



# CHERRYBURN TIMES

*The Newsletter of The Bewick Society*

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Photograph by courtesy of Anderson and Garland

## A NEW PORTRAIT OF THOMAS BEWICK

We celebrate our first issue in colour with this newly discovered portrait by an unknown artist. It is a copy of the well known Ramsay portrait, which we reproduce on the back page with the story of the discovery.

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# A Bewick Grail?

By David Gardner-Medwin

For two years or more I have been questing for a Bewick grail – an illustration of his cottage on the Forth. He lived there with his family for 30 very happy years and it seems unlikely that he never drew or engraved it when so many of his vignettes and other engravings show cottages that at least approximate to his childhood home at Cherryburn. We can spot Cherryburn in these images because we know what it actually looked like from annotated drawings, such as John Bewick's of 1781, and of course from early photographs as well as the present appearance of the building. The cot on the Forth was demolished in the 1840s. Surely someone must have recorded it?

When the medieval town of Newcastle and its 13th century walls were largely demolished in the 1830s-50s, there were those who protested or sadly busied themselves with recording what was to be lost. Many of the resulting drawings and paintings, and a few very early photographs, are now to be found in local archives, particularly the collection of the Society of Antiquaries in the Northumberland Record Office. One wonderful example that I have only recently discovered is in the uncatalogued archives of the Robinson Library at the University of Newcastle. The Richardson family of artists were among the most diligent of the 'recorders' and George Bouchier Richardson (nephew of Thomas Miles Richardson, senior) compiled a superb album of his own and his uncle's drawings and watercolours of the town walls, before and during their destruction, an important and much neglected historical resource. Bewick's cot on the Forth was within yards of the wall, so surely ... but no, there are views from his long-neglected garden, views past his back door, but none of the cottage.



Barbara Liddell's bookplate (courtesy of Gateshead Public Library) showing the cottage on the right, just to the left of the spire of St Nicholas.

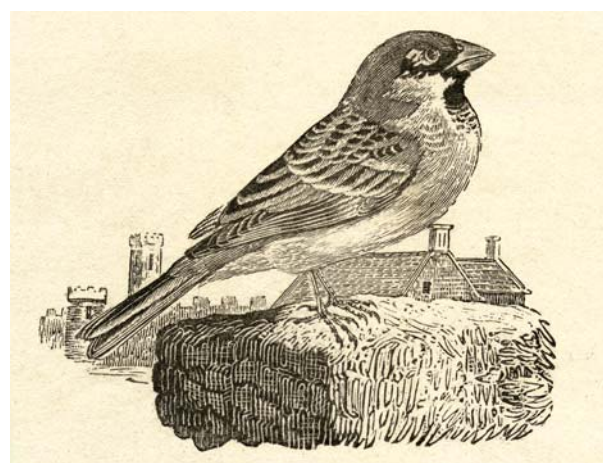
Another recent discovery (for me) was a wood engraving, surely from Thomas Bewick's hand, of Newcastle and Elswick colliery as seen from Gateshead, not unlike the familiar one of an oak tree or the vignette on the title page of the *Water Birds*. There is a beautiful impression of it in the (again neglected) album of Bewickiana collected by Thomas Bell, the land agent and collector, now in Gateshead Public Library. I am grateful

to Iain Bain for pointing out to me that Nigel Tattersfield's *Bookplates* (1999, p.161) reveals the image as the bookplate engraved in 1822 for Miss Barbara Liddell of Dockwray Square, North Shields. In it, Newcastle is represented by the castle keep, the spire of St Nicholas, the town wall – and a single cottage of two gables, placed on the Forth, just where the cot ought to be.



The cottage, town wall, St Nicholas and the Castle, magnified (with keels in the foreground).

Now, obviously one gabled cottage looks much like another, and Bewick is well known to have used his imagination and memory pretty indiscriminately when it came to architectural accuracy in his vignettes. But consider. By 1822 he had lived for ten years in Back Lane, Gateshead, with a clear and doubtless hypnotically interesting view back across the river to his old home. Memory here would have needed no assistance from imagination, even by candle-light on a dark February night. Bewick must have known that cottage perfectly in every detail: why should he invent one? Consider too, how similar a cottage by the wall appears in the engraving of the House Sparrow in the *History of British Birds*.



