650. More decay and the theft of the stonework over the next three hundred years till there was a covering of almost six feet of wind blown soil.
In 1978 English Heritage stepped in to start excavations and make the remaining masonry safe for visitors.

Close to the castle stands the simple rugged church of St John the Baptist. It has been suggested that there is an earlier Anglo Saxon church which could well be the foundations of a building started in 1050 but the only remnant is the lintelled doorway at the west end of the nave.

Built not only for worship, in common with many other churches in the area, it was often used as a refuge in times of need. Scottish raiders were a constant threat and the narrow slit windows were ideal as a measure of defence. Tomlinson suggests that the church was also used for the detention of captured moss-troopers as the door could be fastened from the outside.

In the southern recess may be seen the arms of the De Felton family.

Also close by stands an imposing viaduct. No longer in use following the demise of the Cornhill branch line it formed part of the 36 mile route from Alnwick to Cornhill.

Originally the plan was to build a line from Rothbury to Wooler but Alnwick merchants did not want to see trade from Wooler diverted to Rothbury, and the North Eastern Railway proposed the Cornhill Branch, which was to run from Alnwick through Wooler and meet the Tweedmouth to Kelso line before proceeding to Cornhill.

Initially the single track with passing loops was open to all traffic in 1887 but although it was well used it was unable to compete with the new bus services and fell into decline. Although staff was reduced and other costs cut, the line continued to lose money and passenger services were discontinued in 1930.

In 1948 the line suffered serious storm damage and a bridge near Ilderton was washed away. The bridge was not replaced and British Railways ran two lines: one from Alnwick to Ilderton and the other from Coldstream to Wooler but trains were infrequent, sometimes only one a week. The Alnwick to Ilderton line closed in 1953 and the Coldstream to Wooler line was closed by Dr Beeching in 1965.
And finally there is the story of the nearby Senna Wells.

The rite of "going through the well" was once part of the ceremony of riding the boundaries in Alnwick every fourteen years. It seems that on St Mark's day (26th April) the candidates for the Freeledge had to cross the Freeman's Well, a sheet of water 100 feet long, 15 feet wide and up to 5 feet deep. To the great amusement of spectators they plunged, and swam and generally floundered across. Ropes strung across and peat dykes did not help.

But why?

Well it seems that the noble King John was hunting near Alnwick when he was caught in a bog. (Possibly a rehearsal for his next foray into marshes when he lost his jewels) He was so enraged that as a punishment to the town he revoked their charter. However he relented and granted a new charter with the condition that every burgess, on admission to the freedom should plunge through the same bog on the anniversary of the day His Kingship was dropped in the mire, so to speak.

The custom ended in 1853 and tradition states that King John was indeed in Alnwick on the 24th April 1209.

Close enough for Government work!

10. Fellbridge Monument

Know locally as the Fellbridge monument this eighty foot high column can be found in a field just off the B6341 from Rothbury to Alnwick, down a narrow road leading to Lemmington Hall. But did you know that it once stood in Fellbridge, Surrey where it was known as the Evelyn Monument? If you visit Fellbridge you might be interested to know that the original location was 78, Copthorne Road.

The column was commissioned by James Evelyn in memory of his parents Edward and Julie Evelyn

"JACOBUS EVELYN FILIUS EDWARD EVELYN
ET JULIAE, UXORIS TUUS
O BENIGNISSISSIMI PARENTUS
HANC COLUMN
HAC TERRA(NATALE SOLUM)
Designed by Sir John Soane in 1785 it was unveiled in Fellbridge in the same year. The original design was an Ionic column with an obelisk mounted on a circular pedestal. Opinions differ but it is thought that Sir John was not completely happy and "regretted that he had designed it before he had begun to pay proper attention to 'first principle' ". According to the architectural historian, David Watkin this is a reference to its lack of standard architrave, frieze or cornice.

The shaft is fairly plain and tapers towards the top, crowned by an altar with spiral flutings bearing the eternal flame (signifying Birth). The column (signifying Life) stands on a rather unkempt grassy knoll some 10 yards square, surrounded by a ditch known as a "ha-ha" and protected from livestock by barbed wire. Verses from Addison's Hymn of Gratitude are incised on the monument, some six feet above the base on which is carved a snake swallowing its tail: a symbol of eternity which Sir John used in other funerary designs. Above the body of the snake is inscribed the words "Manners Maketh Man".

When the Fellbridge Estate was sold in 1927 the column was bought by Sir Stephen Harry Aitchison. He dismantled the column and shipped it north to his estate at Lemmington Hall. He had acquired the property, which required a complete restoration in 1913, for despite substantial alterations and improvements by architect William Newton in the late 18th century, Lemmington Hall had become a roofless ruin by the end of the 19th century. The shipping of the monument was both an expensive and difficult affair. By sea and road and finally by a light railway specially constructed for the purpose. Over the years the lettering became worn and following the death of Sir Stephen in 1942 it was re-cut.

Sir Stephen was born on 16 January 1863 and died on 26 August 1942. He was Justice of the Peace for the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne and held the office of Justice of the Peace (J.P.) for Northumberland. He was created 1st Baronet Aitchison, of Lemmington, Northumberland [U.K.] on 31 January 1938.

Nearby is a standing stone about 5 feet tall with the words "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills".

Towards the west are three smaller stones with dates and initials carved thereon, each with a bee motif in the centre.
The initials and the dates commemorate the births of three of the four children born to Walter De Lancey Aitchison, who succeeded to the title of 2nd Baronet Aitchison, of Lemmington, Northumberland in 1942.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>S.C de LA</td>
<td>10 Mar 1923, d. 12 May 1958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.G.F.A</td>
<td>27 Sep 1925, d. 17 Sep 1966</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.A</td>
<td>3 May 1927</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interesting and historical area which is also open to the public!

