# NEWSLETTER

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PATRON – JOHN GRUNDY

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THE FRIENDS OF JESMOND DENE

## JESMOND DEAN AT JESMOND DENE

**See Jesmond Dene A Garden ( page 2), and Jesmond Dean the House (page 7 )**

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**John Grundy Patron of FOJD**

We all know what a wonderful piece of landscape Jesmond Dene is, the extraordinary steep-sided valley, the exposed sandstone cliffs, the Ouse Burn reaching maturity on its short journey from spring to mouth; and we all know what a wonderful park it is and what a range of terrific community amenities it provides. It doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference what sort of day or time of year it is, all the usable bits of it seem to be in full use by families, dogwalkers, musers and drifters, nature lovers, small animal lovers (lover of small animals I mean, not just small people who love animals though there are always plenty of those), rock climbers, couples, joggers, full-fat runners and power walkers, explorers discovering new sneaky-uppy bits they've never spotted before, naughty boys doing naughty things. As a community park it attracts the whole community and rightly so, because it is a fantastic place,

But…I have a but and it's a big but….I have another way of looking at it and thinking about it. As well as being a public park, I like to think of Jesmond Dene as a garden and to look at it in the context of other North-Eastern gardens.

It's a fairly obvious thing to say but Northumberland has played a pretty influential role in the history of British (and world) garden design. Unsurprisingly however, given the difficult warlike times the area passed through in the distant past, we don't have a lot from really early times and even in the 1600s the only clues we have are prints and plans of gardens that have since disappeared or been redesigned. There's a terrific high angle view of the formal garden that existed at Capheaton Hall until it was remodelled in the 18th Century and another similar view of the landscape in front of the Castle at Belsay. Even within the mediaeval walls of Newcastle the print of the garden that existed around the huge house called Anderson Place by the north gate to the town at the top of Pilgrim Street shows a wonderful, complex, formally laid out patchwork of walks, orchards, flower gardens and vegetables….but of course, it is no longer there.

Of existing Gardens and landscapes the earliest surviving clues can be seen at Seaton Delaval. When it was built in the early 1700s the house was at the centre of a vast geometrical landscape of rides and the path of two of them can still be seen stretching away as straight as arrows from the two main entrances to the house and ending at obelisks in the far distance.

But the real riches start, of course, with Capability Brown, Lancelot Brown, the son of a tenant farmer at Kirkharle who started to work for the Loraine family in the 1730s when he left school at the age of 16 and went on to become the most influential gardener of the age, the man who more or less invented and definitely perfected the style of the English Landscape Garden which I suspect is the only artistic style of world-wide significance ever to be invented in this country.

I'm sure you know what it looked like - green swards of grass sweeping right up to the walls of the house, a mirrored lake in the middle distance, clumps of trees dotted about and gently moulded, rolling countryside. It has been calculated that the number of gardens in this style for which he was responsible were equal in size to a medium-sized county and there are a huge number of them which are still recognisably the way he left them – instantly recognisably stretches of classic English style.

What is less obvious is that the origins of the style lie in Northumberland, in the rolling moorland of the upper Wansbeck Valley where he grew up and across which he walked each day from Kirkharle to the school he attended in Cambo. This beautiful landscape is rougher in texture than the gardens he created but similar in shape. It has the rolling profile he recreated elsewhere and clumps of trees, big skies reflected in sudden bright stretches of water and though the gardens are smoother than the existing landscape, from the start of his career he did something very unusual .The further you went from the house, the more natural the garden became, the rougher the edges, the wilder the scenery.

Eventually, quite late in his career he returned to work on two estates in Northumberland, at Wallington and at Alnwick Castle. At both places the garden immediately round the house is in his characteristic style but in both, as you move further off into the edges of the estate, the cultivated landscape becomes less and less visible, the rides and the planting wilder and wilder. Hulne Park at Alnwick is the classic example. In total contrast to the smooth green landscape in front of the castle, Hulne barely looks like a garden at all but more like a piece of wild landscape with paths running through it and various enthrallingly Romantic and picturesque bits and pieces of follies and Gothic building dotted round about it. By this stage in his career Capability Brown's style was morphing into the next big development in garden design – The Picturesque Style which was less calm and more designed to excite emotions than the Landscape Style that had preceded it.

As it happens Northumberland has one of the greatest and one of the earliest examples of a garden in the Picturesque Style. At Belsay, Sir Charles Monck came back from his very long and adventurous honeymoon in Greece and, in 1807, built a house based on his exploration of ancient Greek architecture; around it he created a wonderful garden which is full of picturesque intensity, especially the extraordinary garden made out of the quarry which had provided the stone for his house.