The House Sparrow, with a similar cottage near the town wall

No historian could possibly claim that these images were of the cot on the Forth, only that, with reasonable likelihood, they may have been; and that they provide us with a first clue as we move to the next phase of the quest – to find some evidence. Is anybody out there sitting on the evidence, please?

# A Bewick Society Trip to the Farne Islands with the National Trust

On 3rd July last year a party of Bewick Society members joined a National Trust staff trip to the Farne Islands as a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the publication of Thomas Bewick's second volume of *British Birds*, the one dealing with water birds. We were well aware that Bewick himself had never made the trip, so we fancied ourselves in some way as observers and recorders making a few small footnotes to the *Waterbirds*. We set off at 5pm, spending about two hours on both Inner Farne and Staple Island, this last by special dispensation of the National Trust, which owns and manages the islands. The weather was pretty much 'hoods up' much of the time, but the rain did hold off when we got ashore. We show here a very small selection of the photographs taken that day. It will be noticed that in the main we were rather more interested in the wildlife than the people.



One of the boats setting off from Seahouses harbour in squally rain for the short journey to the low-lying Islands visible on the near horizon to the left



Grey seals basking and stirring as we get closer to shore - a few took to the water to get a better view of us



Shag and chick silhouetted against the clearing sky as we approached to land. According to the Farne Islands website, more than 1200 pairs of shags live here.



Guillemots and chicks. There are 19,000 pairs - the second most numerous of the twenty or so species at home here.



A defensive mother shag.



Puffins in front of their burrows. There are about 35,000 pairs of puffins on the islands, making them by far the most numerous inhabitants.



Arctic Tern coming in to land. There are 1300 pairs in residence, but it is a species not distinguished from the Common Tern by Bewick in the *Waterbirds*.

We arrived back at Seahouses shortly after 7.30pm and repaired to a local fish and chip restaurant for a fresh fish supper, which had been pre-ordered for the whole group. And a good time was had by all!

# JANE BEWICK'S JAUNT TO THE LAKE DISTRICT IN 1836

By David Gardner-Medwin



Figure 1. Albany Hancock and Miss Bewick at an unidentified cottage, possibly at Workington. Or is it in the South of England?

I used to enjoy visiting the second hand bookshops near the British Museum, but in recent years they have become fewer, more exotic or weird, or in some cases have mutated into print shops. So last month, I tried a print shop and asked whether they had any Bewick engravings. They had not, 'but, one moment, we do have some watercolours, something to do with "Miss Bewick", wasn't she an artist too?' 'Not as far as I know', I thought, but asked to have a look. Seven rather amateurish pencil and watercolour drawings appeared. The artist's initials were MJH, which the shop had speculated might stand for M. J. Hawke, and several were annotated 'On tour with Miss Bewick, 1836'. The initials were familiar for I had recently been through the Natural History Society of Northumbria's collection of watercolours by Mary Jane Hancock for a small temporary exhibition at the society's Hancock Museum in Newcastle. The paintings were undoubtedly hers. Any doubt was dispelled by finding on one of them (figure 1) a note that the two figures in the distance were 'Albany H. and Miss Bewick'. Mary Hancock's four brothers were Thomas, Albany and John and William. Thomas took over the family's hardware business; Albany (after training as a lawyer) and John became distinguished naturalists and it was to Albany's memory that John dedicated the museum that he devoted the last years of his life to creating. Its name celebrates both brothers. Albany's drawings of

marine invertebrates were superb. John was a tolerably good artist too, and a magnificent taxidermist. Mary's watercolours were more modest, and generally of greater historical interest for the scenes they depicted than artistic distinction. She was the eldest of the family and spent much of her life housekeeping for Albany and John (all three were unmarried) and supporting them in their work.

The connections between the Hancocks and Thomas Bewick were briefly discussed in a note in *Cherryburn Times* in 2002 (Volume 4, Number 2). The Hancock parents did business with the Beilby and Bewick workshop (dog collars engraved for Hancock were a specially frequent item in the Cash Books). Bewick probably bought his house in Gateshead, in 1812, through the agency of the Hancock firm. Young John Hancock certainly sat at the feet of the elderly Bewick and discussed ornithology with him, and perhaps engraving too, and of course he assisted Robert Elliot Bewick in editing the 1847 edition of *British Birds*. There is a wonderful Hancock family photograph album (NEWHM:1996.H58) in the Museum, in which among scores of others, tragically few of them labelled by name, two photographs of Thomas's daughter Isabella Bewick have recently been discovered, one taken by Mr Piper in the 1850s or 60s and the other at the end of her life by 'Gray and Bulman, Photographers' (of Gateshead), in about 1881.

