

WEA - Routes of Social Change - Washington Heritage Research Group (HRG)

Meeting Update - 22.3.24

Mailing list: Diana Clark, Linda Carr, Margaret Stafford, Bob Twist, D.A. Hall, Doris Jones, Carol Attewell, Peter Welsh, Pauline Allen, Andrea Henderson, Matt Blyth, Ged Parker, Alaine Robson, Stephen Clough, Joanne Heron, Jude Murphy, Steven Hansom, Phil Reay, Jim Metcalf, Tom Parkin, Sarah Murray, Bill Elliott, Sandra Cullen, Derek Otway, Peter Russell, Paul Irving, John Laybourn, Sue Burnell.

Add or pick a research theme to explore!

Resumé of themes to date:

- The New Town - 60th Anniversary - Heritage Partnership Festival
- New Town planning and industries
- Geology, natural history, wildlife
- Roman history
- Maps old and new
- History / Heritage walks
- Pubs
- Agriculture / land ownership / farm labour
- Social history
- Maritime history
- Shipbuilding at Cox Green, Biddick
- Local history, south of the Wear
- Washington Staithes
- Bridges
- Irish immigration
- Mining - sectarian / social history
- Railways - including wooden railways, the basis of routes
- Washington Old Hall
- The Victoria Viaduct
- Washington Chemical Co.
- Aviation, aerial photography
- RAF Usworth
- Royal Observer Corps sites
- The characters of Washington
- Aural history
- Houses through time
- Rope Industry

The meeting of 22.3.24:

Peter reported that there had been two meetings between those planning the Heritage Walk for the 60th Anniversary festival since the previous HRG meeting.

The plan is to develop a walk along the north side of the Wear from St George's Church to Cox Green and back.

John will talk about Churches and Chapels (from St George's Church (?)); Peter Welsh will be by the War Memorial and speak of features local to that area; Peter Russell will speak on heritage features of and near Fatfield Bridge, Worm Hill, the Biddick Pub, and South View. Phil is researching the history and heritage of North Biddick Colliery. He also noted that the Duke of Wellington had visited the area in 1827. Link: [The Duke of Wellington in the North - northeastlore](#)

Derek will talk on the Victoria Viaduct; Ged could speak at length on the Chemical Works.

It was noted that the shape and location of villages changed with the development of the New Town. Eg. Fatfield had moved from its original location.

Reference was also made to the Washington History Society research into churches and chapels - there were two CofE and five Methodist places of worship in Washington in 1851.

There was a lengthy discussion about what printed materials will be needed to support the volunteers offering history and heritage information and stories to passers-by on the Festival date(s).

It was suggested that a leaflet and map for the walk could be augmented with an information board for each location. Matthew and Jude could work together to fund and develop these resources / materials from volunteer drafts, perhaps with a graphic designer. Jude suggested that Mike Clay may be interested.

As for locations, the 'What three Words' grid mapping methodology was discussed (with no conclusion).

It was suggested that Saturday, 6th July, 12.00 - 16.00 may be a good day / time for the Festival Heritage Trail. Matthew will confer with Matt about the optimum date and time.

A trial walk was agreed to take place from St George's Church on Wednesday, 3rd April. NB. In the event, this did not take place as the weather was so bad that week that Matthew conferred with Peter W. and postponed the experimental walk to another time TB.

It was suggested that the information / story narrated by the volunteers should have about 4 minutes uninterrupted to speak their piece before questions. Also, an experimental walk might be very useful to judge when to walk and when to stop and speak. Matthew said it can be difficult to speak and walk at the same time. People need to stand and gather round in order to hear inclusively. Question from Matthew: Do we know any signers?

Phil was interested in the Ropewalk (behind South View?) and the Melvilles, George, Robert and William who built ships around Cox Green in the 1830s / 1840s. Also, John Dryden and the first Thompson's shipyard.

For the experimental walk, Peter Russell could speak at the Biddick Inn, Fatfield Bridge (the oldest existing road bridge in Washington), and Worm Hill.

Derek shared interest with Phil in the Staithes and Wagonways. Colin E. Mountford's 'The Private Railways of County Durham' was mentioned as a valuable source of information. Apparently, the staithes migrated down towards the port over 200 years from 1800-ish as the ships increased in size.

About the original Arts Centre buildings, Ged noted that the occupier of North Biddick Hall owned North Biddick Parish. North Biddick Farm was 550 acres in the 1860s.

Next HRG meeting: Friday, 19th April, from 12.00 - 14.00, Washington Arts Centre.

Ideally, we should arrange another date for an experimental walk, and hope that the weather is not too tempestuous - and dry.

Regards,

Matthew Burge, Project Organiser, Routes of Social Change - WEA