Belsay, and the other picturesque gardens of those years led to the great gardens of the Victorian Age and once again two of them (at least) are to be found in Northumberland. They were both the work of the same imagination and that imagination belonged to Lord Armstrong. One of them, one of the great masterpieces of Victorian garden design, was at Cragside; the other was Jesmond Dene.

The Dene of course came first, created from the 1850s onwards as the garden to go with his house high above the stream on the western edge of the Ouseburn Valley, and Cragside followed in the 1870s and 80s. Similar in style and in detail, Cragside went on to become the more famous of the two; its intensely Romantic splendours have an international reputation. Niklaus Pevsner described it as "Wagnerian" and "a site of high romantic glamour". It is also, of course, absolutely vast and includes apparently 7 million trees planted by Lord Armstrong (not on his own of course; he got the lads to do it for him), but if you ignore the huge disparity in size, the similarities between the two gardens is really striking. Both are landscapes of high drama; both have sandstone cliffs and the streams that eroded them. In both the water has been used and altered to change the appearance and the use of the streams; both have high dramatic iron bridges crossing the gorge and an extensive variety of low-lying bridges providing a network of alternative routes through the valley. Both are planted with a range of exotic and dramatic trees to vary and intensify the mood. Both (like Capability Brown's design at Hulne, incidentally) alternate the dense and wild woodland with open spaces and meadows and both have buildings which hug the valley sides in similar ways, the house at Cragside is by far the greater building, of course, but it is striking how similar the side elevation of the Banqueting House is to it, as if Armstrong was trying out ideas at Jesmond Dene that he carried further at Cragside….

So that's the way I like to think about the Dene – as a beautiful, immensely original garden, one of the greatest urban gardens in the country. It gave birth, of course, to an even greater garden at Cragside but it remains hugely significant in its own right.

JOHN GRUNDY FOJD, Historian and Author

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be on Sunday, 21st May 2023 at 14.00 hrs at Millfield Café courtesy of the Risi family.

Prior to the AGM, members will be sent the agenda and minutes of the last meeting (2022). Officers will need to be elected for the following posts

| | |
|---|---|
| Chair | current Clive Gerrard |
| Treasurer | current Jacki Holmes |
| Secretary | current acting – Yvonne Shannon |

Current committee members: Geoffrey Carter, Susan Lord, John Blakemore, John Telfer, Sandra Grant; Jack White is the co-opted representatives from Urban Green Newcastle.

Geoffrey Carter is our Independent examiner for the annual accounts.

Patron: - **John Grundy**

**Thank you** to all our members for the donations and subscriptions, with your help The FOJD have been able to fund projects to help maintain and improve the Dene.

***It is very important that more people join the committee so we can safeguard the future of the FOJD.***

***If you have any proposals for the officer posts, or want to become a Committee member please email: friends.of.jesmond.dene@gmail.com***

**The next AGM will be 21st May 2023.**

# THE BANQUETING HALL AND ITS HYDRAULIC ORGAN PART 3

This is the third and concluding article about the water-powered organ which once entertained Sir William Armstrong's guests in his banqueting hall. In part 1 I described some of the events, both charitable and social, at which it was played, and the second article described how the organ was powered using water from a specially constructed reservoir at Paddy Freemans. This time we will look at the organ itself and see what is known about its fate.

The original banqueting hall was designed by John Dobson and was completed in the summer of 1862. This consisted only of the main hall, which is the roofless ruin that we see today, plus some service rooms to the north, parts of which later became the gardener's house. It was a single-story complex that was accessed via the nearby bridge over the Ouseburn.

Sir William did not place an order for the organ until March of the following year, so it may not have been part of his original plan for the building. He chose William Hill and Son of London to construct his organ. Hill and Son were one of the foremost organ builders of the time and had constructed organs for many of the country's cathedrals and churches including York Minster and King's College Cambridge. Hill's Estimate Book for the period has survived and it shows that Armstrong specified two manuals (keyboards) and seven stops and it was to be cased in deal-stained wood. It would cost £325 (equivalent to £47,000 today) and had to be complete and installed by May 31st 1863.