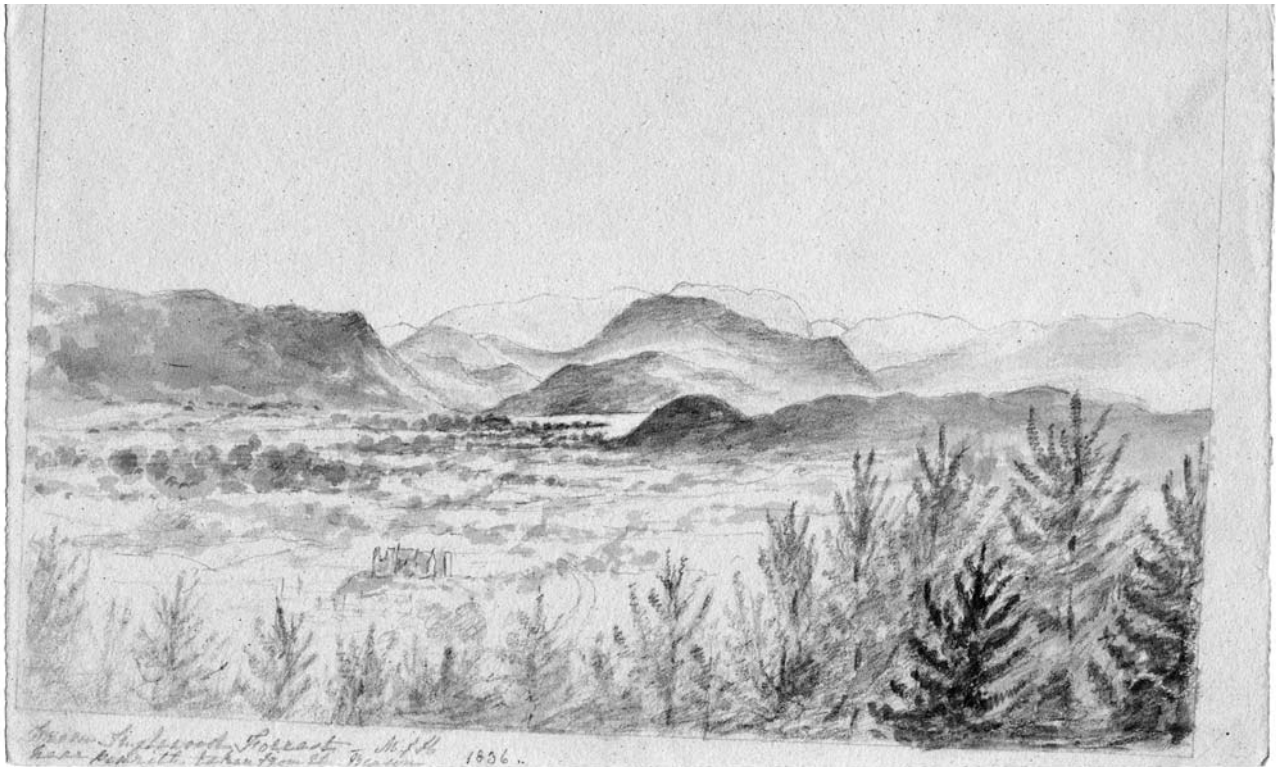


Figure 2. Penrith Castle, with Ullswater in the distance 'From Inglewood Forrest' 1836. Pencil and ink wash drawing by M J Hancock.

Clearly, then, the friendship between the Bewick and Hancock families continued for at least seventy years. Yet, Mary's pencil and watercolour drawings provide evidence of a completely new aspect of this. As far as I know, no other record of the 1836 tour has been reported. Three paintings show Brougham Castle, near Penrith and a fourth is a pencilled view 'From Inglewood Forrest [sic] near Penrith taken from the Beacon', showing Penrith Castle in the middle distance and beyond it the end of Ullswater and the mountains (figure 2). There is one of Patterdale (from the east), and a pencil drawing of 'Miss Cowper's Cottage, Ambleside 1836. MJH. (where Miss Bewick & MJH lodged)' (figure 3).