I am indebted to the Public Monument and Sculpture Association National Recording Project and Alaistair Turner for much of this information.

11. The Peace Monument

Northumberland is a remarkably interesting place. Hidden away at the side of a road, down an alley or in the middle of a field you can find obscure, half forgotten monuments and stones.

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<th>Image of Peace Monument</th>
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Alnwick, a mere 12 miles from Rothbury is home to one of these.

Tucked away in the Alnwick Golf Club, at the top of a hill and surrounded by trees, stands the almost forgotten Peace Monument.

Commissioned by Henry Collingwood Selby this monument to the former glories of England was erected in the grounds of Swansfield House in 1814. It commemorates England's success in defeating the French in 1814, and in particular the part played by William Pitt, Wellington and Nelson.

The monument stands in a small wood within sight of the golf club and is surmounted by a platform with a small pedestal and ball finial.
Generally it is in fairly reasonable condition and although the south inscription at the base is almost completely worn away the others are just legible.

There is a story that the trees surrounding the column were originally planted to commemorate the ships at the Battle of Trafalgar and this may well be true as the trees in the area of Davidson's Obelisk were supposed to be a living replica of the Battle of Aboukir.

12. Elsdon

Elsdon is well worth a visit today to see the church, the parsonage, the green, and take a stroll round the neighbouring countryside. It is only 12 miles from Rothbury along a winding road that takes the visitor though beautiful countryside and across lonely moors.

The name may have been derived from a corruption of "Elisden", "Ellesden" or "Ellesdene", all of which means "the valley of waters". Local tradition, however, insists that the name comes from "Ella" or "Elli" a Danish giant living on the Mote Hills. So take your pick: valley of waters or Danish Giant.

So what else do we know about Elsdon?

Well it was the medieval capital of Redesdale.

It boasts a parish church, a fortified parsonage, the Mote Hills and a pub. In 1498 the Bishop of Durham complained that most of the inhabitants were "reivers and cattle lifters" and the clergy were no better: living openly with their mistresses many could not read nor write and may not even have been properly ordained.

When the church was being repaired in 1877 three horses skulls were discovered in a small cavity just above the bells. Possibly placed there as a pagan protection against lightning or to improve the acoustics or even as an act of sanctification they are now in a case in the church.

Deep scratches on a pillar near the entrance were supposed to have been made by bowmen sharpening their arrows, or swordsmen their swords.
In 1810 when great mounds of earth were removed from the north wall more than 100 skeletons were discovered, laid together with the skull of one within the thighs of another as in one grave. More bodies were found in 1877 extending under the north wall into the church. These are all thought to be the remains of distinguished warriors from the Battle of Otterburn in 1388.

Lintels above the church doorway are formed from old grave slabs. Note the carved cross and pair of scissors.

A Roman gravestone stands in the church. The only headstone in Britain recording the details of a Roman officer's career, this tombstone erected by Julia Lucilla was found at High Rochester in 1809.

Louis Lutens followed him till his death in 1812. Apart from being noted as a man of letters, having written a dissertation on the identity of the man in the iron mask, Lutens' foreign accent prevented people from attending church. The problem was resolved when he invited a few notables to dinner and expressed great surprise when they turned up.

He told them

"When I preach you from my pulpit you no unnerstand my speak, but ven I invite you to my goot dine you very well unnerstand."

Mounted on a pillar in the church is a memorial to the parents of Capability Brown.

Close to the church stands Elsdon Tower a 14th century building with walls 8 feet thick. It is recorded in the list of Northumberland castles and described as belonging to the Rector of Elsdon. Over the years the building changed to provide greater comfort to the clergy till it was sold into public hands in 1961.

Lewis Carroll' s grandfather the Rev. C. Dodgson was rector of Elsdon from 1762 to 1765

The coat of arms of the Umfrevilles, the Howards and the Percies reflect the change of patronage over the years.
The tower has been restored with support from the Northumberland National Park and is considered to be the best preserved historic building in the Northumberland National Parks with a tower that formerly providing refuge from the notorious Border Reivers.

A figure of Bacchus adorns one of the houses fringing the village green. Originally the Bacchus Inn, then a cafe and now a private house the building is early 18th century and the carving is probably of the same date.

A fine pub stands on the village green. But don't take my word for it. Call in and see for yourself.

### 13. Holystone

Other place names in the area further remind us of the monastic age; Nun's Close, a field on a nearby farm, and St Mungo's Well on the south bank of the Holystone burn, opposite the church. Mungo was a Celtic missionary who certainly seemed to get around. There is a Mungo's well at Wooler, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Selkirk and Simonburn in addition to Holystone. The well is reputed to stand on the very spot where the great man preached and baptised.

To reach the well, park in the visitor car park in the forest at the edge of the village then follow the signs: through the trees, and across the fields.

A basin of water (39 feet by 23 feet) is surrounded by tall beech trees and a tall cross erected in the centre. A magical place where the inscription on the cross proudly proclaims:

"In this place Paulinus the bishop baptised 3,000 Northumbrians Easter 627".

There seems to have been a little poetic license in this story as, according to Thomlinson's guide to Northumberland, the Bishop was actually in York on this day.

The confusion may have arisen from the similarity of the names:
Although the date may be inaccurate the story may yet be true although it is difficult to imagine more than 3,000 people congregating in the area at one time.

At one end of the pool stands a statue of St Paulinus brought from Alnwick in 1870 and at the other end stands an altar called the Holy Stone.