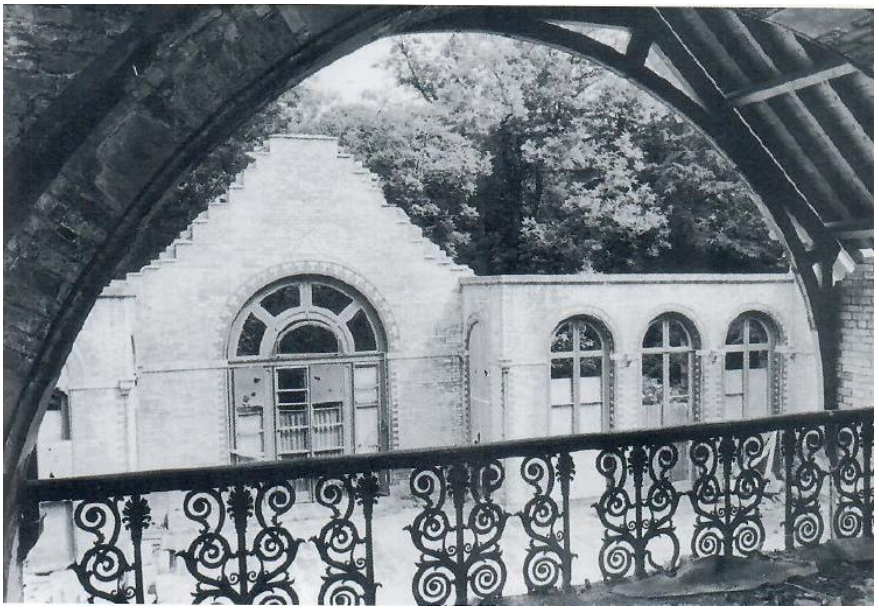
The banqueting hall was rectangular in shape with two alcoves or transepts mid-way along the longer walls, and the organ was installed at ground level in the west transept.

Sir William must have been happy with his organ because he entrusted the same company to build very similar organs for All Saints Church at Rothbury in 1866, for Brinkburn Priory in 1867, and for St Stephen's Church in Elswick in 1868. He paid in full for the organs at Brinkburn and Elswick, while he and the rector jointly paid for the Rothbury organ. The organs at Rothbury and Brinkburn are still in use today. The Brinkburn organ is virtually unaltered except for the conversion from manual to electric blowing in 1965. The Rothbury organ was completely restored in 2016.

In 1870, the Banqueting Hall was extended, and the additions included a large reception hall to the west side of the original hall, as well as a gatehouse to enable access from Jesmond Dene Road. A vestibule linked the banqueting hall and the new reception hall, and an organ loft was built over the vestibule. This arrangement enabled the organ and organist to be seen from both the banqueting hall and the reception room. The extensions were designed by Norman Shaw, who at this time was also designing the extensions to Sir William's country retreat at Cragside.

The organ was completely re-built and enlarged prior to being moved into the organ loft. Additions included 9 more stops, including a trumpet stop, and an extra swell pedal. The bellows were to be below the stairs. These modifications cost a further £280. As described in Part 1, the original organ was used for several charitable events and to entertain Sir William's guests at sumptuous banquets in the years immediately following its installation in 1863.

However, there are very few reports of its use by Sir William after it was moved into the loft in 1870. This was because it was at this time that Armstrong was taking less interest in his properties at Jesmond as he developed his new country home at Cragside near Rothbury.



View from the organ loft down to the banqueting hall after the roof was removed in the 1970s

Once Cragside was complete he preferred to entertain his important visitors there, so the Banqueting Hall and its surrounding pleasure garden became largely superfluous to requirements. So, in 1883 Sir William gifted Jesmond Dene, including the Hall and its contents, to the city.

The official opening of the Dene occurred in August of the following year and the ceremony was conducted in the Banqueting Hall by the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) amid much pomp and speech making. This occasion was undoubtedly most prestigious occasion at which the organ was played. The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle reported *About one o'clock loud cheering outside and the booming of cannon heralded the approach of the procession, and a few minutes' later the organ pealed forth "God bless the Prince of Wales*". And after the ceremony *"God save the Queen" was played on the organ as Their Royal Highnesses traversed the great hall to the north door, where their carriage waited.*

So from 1883 the organ was the responsibility of the council. The minutes of the Parks Sub-Committee record their efforts to maintain the organ from that time. In 1899 they insured the instrument for £250, so they clearly considered it to be an asset. They had it tuned every year, and it was given a complete overhaul in 1923 and again in 1927 as the pipes were very dirty. They also cleared the weeds from the reservoir up in Paddy Freemans every year.

In 1905 the council had decided that organisations that hired the Banqueting Hall (at a cost of two guineas) should pay an extra 5/- (25p) for the use of the organ, and this fee continued to be levied into the late 1920s. In 1925 the Church of Divine Unity hired the hall and organ for their services while their church was being renovated. So the organ was used regularly for the first 50 years in the council's care but the first evidence of its decline, in both its use and condition, came in January 1938 when the members of the parks sub-committee voted 4 to 3 against paying £79 to repair the organ. They asked the City Engineer how often it was used and he reported that it had been hired on only 12 occasions in the previous four years. The committee asked Blackett and Howden, a local organ building company, to carry out a detailed survey. The report said that the organ had been greatly neglected owing to lack of use. It was out of tune and very dirty although general tone was good. Immediate repairs would cost £41 but they estimated it would cost £465 (equivalent to £38,000 today) to re-voice the reeds and bring it up to date. The committee then decided to inspect the organ. It is not known whether the inspection took place but no repairs were carried out, and a few months' later the Banqueting Hall was requisitioned by the military at the start of WWII.