The seventh, more finished, watercolour of a rustic thatched house overlooking a rural valley, with Albany in a stove pipe hat and Miss Bewick in a poke bonnet, and a couple of cows grazing in the foreground, has a title that is difficult to read but may be 'Workington' (figures 1 and 1a).



Figure 1a: Initials MJH and illegible placename.

It cannot be assumed that this painting was contemporary with the other six since it is undated, the paper is different and the architecture seems very unlike the vernacular of Cumberland. If the house could be recognised, that might provide a clue. Does anyone know it by sight? The point is important because this is the only one of the paintings to mention Albany.

The Penrith and Patterdale drawings are on blue-grey or brown wove sketching paper, the others on two different ivory wove papers of better quality. There are no exact dates but the colouring of the foliage suggests high summer. On most of the drawings the notes are partly in an untidy hand, evidently contemporary with the drawing

and always including the artist's initials. Some neater notes were evidently written later from the way they have been fitted in. All the mentions but one of the date, 1836, and all of Miss Bewick are in this neater hand. In the note about Miss Cowper's cottage, quoted above, the part in brackets is in the later neater hand, and the initials MJH do appear to be sufficiently alike in both instances to make it possible that the neat writing was also Mary's but added later in more comfortable circumstances.

It would be difficult to glean much more from the pictures or notes, but the evidence is enough to give us some idea of the season and route, and of the three travellers, Jane Bewick and Mary and Albany Hancock (if indeed Albany was with them in Cumberland). They evidently stayed long enough in Penrith to climb Beacon Hill and visit Brougham Castle, long enough in Patterdale to walk across the valley to the east, and we know exactly where they stayed in Ambleside. Workington is not easy to reach from Ambleside (or Penrith) and there must have been some special reason for the party to go there, if indeed they did; perhaps there was a special friend or relative they wanted to visit. Several of the drawings are of some potential interest as illustrations of the topography of the day, particularly perhaps the one of Ambleside. But that is a subject for a different study.

That summer Jane would have been 49, Mary 32 and Albany 29. It is pleasing but fruitless to speculate on who took the initiative in proposing the journey and who chose the route. Presumably they travelled by the public coaches for we have no evidence that either family at any stage owned their own vehicle. Sixty years earlier, Thomas Bewick had walked to Cumbria on his way to Scotland and had spent a week visiting his mother's family in Ainstable, during which he explored Kirkoswald and Armathwaite, and afterwards Penrith and Carlisle. It is tempting to



Figure 3. 'Miss Cowper's cottage, Ambleside 1836'. Pencil drawing by M J Hancock.

suggest that Jane, custodian of her father's *Memoir*, may have taken the opportunity to see Ainstable for herself and perhaps some of her cousins in that area. Albany Hancock by this date had given up the law and had busied himself in the foundation and early work of the Natural History Society, but was barely on the threshold of his life's main work on the molluscs and other invertebrates; it was in 1836 that his first published paper appeared (on a rare marine fish, *Raniceps trifurcatus*, on the Northumberland coast), the earliest of seventy-four he published by 1871. In this frame of mind, no doubt he recorded and perhaps sketched the wildlife he saw on the tour of the Lakes, but no trace of such a record is known. His biographer, Professor Denis Embleton, described Albany as 'modest and unassuming'. 'No one could be long in his genial company without feeling that he was in the presence of a superior person . . . Naturally mild, grave, and contemplative he was courteous, sensitive, and somewhat diffident.' 'He delighted in beautiful and tasteful combinations of form and colour, and was a great admirer and good critic of poetry and the Fine Arts generally.' It is easy to imagine that Jane Bewick, a thoughtful conversationalist and lover of poetry herself, would have enjoyed the company of this young man on their tour.

To change the subject slightly, the faintly sketched, distant figure of Jane Bewick in Figure 1 is earlier than any other known image of her. She is significantly taller than Albany (Audubon described all the Bewick sisters as tall in his *Journal* in 1827). In 1852 Josiah Gilbert drew the earliest portrait of Jane, the whereabouts of which is



Figure 4. Photograph of a missing portrait of Jane Bewick by Josiah Gilbert (courtesy of Iain Bain).

now unknown. She herself praised it as a good likeness. Figure 3 is an early, possibly 19th century, photograph of the missing portrait. Does anyone know where the original may be?