Only the small village church of St. Mary remains as part of the original nunnery and even this was largely rebuilt in 1848-9. In 1291 there were 27 nuns recorded as living here with 4 lay brothers, 3 chaplains and a master. The well itself used to boast a board proclaiming that the well belonged to the nunnery.

Whilst in the area stroll over the fields to the village and look at one of the oldest coaching inns in the country. This is the Salmon Inn: famous throughout England.

Regretably It is now closed and converted into a private house. Lack of support and passing trade was the reason given.

14. Biddlestone Chapel

Biddlestone Chapel is a Grade II Listed building and stands at the foot of the Cheviot Hills some ten miles north west of Rothbury. It is one of the more remote chapels maintained by the Historic Chapels Trust.. For almost eight centuries Biddlestone Hall was the seat of the Selbys, one of the great Recusant Catholic families of the area. Not only is it an important historic building in its own right but Mass has been celebrated there for more than 300 years before the Reformation.

In 1272 the Selby family was granted land in the borders and the chapel was built as a typical 13th Century Pele Tower. In the 17th century, the building was later extended to include a West Wing with a small courtyard and gateway to the south. In this form Biddlestone became the model for "Obaldistone Hall" in Sir Walter Scott’s "Rob Roy".
After a disastrous fire, the entire structure, with the exception of the ground floor of the original Pele was demolished and replaced by a completely new house in 1796. The present chapel was built in 1820 and designed by John Dobson as a first floor wing on top of the old Pele's remains.

There is an upper gallery in the Chapel which allowed access by the Selby family and scars on the west wall of the chapel indicate the site of the Hall. The exterior measures some 32 ft x 42 ft and has space for a congregation of up to 50. Just inside the entrance of the rear doorway can be seen an example of an Anderson Shelter, a relic of World War II and in perfect condition, though it is doubtful if it would have afforded any more protection than the main building. In 1914 the estate was sold by Walter Selby and the farms later bought by their tenant. The hall and 50 acres of parkland were acquired by the Forestry Commission. In the late 1950's the hall was demolished but the Chapel wing continued to serve the local Catholic population right up to the 1970's.

Biddlestone Chapel was acquired in 1997 by the Historic Chapels Trust and used for Masses three or four times a year. Major maintenance is now in their hands whilst minor repairs, cleaning and access are the responsibility of the 'Friends of Biddlestone Chapel'.

The Chapel is in a relatively good condition with extensive internal decoration completed whilst the exterior has been cleared and the grounds tidied and landscaped.

For more information or access please contact:

Dr. A.W. Henfrey
Tel: 01665 574420
or
E-mail to hencalluk@aol.com
15. Sharpe's Folly

Thomas Sharpe was made rector of Rothbury in 1720 where he remained till 1758. It is worth a passing comment that he was given this post by his father the Archbishop of York.

Strictly speaking the word 'folly' means a building used for ornament rather than actual use. But does it really matter?

This is the earliest folly in the county, and Dr Sharpe claimed that it was built primarily to relieve unemployment amongst the local stonemasons.

But as he dabbled in astrology the tower may also have served as an observatory to enable him to continue his studies.

It is a round tower some 30ft in height with a cantilevered internal stone staircase which is normally inaccessible. Much the worse for wear it is inadvisable to attempt entrance.

In earlier years the sea could be seen from the tower but the tall beeches and sycamores have now obscured the view.

The folly is but a short stroll up the lane from Whitton Tower which was the regular residence of Rothbury rectors and is also part of one of the circular walks published by the Northumberland Countryside Service.

Leaflets describing these walks are available at the Information Centre in Rothbury.

16. The Farmers Folly

Not too far from Rothbury lies the County town of Alnwick. And a very pleasant place it is too, with its 'olde worlde' buildings, narrow winding streets, interesting market place and Alnwick Castle amongst other treasures.
At the southern edge of the town, close to the hospital, and just opposite the erstwhile railway station stands the Tenantry Column: 83 feet of fluting, topped by the famous Percy Lion. Designed by Charles Harper it is arguably the most prominent memorial in Alnwick and was erected to the second Duke of Northumberland in 1816.

But what was the story behind this monument to nobility? What brave deeds caused its commission? The story is interesting:

During the 19th century local farmers profited, very nicely thank you, from the high cost of goods sold to support the war with France. The Duke, reviewing his rents, as one does, saw fit to suggest a small increase; double or possibly quadruple. And everyone was happy.

Unfortunately when peace broke out, reduced prices in the market place created a cash flow problem and farmers were unable to meet the vastly increased rents. They commented on this to the Duke who reduced the rents accordingly.

The Duke decided that if the tenantry could afford such an edifice then they could also afford the rents, which were promptly increased. The cost of this monument was such that with the re-imposed rental increase farmers were unable to survive and promptly went into bankruptcy. But the subscriptions were now insufficient to complete the monument and the Duke was forced to finish it himself. Noblesse Oblige!

The tenants in their turn, felt beholden to such generosity and erected a column, topped by the Percy Lion to express their gratitude to the Duke and it was inscribed:

"To Hugh, Duke of Northumberland. K.G This column is Erected, Dedicated and Inscribed By a Grateful and United Tenantry Anno Domini MDCCCXVI"

Also interesting as it is reported that the Duke died before its completion.

A few small minded persons have suggested that this largesse was to merely satisfy the ego of the Duke. But when you consider that on his death on July 10th 1817 it was reported that the "Percy Tenantry volunteer artillery, cavalry and riflemen were clothed, paid and in every respect maintained in arms at the sole expense of this patriotic nobleman" then it is possible that the Duke may
have intervened to save embarrassment all round. This may have been a noble deed and not a selfish one. Whatever! The name Farmers Folly was applied and has remained to this day.