The Banqueting Hall was returned to the council's care in 1945 but it seems that the organ was never used or hired out after the war, although it was playable at least until around 1960. Pauline Brider, who lived in the gardener's cottage mentioned earlier, and whose father worked in the Dene and the Hall, was a child at this time and she remembers him playing the organ for pleasure. She added that to her young ears it 'sounded in good voice'. She used to have the run of the hall during the 1950s, and she and her friend often went up to the balcony and pretended to play it! She says the organ was very large with some of the pipes being around 15 feet in height, extending from the floor to the ceiling.

Photograph of The Organ in 1962

In 1962, a Mr Dowden of North Shields offered to repair the organ free of charge if he was allowed to play it. He said that it was in a shocking condition but that it was not beyond repair. Although the parks committee accepted his offer, it appears that it came to nothing. The accompanying photograph of the organ was taken at that time.

In 1972 the Newcastle Journal reported that *the mighty organ is not working any more and half the works are in the gent's.* Many of the statues and paintings mysteriously disappeared from the building at about this time, and it seems that the same happened to the organ as there are now no traces of it anywhere in the building.

So the magnificent organ which had entertained thousands over many years, including numerous guests at charity events, many world-famous scientists at their annual meeting, and a future king and queen, has sadly disappeared without trace.

JOHN TELFER FOJD john.a.telfer@btinternet.com

# JESMOND DEAN AFTER ARMSTRONG

John North writes :-

Call it serendipity, but earlier this year and quite by chance I came across the following advert placed 115 years ago in a local newspaper.

**Newcastle Daily Chronicle 28th December 1907.**

**Jesmond Dene. Newcastle-upon-Tyne.-** *To be let. Furnished, for such term as may be agreed upon, the very desirable residence of Jesmond Dene with its out-buildings, gardens and grounds. The house, which is within two miles of the Central Station and a short distance from the Osborne Road and Jesmond Road trams, and is most pleasantly situated in its own grounds, with carriage drive and Gatekeeper's Lodge, contains, in addition to its entrance hall, three public rooms, ten bed and dressing rooms, ten or eleven servants' rooms, (with separate staircase), two bathrooms, kitchen, servants' hall, silver and linen closets, and other usual conveniences, and is heated by hot water. Outside there are extensive glass houses, (including conservatory and orchard house) and horse and carriage accommodation, besides a motor garage and pit, with chauffeur's room behind. The grounds are well timbered and are sufficient for privacy and enjoyment, while the kitchen garden, at a short distance, contains a vinery and other glass houses, and is productive and convenient. – Further particulars may be obtained from Messrs. Dees and Thompson, Solicitors, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. View by card only to be obtained from them.*

This property could only have been the former Jesmond home of Lord and Lady Armstrong. Friends of Jesmond Dene may recall a piece I wrote in the Spring newsletter of 2020 about "Jesmond Dean", Lord and Lady Armstrong's home above the west side of Jesmond Dene. In it I explored, inter alia, the question of how the house had come to be known to some by the confusing name of "Jesmond Dean". At other times it was known as Jesmond Hall, Jesmond Dene Hall and Jesmond Dene (as in the above advertisement).

Before we consider the advert let us take a step back. "Jesmond Dean" was the home of William and Margaret Armstrong (they had no children) from around the time of their marriage in 1835 through to the 1870s when they began the transition to their fabulous hillside home at Cragside near Rothbury. They were at Jesmond Dean (called Jesmond Hall) in the census of 1881 but two years later the couple departed Newcastle for Cragside. Their Jesmond home was not handed to the City along with Jesmond Dene itself, but was retained as a town house until Lord Armstrong's death aged 90 in December 1900. Ownership of the house then passed to his great-nephew William Watson-Armstrong. It was probably rented out from soon after that time.

Reading the above advertisement was not quite the equivalent of stout Cortez first staring at the Pacific Ocean from a peak in Darien, but it was definitely up there in the foothills. For this advert gave the fullest description I had come across of Lord Armstrong's former home.