## A collection of Bewick letters for Newcastle

A large and varied new collection of Bewick letters has recently arrived in the Tyne & Wear Archives in Newcastle. There are seventeen draft letters from Thomas Bewick to such correspondents as Ralph Beilby, Henry Hole (former apprentice), Sir John and Walter Claverley Trevelyan, William Lubbock (bookbinder), George Townsend Fox, and Longmans the booksellers. There are 83 letters to Bewick from friends such as Christopher Gregson and William Bulmer, apprentices and their parents (including several from Hole), many booksellers, William Davison of Alnwick, William Nicholson and J.A. Kidd the portraitists, and importantly one from the secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts [etc] dated 4 January 1776 – the year in which Bewick won the seven guinea prize from the Society. In addition, there are half-a-dozen letters to Jane and Robert Bewick and two to Ralph Beilby (one of them from Charles Hutton).

The letters are a most significant new research resource to be added to the already extensive Bewick collections in the Archives. They originate with the Ward family who were the residual legatees under the will of Thomas Bewick's last surviving daughter, Isabella. Iain Bain has played a major part in the negotiations for their acquisition. Readers may like to refer to the article in *Cherryburn Times*, Vol. 4 No. 1, dated Spring 2001, entitled 'Iain Bain on Thomas Bewick's Letters'. It summarises the Spence Watson Lecture given at the Newcastle upon Tyne Literary and Philosophical Society in the previous November.

Like so many treasures, these days, these new letters come at a price – based on a formal valuation. The money has still not been fully raised, so the Society's committee has agreed to make a contribution of up to £1000 if the whole sum has not been found before the 31st of March. If any members of the Society would like to make personal donations towards the purchase these would be most welcome and should be channelled via the Society's treasurer, Dr Peter Quinn at 22 Moor Crescent, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 2LD (cheques payable to The Bewick Society, please).

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## A new Bewick website

Readers are, we hope, already familiar with the website organised by the Bewick Society which is to be found at [www.bewicksociety.org](http://www.bewicksociety.org) We are pleased and excited to note that Sarah Walter has created a new website for Tyne and Wear Museums called 'Discovering Bewick'. The 'url' for this is [www.twmuseums.org.uk/discoveringbewick](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/discoveringbewick) The first page offers a search facility through which, for example, you could enter the word 'portrait' to find eleven portraits of Bewick which you might like to compare with the two featured on pages one and eight of this *Cherryburn Times*.

## Programme of Events for Spring / Summer 2005

### June 9th, 2005: Bewick Society Annual General Meeting.

After the meeting Jenny Uglow, biographer of Hogarth and author of *The Lunar Men*, has kindly agreed to give us a talk entitled 'Biographical Puzzles,' when she will discuss the challenges and delights of tackling a life of Bewick.

*Venue:* The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle, 23, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.

*Date and time:* 9th June at 6.00 (AGM) for 6.30 (lecture).

### June 25th, 2005: Visit the Chillingham Cattle!

Following the success of the meeting last year when we visited the Farne Islands on the 200th anniversary of the publication of Bewick's *Water Birds*, we hope this year to give *Quadrupeds* their turn and visit the Chillingham Cattle.

*Venue:* Meet at 1.45pm at the entrance to the Chillingham Estate. A map will be included in the next *CT* in June.

### August 14th 2005: Bewick birthday celebrations at Cherryburn, by kind invitation of the National Trust.

An occasion to gather and celebrate Bewick's birthday. 'In August 1753 I was born' states Bewick in his Memoir, but gives no date. Some biographers believed that he was born on the 10th or 11th of August, but the 12th was the date he always celebrated.

*Date and time:* Sunday, 14th August from 1pm - 5.30pm

*Venue:* Cherryburn, Station Road, Mickley Square, near Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7DD.

*Admission:* Admission charges apply. National Trust and Bewick Society members free on production of a valid card.

*Location:* As above.

## Other Bewick Related Events and Exhibitions, not organized by the Society

### April 4th –May 1st 2005: Pease Collection Exhibition.

An exhibition of items from John Pease's renowned collection of Bewick material can be viewed in the foyer display area of the City Library, Newcastle upon Tyne. This will be the last opportunity to view items before they go into storage owing to the building of the new library.