The plaque near the monument simply states that there is no evidence for this story. But then it would, wouldn't it?

The question as to why the Lion's tail is proudly horizontal has often been raised. Is it some strange exotic symbolism and what does it all mean? The Alnwick Gazette, in an excess of journalistic zeal, tracked down the reason:

'Making the tail straight, using a wrought iron rod, makes it stronger and also helps it stand out from a distance.'

How disappointing!

17. Cartington Castle

To the west of Rothbury and two miles north of Thropton lie the picturesque ruins of Cartington Castle. Although it is in private grounds it may be viewed from the surrounding fields or road. Permission may also be granted from the nearby farm.

This 14th century castle was originally built as a pele tower and lies on the slope of Cartington Hill looking down on the River Coquet. The actual date of the castle is uncertain.

The first recorded owner was Ralph Fitzmain who held it in 1154. In 1416 it was mentioned in the list of Border fortresses and in 1421 it was extended to include a great hall, and a tower-defended courtyard, when John Cartington was granted a licence to crenel late his home. In 1494 it passed by marriage to the Radcliffe family. It was later described in 1542 as:

"a good fortress of two towres and other strong houses .... in good reparacon."
In 1648 the castle, held for the King by the Royalists, Widdringtons, Selbys, Claverings and other local families, was besieged and after a little resistance was taken by parliamentary forces. A few years later the castle was dismantled and the stones used to build outhouses, walls and barns.

Lord Armstrong in 1887 partially restored the castle in order to prevent its complete disintegration, and excavations by Mr. Hodges of Hexham provided details of its layout and construction. Dippie Dixon in his book, "Upper Coquetdale" provides a comprehensive description of the castle, its history and the artefacts found during these excavations.

There is the usual local tradition of a secret passage from the castle to the rocks of Old Rothbury a few miles to the east and, in keeping with other tales of secret passages, from Harbottle Castle and even the (now demolished) manor house in Rothbury. But no traces have been found.

Margaret, Queen of Scots with her baby daughter Margaret stayed here on the night of 16th November 1515 on her journey from Harbottle Castle. The baby, Margaret, Lady Douglas, later married the Lord of Lennox and became mother of Lord Darnley and grandmother of James 1st.

Just to the west of the farm stands the "nunnery", an alms house founded by Dame Mary Charleton in 1697 for Roman Catholic Widows. This mission at Cartington was later merged with Thropton in 1745 to form the Roman Catholic Chapel of All Saints.

Two plaques on the wall of All Saints, Thropton record this event.

18. Davison’s Obelisk

Those who travel along the current A1 are unlikely to have seen Davison's Obelisk even in its newly restored state. It stands just south of Rashercap on the old A1 and is bypassed by the carriageway north of Felton.

But it is well worth the slight detour.
Erected in 1807 by Alexander Davison this fairly obscure monument is a memorial to Horatio Nelson of Battle of Trafalgar fame. Tucked away in the trees for many years it has been refurbished and restored thanks to grants from Northumberland County Council, Alnwick District Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

There are three inscriptions on the monument:

**England expects every man to do his duty**

**Victory 21st October 1805**

**Not to commemorate the public virtues and heroic achievements of Nelson, which is the duty of England; But to the memory of private friendship, this erection is dedicated by Alexander Davison, 1807.**

The stonemason was Thos Robson whose name was found during the renovations.

Alexander Davison had a chequered career. B 1750 in Lanton, Northumberland, he began his business career during the American War of Independence as a merchant in Quebec. He was involved in textiles and shipping and worked as a supply agent for the British Government. In Quebec he met Horatio Nelson who was then captain of the Albemarle. It is said that their friendship was cemented when he "counseled Nelson against offering marriage to a local belle" thus preventing him from jeopardizing his career.

In 1786 he returned to England where he purchased the Swarland Estate and set about enlarging the house and improving the grounds.

In 1798 following the Battle of the Nile he was appointed prize agent by Nelson when he awarded medals to all those who had fought in the conflict. For his own part he decided to plant a living replica of the Battle of Aboukir Bay to the east of his house. This was created using trees and shrubs to represent battle fleets. There were 14 clumps of trees, surrounded by wooden railings with name plates attached, none of which has survived and today only a few "ships" remain.
When trees were felled to accommodate small holdings it was reported in the Newcastle Journal of May 1934 that "They are cutting down the ships"

But his career did not stop there. He was imprisoned for in May as a result of a successful attempt to rig an election, and charging fees for goods from his own factories thus profiting from both profit margin and finders’ fees. This time he got twenty one months in gaol.

Davison died in Brighton in 1829 and is buried in the family vault at Kirknewton.

19. Tosson Tower

Follow the main road from Rothbury across the Bridge towards Hexham. Turn right up Cemetery Bank and at the top of the hill turn right again and proceed towards Great Tosson following the road signs.

Once a flourishing hamlet with school house, blacksmiths, joiners shop and public house Great Tosson now comprises just a few farm buildings and private houses.

As with many areas in Northumberland its links to the past are extensive with remains of ancient camps with defensive ramparts and ditches at Tosson Burgh and the remains of a pele tower, relic of border turmoil.

In 1715 John Warburton wrote:

"Great Tosson, a small village south of ye river Coquet, in which is the remains of an old pile (peel tower)."

And indeed, Tosson Tower is one of the many pele towers built as a line of defence against the Scots. The massive walls of the pele tower still stands about thirty or forty feet in height and at a thickness of some nine feet. Many of the outer stones were removed years ago and used to build local farmhouses.
Border towers were constructed using small boulders and welded together using hot lime. It is a tribute to this method of building that these towers have stood the test of time.