It is clear from the advertisement that this is a substantial property. Not only does it have 23 main rooms, there are well-timbered grounds with gardens, outbuildings, glass houses and a vinery. A carriage drive leads to a gatekeeper's lodge. [NB a stone-built lodge, one of the gate lodges for Jesmond Dean, remains at the junction of Lindisfarne Road and Jesmond Dene Road]. Horse and carriage accommodation was to be expected in a property of this size, but the hot water heating advertised was a luxury in that era. A sign of the times was the motor garage and pit, with a chauffeur's room nearby. I am fairly sure this would not have been there in Armstrong's time. The chauffeur would have been not only a driver but also a mechanic responsible for the upkeep of the engine and for carrying out routine repairs. The pit would have been in the floor of the garage allowing access for maintenance and repairs.

A newspaper report I read refers to the "rich profusion of floral and arboreal delights" to be found in the grounds. What the advert doesn't say, but would have been clear to anyone visiting the property, is that the grounds provided facilities for a range of "lawn games". This is made clear from the newspaper accounts of activities at "Jesmond Dean" during the Great War and later.

In the census of 1911, the house, now called Jesmond Dene Hall, was occupied (rented) by 48-year-old Robert Ecles. With him were his wife Kate, young daughter and six servants. The Hall was recorded as having 23 rooms. A chauffeur and kennelman lived in the next cottage. I cannot be sure that Robert Ecles had taken the tenancy in response to the advert of December 1907. However he was listed living there in a trade directory of 1910, so it seems likely he had moved there early in 1908.

Robert Ecles was a self-employed consulting engineer and naval architect with his company office in Queen Street, Newcastle. He was a Director and board member of a number of local companies. He was also actively involved in local civic affairs. In particular throughout the 1914-18 war he was President of the Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce Military Committee and was on the "Recreation, Comforts and Gifts Committee" of the 1st Northern General Hospital (see below). In these capacities he regularly offered the grounds of his home as a venue for garden parties and entertainments for wounded soldiers.

The first such event reported in the local press was on August 4th, 1915. Not coincidentally, I suspect, August 4th 1915 was the first anniversary of Britain's declaration of war on Germany. "120 wounded men" from the "Northumberland War Hospital* in Gosforth" were entertained "in their beautiful grounds". The "wounded men" could participate in games of cricket, tennis and quoits, all provided within the grounds of the Hall. Press reports discreetly make no mention of soldiers who were physically unable to take part. In addition to these activities an open-air performance was given by members of the "This Is Your Life" revue company which was currently appearing at the Hippodrome Theatre (this had opened in Northumberland Road in 1912 and closed in 1933).

*In 1915 civilian patients from St Nicholas' Hospital in Gosforth were transferred to other mental hospitals in the North East. St Nicholas was then converted and rebranded "Northumberland War Hospital" and was used to treat, in total, c.25,000 injured and wounded soldiers. In their blue uniforms they became a familiar sight around Gosforth.

A succession of similar garden parties were held, not all at Jesmond Dene Hall, throughout the war years. One was reported at Jesmond Dene Hall on June 8th 1916, just three weeks before the infamous Somme offensive. The event was attended by 125 men from Armstrong College Hospital. The college had been requisitioned by the government as an emergency hospital to be known as the 1st Northern General Hospital. Its proximity to the Royal Victoria Infirmary and access to their medical and surgical facilities would have been crucial.
More than 41,000 servicemen were treated in the hospital throughout the duration of the war. The College buildings were not used for teaching purposes again until October 1919, almost a year after the war ended, when the College received its first intake of ex-servicemen.

Another garden party was held at Jesmond Dene Hall on July 20th 1917. As well as cricket and quoits, football and a "hat-trimming competition"(?!) "were indulged in" reported both the Newcastle Journal and Newcastle Daily Chronicle. The men were entertained throughout that afternoon by the band of the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers.

One guest at the above garden party was Second Lieutenant Harry S Ecles, the 19-year-old son of Robert and Kate Ecles. He had enlisted with the Royal Field Artillery. Three months later there is a report of his being admitted for a short period to Catterick Military Hospital suffering from "trench fever". The wartime efforts of Robert and Kate Ecles were clearly motivated by personal concerns as well as by their patriotic instincts. Harry Ecles survived the war and in the 1921 census is listed as an officer serving with the Royal Field Artillery.

Newspaper reports show the Ecles family still living at Jesmond Dene Hall in December 1918. By 1921 however they had moved to Lanchester, County Durham where Robert Ecles died in 1928.

