

The *Dunse History Society* was treated to a most excellent and informative talk 'Jacobites, Hawksmoor & Heritage: the Barracks in Berwick' given by *Rt Rev Stephen Platten on 26 February*. The barracks (known as Ravensdowne Barracks) is the largest and finest of a number built in the early 18th century to house infantry and subdue the unrest and deter any further uprisings following the 1715 Jacobite revolution. It was the first ever purpose-designed infantry barracks in England and Berwick was chosen as it is the most northerly town in England. Berwick changed hands about 14 times in the Medieval period and the border was much fought over and not until 1603 when the thrones of Scotland and England joined was some order restored. It was a very dangerous part of the country with many skirmishes. The Jacobite rebellion created the decision to build substantial defences and the construction of the barracks started in July 1717. Much admired architecturally, the barracks were designed by the renowned architect Sir Nicholas Hawksmoor (1662-1736) who had worked with Sir Christopher Wren on the design of St Pauls Cathedral and was most famous for the designs of 7 churches in London built after The Great Fire and the Royal Naval Hospital, Greenwich. The design was later simplified from Hawksmoor's original design. 600,000 bricks were used and some parts are 19th century additions. The gateway opened onto a square with 3-storey ranges either side. Each range had rooms for 8 soldiers plus officers quarters and the barracks were occupied by the end of July 1721. Officers were later moved into the town. The range opposite the entrance was built 20 years later and In 1745 a military hospital with 24 beds was built and subsequently a Magazine and a Gymnasium (now an arts centre). There was some hostility from the townspeople resulting from crime and drunkenness by the soldiers (there were 66 pubs in Berwick!). Robbery was not uncommon and the punishments were severe including deportation. The living conditions were very basic, soldiers cooked their own meals on barrack room fireplaces, it was smelly and dirty and each room had a slop bucket. Local duties included guarding the town gates and the main guard. Until the end of the Napoleonic wars there was a serious possibility of invasion by France. No regiment was permanently based in Berwick, or any other barracks, and the Berwick barracks became the home for several different regiments. The Kings Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB), prior to 1887 known as the 25th Regiment of Foot, visited the barracks in 1746 but only later did it become their permanent base. In 1881 the barracks was considerably improved. During WW1 the barracks became a training and transit camp and with 1100 men was filled to capacity. By 1963/64 the KOSB had moved out and the barracks stopped having a military function however a KOSB regimental museum was created together with another museum, the Town Museum. The Department of the Environment took over the barracks in the 1970s and in 1987 it became the responsibility of English Heritage. At present the left hand side is museums, the right hand side will become a residential block and the gymnasium will be an exhibition centre. The building will soon be reconditioned funded by a £10M grant thus preserving this fine and important building in Berwick. An illustrated book 'Berwick Barracks' giving much more detail and written by Stephen Platten is available for £5.

Donald Ritchie, - February 2025