The Lords of Hepple held their court in Tosson following the demolition of their own castle and opposite the pele stood the village inn, the Royal George. A stump from the inn's oak beam can still be seen in the house wall.

A short stroll westwards: just about half a mile past the farm and you come upon the Tosson Lime Kiln. Designed by architect George Reaval in 1888 it was built to last and is certainly the best preserved lime kiln in Northumberland.

Lime is one of the oldest products known to man, and dates back to the Stone Age. Primitive kilns believed to have been used to produce lime during this era have been excavated and it is thought that lime is the first manufactured chemical to be used by man. This was most probably in farming although it is also one of the oldest mortar materials known. In fact lime plaster in reasonably good condition has been found in the pyramids, some 4,500 years old.

Lime was very important in farming to neutralise or sweeten acid soil and in this area it was produced in one of the many lime kilns dotted around. Some of these were in private hands whilst others were for communal use.

Mixed with coal and burned at extremely high temperatures of up to 1,000 degrees centigrade the limestone or calcium carbonate yielded carbon dioxide and calcium oxide also known as quicklime. Although hard work, the method was easy: alternate layers of coal and limestone were tipped in the top of the kiln and the burnt remains removed through the small doors at the base.

During the war many lime kilns were closed down for fear that the glow of the furnace would attract the enemy at night.

The top of this kiln is now surrounded by a fence but shortly after the war a cow wandered too close and fell in. Although it was unharmed after a drop of some fifteen feet it proved difficult to extract it and the door and wall at the north side was
removed. Rumour has it the cow was unscathed but the enlarged hole remains to this day.

20. Brinkburn Priory

Brinkburn Priory lies on a small haugh in a bend of the River Coquet, some four miles east of Rothbury.

Founded in the reign of Henry I by William Bertram, Baron of Mitford as a house for Augustine canons, the exact date is not known but thought to be somewhere between 1130 and 1135 as Henry died in this latter year. The architects responsible for Longframlington Church a few miles away are likely to have been the builders.

The Priory acquired scattered lands in Northumberland and Durham over the years but the house was never very wealthy. Little is known of the history of the house other than that gleaned from the records now housed in the British Museum. It survived some troubled times and as late as 1419 was raided and robbed. In 1535 the value was recorded as £69 and the house was finally dissolved in 1536 along with all those other minor house with an income of less than £200.

Services continued to be held at Brinkburn and the church was retained in a fair state of repair till the end of the 16th century. In 1602 it was reported to be in a state of decay, a situation which worsened over the years and eventually the roof collapsed.

In the middle of the 18th century Dr Sharpe, Archdeacon of Northumberland tried to effect repairs and, although there was considerable support for the project, work could not continue due to a dispute between the owner, William Fenwick, and the Vicar of Felton.

In the 19th century the owner of Brinkburn tried to revive the restoration of the church and work began in 1858. The roof was completed along with some masonry repairs in 1859 and the stained glass windows inserted between 1861 and 1864; but the repairs were not completed till 1868.
It is interesting to compare photographs from 1911 and today from the same viewpoint. Not a great deal seems to have changed externally in almost 100 years.

A number of interesting finds were made during the reconstruction. The tombstone of Prior William, suffragan Bishop of Durham who died in 1484 was found among the debris, and the original altar stone with five crosses is still preserved along with an ancient font.

In 1834 another discovery was made about 50 yards from the church when a bronze pot containing almost 300 Rose Nobles of Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV were discovered.

Tradition tells of a party of marauding Scots who were unable to find the Priory, even though it was nearby. The band failed in their bid to plunder and headed for home. They were startled to hear the sound of bells, which the monks rang in joy at their departure.

On hearing this the Scots returned and following the pealing of the bells, forced their way through a dense wood to the Priory. Pillage was the order of the day and the Priory burned.

However this story should be taken with a pinch of salt: a similar tale is told of Blanchland.

Nearby, a deep part of the river bears the name of "Bell Pool". The ubiquitous Scots during one of their raids flung the Priory bells into the river at this spot. And tradition tells us that whoever recovers the bells will be well rewarded by other treasures.

And of course there is the tale of the burial place of the Northumbrian fairies within the Priory lands whilst Gawen's Field on the estate takes its name from Gaweb Redhead, a border reiver, whose abode was a hollow oak tree, so large that a half dozen calves were wintered in it. Ummmmmmmm!
Elsdon is a small village about 12 miles west of Rothbury. And although not strictly speaking part of Coquetdale is near enough to figure in these pages.

On August 10th 1792 William Winter, Jane & Eleanor Clark were executed at the Westgate, Newcastle for the murder of Margaret Crozier, an old woman at Raw Pele, a tower two miles north of Elsdon. Margaret Crozier died of a fracture to the left temple and strangulation although it is often stated that her throat was cut.

It is interesting to note that the executioner was also a villain. William Gardner had been sentenced to death for the crime of sheep stealing in Northumberland and agreed to be the executioner of Winter and the Clarke sisters. For this service he was reprieved and his sentence reduced to transportation to New South Wales for seven years. Strange times!

Following the execution the bodies were disposed of in different ways: the females dispatched to the surgeon's hall for dissection whilst the body of William Winter was hung in chains on Whiskershields Common, a few miles south of Elsdon.

The body remained on the gibbet as a sight for the passing curious until the clothes rotted. Eventually the body was cut down, the bones scattered, and the skull sent to Mr Darnell of Newcastle.

In time the original gibbet decayed, partly due to natural processes and partly due to the quaint country practice of rubbing pieces on the gums to cure toothache.