In July 1920 the Newcastle Journal reported, intriguingly, that Fenwick's (our much loved department store) had secured the use of the Hall for staff accommodation. It was anticipated that 40 female staff would live there with a matron in charge. It did not quite work out like that however. Jesmond Dene Hall was listed in the 1921 census, as a staff residence for JJ Fenwick Ltd and was indeed providing boarding accommodation, though only for 10 women. These women were all single and, though mostly from the North East, came from across the country. Examples included a costume buyer, a dress making fitter, a milliner and a ribbons buyer. Also in residence were five staff employed by Fenwick's who worked permanently at the Hall i.e. as housekeeper, cook and house maids.

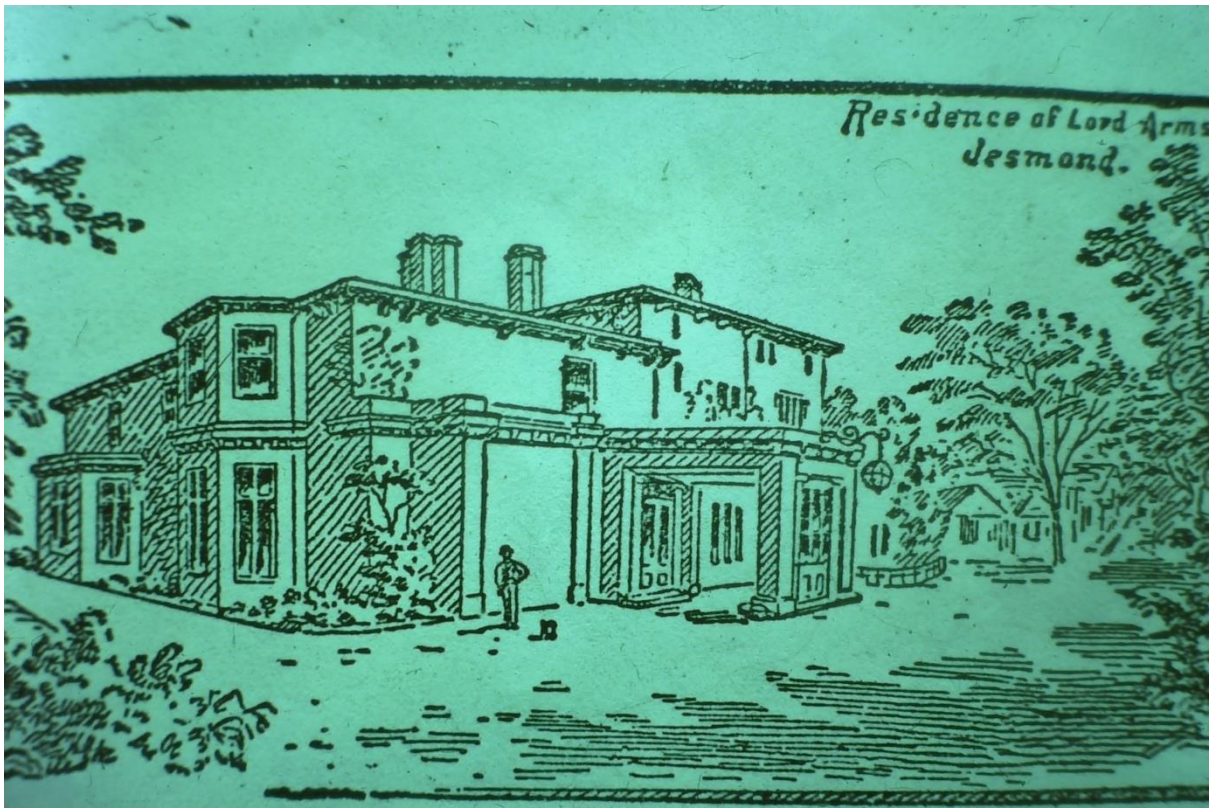
By 1922 the Fenwick's staff had departed. Quite likely the huge costs of renting, running and maintaining the Hall did not find favour with the thrifty Methodist traditions of the store.

Jesmond Dene Hall was next tenanted by the splendidly monikered Glanville Reah, a mining engineer in his mid-forties. He had moved from Graham Park Road in Gosforth where he was both a magistrate and a local councillor. Press reports show him to have been the manager of the Burradon and Cox Lodge Coal Company which included, for example, Hazelrigge Colliery. He lived at the Hall (ie the former Jesmond Dean) for around five years with his wife, two daughters and domestic staff. By October 1928, however, he was back living in the more modest circumstances of Graham Park Road. In that month the Newcastle

Journal reported that he had appeared at a bankruptcy hearing in London. “Living beyond his means” was one reason given for his indebtedness. His estate was placed in the hands of the Official Receiver. For Glanville Reah to continue living at Jesmond Dene Hall was now clearly out of the question. In the 1930s he moved to Hexham where he died in 1947.