### Friday 15th April 2005: Carving Wood, Carving Sound.

The Avison Society has kindly organised a joint meeting with the Bewick Society as one of their special events to coincide with the Bewick exhibition at the City Library in April. Pavlo Beznosiuk, leader of the Avison Ensemble, will talk about the development of the violin bow followed by music from the Ensemble. There will be a short talk on Thomas Bewick's engraving techniques and tools. This will be followed by a wine reception.

*Venue:* Newcastle City Library, Newcastle upon Tyne.

*Date and time:* Friday 15th April at 6.30 – 9.00pm.

*Admission:* Avison & Bewick Society members £5, Non-members £6.

Tickets available from The City Information Service, Newcastle Central Library. Telephone 0191 277 4109.

# A New Portrait for Cherryburn

by June Holmes

The Museum at Cherryburn is now the proud owner of an interesting early 19th century portrait of Thomas Bewick recently acquired by the National Trust for display in the newly renovated exhibition room.

The oil painting came to light during the exhibition 'The Many Faces of Bewick' held at the Hancock Museum in 2003. A visitor to the exhibition had approached June Holmes, the curator of the exhibition, and said he had a painting of Bewick in his collection identical to one of the portraits on display.

Sad to relate, the gentleman, who had lived at Felton Park in Northumberland, died before a visit to see the portrait could be arranged. In October 2004 it was sent to the local auction house of Anderson & Garland in Newcastle for the Christmas sale taking place in December. When John Anderson was approached, he was extremely helpful, allowing June Holmes and Dr David Gardner-Medwin a preview of the portrait in order to establish its authenticity and to give their opinion.

The portrait (740 x 620mm in a carved gilt frame) was indeed a contemporary copy of one of the most famous images of Bewick painted by James Ramsay in 1815 when the sitter was 62. The original portrait, given to Bewick's wife in 1820 by the artist, now forms part of the Bewick family portrait collection held by the Natural History Society of Northumbria at the Hancock Museum.

Comparing the two portraits, the copy is almost identical in aspect and posture, clothing details, colouring, and background (including the books), but in some details the appearance of the face is changed, looking younger and more rounded than in Ramsay's original.

Although not painted by Ramsay, there is no label or signature to give a clue to the artist; it is a good copy of the original and it raises the question of when it was copied. The original Ramsay remained with the Bewick family from 1820 until it was deposited with the Natural History Society in 1884 and there is no evidence that it was copied then. Bewick in his correspondence often recorded the various artists busy with the many paintings and engravings of him but this reproduction of the 1815 Ramsay is not mentioned. A copy made during the years it

was exhibited in the artist's studio and at various exhibitions would be more likely, but for whom? Research indicates that the growing fame of Bewick had spawned a whole industry in the taking of his image for his many admirers and collectors and it was most probably painted to sell to a local enthusiast.

It had apparently remained in Northumberland; on the stretcher is the label of John Hay and Son, Carvers and

Gilders, Dealers in Works of Art, 30 Grainger Street, Newcastle upon Tyne.' Under this name of John Hay and Son, the firm appeared in the Newcastle directories between 1869 and 1884. The painting's last owner had been an antique dealer but any earlier provenance has sadly been lost with his death.

The National Trust successfully bid for the painting at the auction and, whatever the outcome of further art-historical research, have obtained a fascinating, hitherto unknown portrait of Bewick to grace the walls of his birthplace.

The research into the images of Thomas

Bewick continues and June Holmes will be publishing a catalogue containing every known portrait, drawing and engraving of Bewick, his family and some of the apprentices known to date, in the *Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumbria* later in the year. June had thought that after all her research for 'The Many Faces of Bewick' exhibition there were no more stories to tell, but more portraits have emerged and we are wondering now how many more are out there. If any reader of this account could offer further enlightenment on this portrait, please communicate with June Holmes at the Hancock Museum, Newcastle.

In addition to being officers of the Bewick Society, June Holmes and Dr David Gardner-Medwin are officers of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, Hancock Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT.



Detail of the Ramsay portrait, given here for comparison with the new portrait on page 1.  
Photo by Ian McKie, courtesy of the Natural History Society of Northumbria

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