Around 1867 Sir Walter Travelyan of Wallington ordered a replica, complete with wooden body, to be erected on his land. In time the wooden body disappeared following its use for target practice, till only the head remained, giving rise to the 20th century custom of hanging a fibre glass head on the replica gibbet.
Today the gibbet stands proudly on National Trust property high on the lonely hills around Elsdon: a monument to murder.

The head was frequently stolen and as frequently replaced. In 1998 the complete gibbet disappeared: a task worthy of Paul Daniels!

There is a story that a local wag erected a miniature gibbet on the spot with a sign proclaiming that given the current rainfall it would soon grow. Sure enough it is now full size,

This new gibbet was dedicated to the late Miss Annie Elliott by the Green Men of Harwood as a small tribute to her "good nature and ebullient humour". Unfortunately that one disappeared also. No reward but it would be interesting to have it replaced beside of its big brother.

But who was Winter?

William Winter seems to have sprung from Gypsy stock and was the end of a long line of criminals. For the last 18 years of his life he had been at liberty for only 6 months. A truly hardened criminal! In 1784 he had been convicted of stealing an ass and sent to the hulks on the Thames for seven years. Upon his release in 1791 he made his way back to the North of England where he seems to have taken up his old life style once more. But his liberty was not to last and he was apprehended following the murder of Margaret Crozier.

August was not a good month.

Margaret Crozier was murdered on 29th August 1791. When William was discharged from the hulks on 14th August 1791, he found that his father and brother had been hanged on 6th August 1788. The father of the Clark girls, Walter Clark was hanged with Margaret Dunn on 14th August 1793. The crime was burglary. The Winters, John & Robert, father & son, were executed for breaking & entering. A harsh sentence in a harsh day! All were classified as hardened criminals.

And the sequel to this sad tale:

Raw Pele, the scene of the murder was never again lived in, and the tower became part of the farm buildings, although much changed. The chief witness, a boy called Robert Hindmarsh (sometimes known as Robert Hymers) feared gypsy vengeance and moved out of the area; first to Bywell and then to Aberdeen. He eventually returned to his home, only to die in September 1803 at the age of only twenty-two.
Local parish registers, however, indicate that his date of death was 14th November 1800, aged 20.

Robert was immortalised by Baden Powell in his book "Scouting for Boys" as an example of observation and citizenship. Legend has it that Winter was identified by Hindmarsh from the nail patterns on the soles of his boots. But as his deposition stated that Winter remained standing all the time that he was observed by Hindmarsh, this seems unlikely.

It should be remembered that this story is shrouded in the mists of time and many legends have grown up around it. The above "facts" have been gleaned from many sources and are open to interpretation.

The most reliable source today is Barry Redfern, a retired policemen, who has devoted a great deal of his time to studying records and applying modern police methods to their analysis. For his help in this page I am most grateful.

22. Woodhouse Bastle

Not too far to the west of Rothbury and a little past Hepple lies Harehaugh Hill, a great triangular mass, formerly a large entrenched stronghold of the ancient Britons. The camp is defended by three ramparts separated by a deep ditch (or fosse).

On the north side, just off the Grasslees to Holystone Road, lies the remains of Woodhouses Bastle. (Bastle comes from the French, "bastille" meaning "stronghold" and it is estimated that over 1,000 bastles were built in the borders during the 200 year period starting in 1500.

The building has been leased from the owners and restored from its roofless condition under the guidance of English Heritage. It is now in an excellent state of preservation with a winding staircase to the upper apartment, an arched vault in the basement and a stone spout above the doorway, possibly used for pouring molten lead on enemies.
Woodhouse Bastle is built of coarse stone and displays many features characteristic of the fortified houses or bastles that were once necessary to ensure the safety of the occupants. The walls at the basement are 5 feet thick and the height of the building is some 22 feet to the eaves, above which tower the steeply pitched roof, originally thatched with heather, replaced with grey stone slates in 1904 and re-roofed again in 1993.

The original entrance high up on the wall and is now blocked up. The original barred window and slop-stone are clearly visible today, whilst a former slit window has also been blocked up.

To the rear of the bastle are 19th century mullioned windows and the remains of another blocked-up doorway. Situated in the east gable and closed with an iron barred gate the original entrance to the basement is still in existence complete with drawbar slots whilst above it is an inscription:

**W.P.-B.P.-1602**  
**TAM.**

The bastle was in existence long before this date. Erected by Roger Hanginshaws sometime before 1541 it was finally completed in 1602 by a family called Potte whose initials are shown; William and Bartholomew Potte.

The famous Northumbrian Piper, James Allan, was born here in 1734. Of gipsy descent he led a life of complete dishonesty and roguery, ending his days in jail in 1810. As an indication of the savagery of the times, it should be noted that he was condemned to death for horse stealing, although his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment.

Close by, at the foot of Beacon Hill lie the "Five Kings", traditionally thought to be five brothers who owned adjacent tracts of the country, and possibly connected in some way to the five grave mounds on nearby Holystone Common. The largest stone is about 6 feet high but there are in fact only four stones remaining.

All very well worth while visiting on a fine sunny afternoon, although if you wish to view the interior it is necessary to contact the National Parks Office for a guided tour.
23. Harbottle Castle

Situated just a few miles west of Rothbury at the edge of Harbottle village stands the remains of a castle. Although there is little to be seen it continues to attract a great many visitors.

Harbottle Castle was built about 1160 by Odinel de Umfraville following a direct order from King Henry II; keen to strengthen his border defenses and demonstrate his power and rank.

The name Harbottle is derived from the old English "Here-botl!" meaning "army building".