By 1930, however, the Hall was no longer listed in street directories. It was almost 100 years old and was very likely in need of modernisation and refurbishment. Instead the land was sold for development and the Hall was soon demolished. By the mid-1930s the area which now straddles Glastonbury Grove in Jesmond was being laid out.

A sketch of Jesmond Dean is reproduced below. Two stone gateposts remain, now part of a wall on Jesmond Dene Road. On the west side of Glastonbury Grove towards its (now closed) junction with Jesmond Dene Road, can be seen two pairs of houses built of stone up to the first floor. This stone was recycled following the demolition of Jesmond Dean. It is all that is left of the house that had been the home of one of Newcastle’s most able and distinguished citizens and which played a part in Newcastle’s history for three decades after Lord Armstrong’s death.




JOHN NORTH FOJD and Newcastle City Guide

**Dawn Chorus** nature walk. (Part of Jesmond Community Festival)

Saturday 13th[th] May 2023 Come with us in Jesmond Dene to birdwatch and listen to the wonderful early chorus of diverse birds living in the Dene. Bring binoculars if you have them. Stout shoes are advisable. **Please note. we Start at 4.30 am** for approximately 2 hours, meeting at the Information Centre Jesmond Dene. **There will be no facilities available. i.e., Toilets.**
No charge, although donations to FOJD welcome. Places are limited to 12 so Book at friends.of.jesmond.dene@gmail.com

**Heaton Park Walk** (Part of Jesmond Community Festival)

Saturday 3rd June 2023 at 11.30 am. Meet at Heaton Park Pavilion https://what3words.com/frost.loops.these Heaton Park was once the garden of the impressive Heaton Hall. (now a 'lost' house).
Come with us to hear about and, see the sites of 'Mines, A Temple, Bears and much more!'.
No charge, although donations to FOJD welcome.
Book at friends.of.jesmond.dene@gmail.com

**'The Royal Route'** guided walk by Friends of Jesmond Dene.

Sunday 21st August 2023. Come with us and follow the route taken by the Prince and Princess of Wales on this day in 1884 when they officially opened the parks. Starting from Heaton Park and finishing in Jesmond Dene. Stout shoes are advisable. Meet at the Main gates at 11.00 am in Heaton Park near the junction of Warwick Road and Heaton Park Road - What3Words: https://what3words.com/gifted.party.hood The walk will last about 2 hours. No charge, although donations to FOJD welcome. please book via friends.of.jesmond.dene@gmail.com

YVONNE SHANNON FOJD

# THE RSPB BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Many of you will have participated in The Big Garden Birdwatch on the weekend of 28th January. 18 species were spotted in the Dene and are detailed below.

List of birds seen in Jesmond Dene, from the Outdoor Classroom ,as part of the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch. Jay, Robin, Blue Tit, Wren, Kingfisher, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Long-tailed Tit, Blackbird, Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Magpie, Redwing, Grey Wagtail, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Bullfinch.

PETER WEIGHILL (RSPB)

# St. BERNADETTES SCHOOL GROUP

**The Outdoor Classroom** was in use again during February when 70 children (year 1 and year 2) from St. Bernadette's School in Wallsend came to engage in 'nature' activities and visit the Dene. Rachel Faichnie from Urban Green with support from colleagues Malcolm and Ed did a great job in organising the activities. UG volunteers including some FOJD members also helped with the event. One little one found a newt –

Which was safely returned to its habitat without harm after being observed. A variety of small creatures i.e. a ladybird, woodlice, worms and snails were inspected with great interest by the children.

YVONNE SHANNON FOJD

**Winter tasks performed by Jesmond Dene Volunteer Rangers (2023)**

Since the end of the Covid lockdown a small group of four volunteer rangers have continued working together, and that team has carried out whatever work is required by the Rangers. Our team meets every Tuesday and Friday morning. There are separate volunteer sessions on a Wednesday morning run on a more casual basis for anyone who wishes to volunteer. There are several tasks that our group carries out:-

**Litter Picking**

Whenever we are going somewhere to work in the Dene one of us takes a black bag and some litter pickers so that we can pick up any litter we see on the way. Also, after sunny bank holidays we might do a litter pick in the areas where people have picnics. The worst thing is when we find a lot of discarded glass bottles as they are a pain to lug around.

**Leaf blowing and path clearing**

We had several sessions with the leaf blowers clearing the paths in Jesmond Dene, Armstrong Park and Heaton Park. When the trees start to drop it's difficult to keep up with the shower of leaves. In addition to the leaf blowing, we spent time shovelling leaves and mud from the sides of various paths.

**Fallen and diseased trees**

High winds can a lot of damage and bring down of trees in the parks, blocking footpaths and damaging fences. We don't have access to chainsaws and so have to rely on the rangers to chainsaw the larger stuff, but we can use bow saws and loppers to cut branches into small enough pieces to be able to dispose of them.

**Mending fences**

Jesmond Dene contains a large amount of wooden fencing, most of which was installed many years ago. Unfortunately the wooden supports eventually rot so that the fences keel over or are susceptible to vandalism. In places where the fences are above a steep drop it is important that they are promptly replaced. This is easier said than done, as the original fence supports have usually been concreted in, and to insert a new support into the concrete socket it is necessary to chisel or drill the old support out. (See before and after pictures)

Before

After

**Mending steps**
We recently had a couple of sessions repairing the steps leading up to Jesmond Park View. The steps had got into a bad condition with loose and missing slabs. We had great fun mixing cement, replacing the missing slabs and filling in gaps (See picture)

**Removing fly-tipped rubbish**
We recently had a session in the closed-off area across the river from Fisherman's Lodge where members of the public had been accessing and leaving large amounts of rubbish. We had to access the area from Jesmond Dene Road down a steep bank and use a rope to haul bags of rubbish up to the road above. We managed to collect a truck-full of rubbish.

**The Nature Area**
The Nature Area is across the river from Pet's Corner. There is a leak in the large dipping pond which we hope to sort out. We are currently trying to keep the area reasonably tidy. We recently had a couple of sessions where we wheeled barrows of chippings across from the Pet's Corner compound and freshened up the footpaths in the Nature Area.

**Walbottle and Throckley Dene**
We recently had a trip to Walbottle and Throckley Dene (first time there) to do some rhododendron clearing. The Rangers had arranged to have a tree-planting session in which a group of people were invited to plant tree whips. We attended and removed several groups of rhododendron to leave more room for the tree planting.

**Hedge Trimming and cutting back**
We occasionally have to trim hedges either in the Dene or Heaton Park. We do this with powered hedge trimmers or loppers. We then have to find somewhere to dispose of the cuttings; easier said than done. We have also spent time cutting back encroaching undergrowth from the edges of several paths.

**Clearing areas for crocuses**
We spent a couple of sessions up at the picnic area clearing away dead leaves from patches of ground where crocuses were due to flower.

**Tidying up the children's playground**
We spent a session weeding the children's play area next to Pet's Corner and applying fresh chippings under the swing.

**Collecting holly for wreath-making**
We spent a session collecting holly to be used in wreath-making sessions before Christmas. We looked for holly that had plenty of berries. Some of the trees in Millfield House garden were ideal.

DAVE POSTE FOJD and Volunteer Ranger

Please see up to date activities and events:-

**FOJD**
Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/757773184342507/
Web https://www.jesmonddene.org.uk/
**Urban Green**
Facebook https://www.facebook.com/urbangreenncl/
Web https://urbangreennewcastle.org/

# FRIENDS OF JESMOND DENE COMMITTEE LIST

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| **Patron** | **John Grundy** |
| **Chair** | Clive Gerrard |
| **Treasurer** | Jacki Holmes |
| **Secretary** | Vacant post – acting Yvonne Shannon |
| **Members** | Geoffrey Carter, John Blakemore, John Telfer, Sandra Grant |
| **Membership Sec.** | Susan Lord |
| **Newsletter** | Yvonne Shannon |

Urban Green Representative Jack White@urbangreennewcastle.org

**Webmaster** Carlton Reid https://www.jesmonddene.org.uk/

**Next Newsletter contributions or any other queries to: -**
Friends of Jesmond Dene, c/o Ouseburn Parks Visitor Centre, Millfield House, Red Walk, Jesmond Dene, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7BQ or email as above.

Subscriptions are set at a flat rate of £5 p.a. for households, paid by standing order. Our Membership Secretary is available if you need help or advice on how to join - contact **Susan Lord**, at membership.fojd@gmail.com or, FOJD at the address above. To set up the standing order you will need the bank details for the Friends bank - The Sort Code is **30 93 55** The Account Number is **01464356**. Would you also please ask to assign a payment reference of your own full name (forename and surname) so that we can correctly identify your payment.

**To join the FOJD** contact **Susan Lord**, at the above address or membership.fojd@gmail.com

**To join the Jesmond Dene Volunteer Rangers** please contact:
Volunteering and Engagement Coordinator volunteer@urbangreennewcastle.org .

Reg Charity no: 702260 Web: https://www.jesmonddene.org.uk/
Postal address: 'Friends of Jesmond Dene', c/o Ouseburn Parks' Visitor Centre, Red Walk, Jesmond Dene, Newcastle, NE7 7BQ.