The mound on which stands the keep is thought to be a mote-hill of the ancient Britons, and in Saxon times there was a stronghold here held by Mildred, son of Ackman.

Not long after its erection it was taken by the Scots in 1174, only to be rebuilt more strongly and just over 100 years later in 1296 it was besieged in vain, holding out for two days.

About 1436 the castle passed into the hands of the Tailleboys and for a long time was the residence of the Warden of the Middle Marches.

Among its claims to fame Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII and widow of King James IV of Scotland was granted asylum here in 1515 when a daughter was born to her: Margaret, Lady Douglas who became the Countess of Lennox, mother to Lord Darnley and the grandmother to James I and IV of Scotland.

However by 1543 the castle was in such a bad state of repair that the garrison was in danger from falling walls and timber. Part of the castle appeared to remain inhabitable and in 1599 George Meldrum of Dumbreck seized a Mr. Gibson (afterward Lord Durie) and imprisoned him in the castle where he was kept for eight days.

It is worth recording that local folklore tells of escape tunnels from the castle and although recent excavations have found no trace of them a visiting dowser located
five possible places, all five paces wide (approximately eight feet) and all ending at the peak of the castle ruins. Since escape tunnels are known to exist elsewhere it would seem sensible to assume that they also exist at Harbottle Castle.

Following the Union with Scotland when border fortresses were less needed for national security the remainder of the castle fell into decay and over the years was plundered for its stone. In 1865 Roger Widderington used both the stone and the name to build a new manor house at the east end of the village. Later occupied by the Clennels, there is a beautiful fountain erected in the village to the memory of Mrs. P.F. Clennel. The inscription reads:

"Mrs. Clennel, of Harbottle Castle, died Nov 17th, 1879. She devoted the powers of an active mind, the impulses of a generous heart and the industry of a busy life, to the welfare and happiness of the inhabitants of Harbottle and the neighbourhood. To perpetuate her name and virtues, they erected this fountain, August 1880."

Little remains of the castle today although excavations take place each summer. A brand new car park and picnic site has been built to accommodate visitors and Northumberland National Park has erected an information board. A poem "The Sad Castle" by Felicity Lance, a pupil from Harbottle School is inscribed on a stone slab adjacent to the picnic area.

High on Harbottle Hill, stands a massive sandstone block, known as the Drakestone. It stands, overlooking Harbottle Lough, a lonely tarn surrounded by sandstone ridges with sweeping views across the heather to Redesdale.

There is a story that tells of a plan to drain the tarn but the workmen fled at the sound of voices singing:

"Let alone, let alone
Or I'll drown Harbottle
And the Peels and the bonny Holystone"

The Drake Stone is reached by a narrow but well worn path from the forest to the west of Harbottle. Almost 30 feet in height at its maximum it presents quite a challenge to visitors, for whilst it is fairly easy to climb up, using the cracks in the surface, descent is more difficult. Folklore has it that cries for help were not unusual with passing travellers spending the night in safety at the top but unable to descend in the morning.

Folklore also tells of sick children being passed over the stone to facilitate their recovery. And this may well be true as the huge stone was the Draag Stone of the Druids. At any rate Tomlinson tells us that:

"Harbottle is an exceptionally healthy place .......and mortality among children almost unknown"

25. Duergar

Now there is a name with which to conjure. But what does it mean?

Duergar are malevolent elves that haunt the Simonside Hills. They typically live underground and have a dark complexion. They have many skills but seem to have majored in thieving, at which they are adept.

Many stories are told of their pranks; if luring folk to their death in bogs or over cliffs can be considered pranks. Mind you, being described as 'a hideously disfigured troglodyte dwarf with chronic halitosis' could well have a detrimental effect on their social interaction with humans.

According to experts on Northumberland and Coquetdale lore they started up the huge Tosson water wheel (long since gone) in the middle of the night. No mean feat for little people!

In common with other mischievous fairy folk they had a penchant for misleading weary travellers. On one occasion they lured a traveller to the edge of a peat bog. Having survived this ordeal the traveller was pursued by the evil creatures across the hills.
Frightened out of his wits he laid into them with his stick and encountering only thin air dropped to the ground where he lay till the morning. (It says in all the best books.)

The other story, (of the great many) tells of yet another traveller who passed the night in a cosy well warmed hut with one of the creatures and as day dawned found himself perched on a stone at the top of a steep precipice, with hut and creature vanished.

All of this may not have been too surprising in a bygone age, as the hills around Rothbury abounded in illicit stills. Was the traveller a customer who had imbibed too deeply or did the malevolent elves really exist?

In a cavern at the foot of the Tosson hills, Excise officers discovered an illicit still in 1840, capable of making 100 gallons of spirits a week.

In fact if you visit the John Barleycorn Festival in Rothbury you will learn a great deal concerning illicit brewing in the area. There are at least four well known stills to be found among the high hills.

Today duergar seem to be more likely to be spotted in Dungeons and Dragons where they continue their existence of a different plane.

Whatever the truth, on wild and windy nights the hills around Tosson are alive with lights. Are they the Duergar or farmers working? But why so late?

And high up on the Carriageway past the Pilgrims' Way can be heard the plaintive cry "Beeeeeeee..............nnnnnnnnn......suuuuuuuuuuuuuun".

Or maybe it's just the wind!!!!!!!

26. The Cragside Monks

A well known Rothbury business man tells this story:

He was driving home to Rothbury following a convivial evening in Alnwick. It was about one in the morning and the night was dark: weather not too good. A light drizzle over the moors but visibility was ok and he made good time.

Over the New Moor Crossroads and up the hill: over the moors towards Rothbury: then down towards town.
As he passed Debdon Pit Cottage and entered the woods a mist swirled through the trees and he slowed down. A good decision given that visibility had dropped to only a few yards. Crawling along, peering through the windscreen, he saw movement in the mist and stopped. Just in front of the car was a line of figures moving slowly out of the woods and down the road. There were probably about a dozen or so, but he could not make out details.

The figures seemed to be wearing long dark cloaks with cowls and their faces could not be seen. They shuffled down the road and disappeared into Cragside.

He continued slowly to Rothbury and just past Tumbleton Lake the mist lifted. After that it was all plain sailing and he made it home without further incident.

A few days later he was discussing this experience which by now had been slightly embellished to definitely describe the figures as monks, when someone mentioned the old nunnery at Cartington. This according to records was an alms-house founded by Dame Mary Charleton for four widows at the end of the 17th century. Someone else mentioned St Helens Chapel in more or less the same vicinity and which is marked on some old maps, and then the discussion turned to the Pilgrims way that headed towards Holy Island.

The problem was the apparent direction of the group. They appeared from the woods of Debdon and disappeared into Cragside. Wrong direction for Holy Island.

A few enquires over the next few days produced no solution. No visiting groups in Cragside: no walkers arriving late: no monks in the area. In short a mystery.

Our friend was rather shaken up. He did not believe in ghosts or apparitions: he was certainly sober that night. So what happened?

He never mentioned this story again till he read that some years ago someone else in the village claimed to have seen a band of soldiers armed with pikes, marching down Cemetery bank towards the bridge.

But the mystery remains!

Coquetdale abounds with tales of the supernatural. From John Green in Thropton to the Deugar on Simonside, to the dancing fairies and the marching soldiers.
There more things in heaven and earth, Horatio than are dreamt of in your philosophy"

27. Ruins and Rocks – A peaceful place

Ok! ...... So this a little way from Rothbury! But it is one of my favourites and well worth the effort. Head out from Alnwick on the B6346, past Harehope Hall towards Old Bewick where you can park your car at the side of the road. (grid ref 066215) Then just follow the signed pathway to Blaewearie.

The hill to your right abounds in prehistory and there is a well defined path from the second gate to the top.

First, there are the Cup & Ring marks that seem to abound in Northumberland, usually close to iron age camps. These were originally thought to be unique to Northumberland but are now known to be found in many other areas, both in Britain and abroad. In Britain they are about 4,000 - 5,000 years old.

Generally they consist of concentric circles carved into the surface of the rock, with grooved channels linking various sets of rings, small hollows and horseshoe shaped grooves. The meaning and purpose are still a mystery although some consider them to be associated with burial practices or religious rituals. In any event they are normally to be found on high ground with excellent views over the surrounding countryside.

There are two large rocks on either side of a fence clearly showing cup and ring marks and it was here in the 1820s that they were first recognised as being of immense archaeological importance. The leading local authority on cup & ring marks is Stan Beckinsall who has made it his life's work to catalogue and document them.

Wander along the top of the hill searching for other interesting finds such as the World War II pill box, now a listed building or the iron age fort. Amazing place! Beautiful views!
A mile further on, past a burial cairn lies Blaewearie, a deserted farmhouse set among a few trees and which really merits a book in its own right.

Situated in the middle of a wild moor in perfect peace and tranquillity, this a magical place. Now a ruin, it was once home to the Rogerson family, the last members leaving in the 40's.

The original house was 3 bed roomed, one upstairs with windows facing Old Bewick, one to the right of the front door, and the third through the living room with its window hidden by a bush.

The living room was quite large with a kitchen range, and the scullery was to the right of the front door. The white gate at the right of the picture led into the garden and further down to the outside loo.

At the back of the house was a big walk-in pantry. Water was from a well in the front of the house.

I am indebted to Mrs M. Anderson for this photograph.

Remains of the outside privy still stand as does the remnants of a terraced garden, sheltered from the winds and once lovingly tended, but now neglected.

Water from a spring, a warm roof over your head, plum and cherry trees, silence apart from the whistle of the wind; what more could you ask for? A peaceful, beautiful place!

A mile and a half past Blaewearie stands Cateran Hill, just before you reach Quarry House.

Just another hill in Northumberland and not even a particularly high one! So why the interest?
Well, at the top of the hill is a hole. It is quite easy to walk past it, especially in the mist, or even the summer, when grass and heather are growing strongly.

Stone steps lead down to a tunnel entrance. There is a stone bench to the right and the tunnel continues for some 100 ft until a large rock prevents further exploration. It is believed that the tunnel continues for another 200 ft past the blockage.

Some sources swear that it leads to the church in Old Bewick or Ros Castle, or even Chillingham Castle a few miles down the road. Castles were always supposed to have secret tunnels weren't they?

Personally I think it a natural phenomenon used and enhanced by travellers, for you can certainly imagine smugglers hiding here on dark and stormy nights waiting for excise men to pass. After all this is on a main route to Scotland.

Salt to Scotland: Whisky to England. Sounds pretty good!

The tunnel is high enough to stand even if you happen to be six foot tall, and the floor is fairly even. Remains of candles and matches are littered around and the roof contains a number of names and initials smoked on by previous visitors.

So have you seen enough of Northumberland?

So far we have not touched on all the other hill forts, burial cairns, bastles and follys hereabouts. Nor even Ros Castle with its superb views.

Surely the whole of Northumberland warrants a visit?
If you have enjoyed this booklet please tell your friends

If not tell me  rothbury.coord@gmail.com

And if you can add a few more interesting details to these brief stories, add others or identify errors it would be appreciated.

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