

SESSION 8 – FOOD AND DRINK

FARMING: 18th CENTURY IMPROVEMENTS

The Border countryside around Berwick had been devastated by centuries of Anglo-Scottish warfare.

As peace finally came to the Borderlands, Northumberland had moved from being an agricultural backwater to one of the most advanced counties in the forefront of the Agricultural Revolution.

Improved farming methods, better breeds of animals and new types of crops had been introduced during the 18th century.

Enclosure and improvement of land previously considered unsuitable for regular farming had radically changed the landscape of north Northumberland and Berwickshire with thousands of miles of hedges and a patchwork of farms and fields.

PICTURE – SMALL'S SCOTCH SWING PLOUGH

In 1763, James Small of Blackadder Mount, near Allanton in Berwickshire began making ploughs and other agricultural implements, including the first plough with a cast-iron plough-share.

Small's design developed into the “Scotch Swing Plough”, which was constructed to make it easier for the ploughman to swing the plough into the next furrow.

Horses continued to provide the motive power for ploughs throughout the Victorian period, though steam engines began to be used on some larger farms in the second half of the 19th century.

PICTURE – STEAM PLOUGHING 1862

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the landscapes of Northumberland were changed through the efforts of improvers like John Grey of Milfield, John Baillie of Chillingham, and John and Matthew Culley at Fenton and Fowberry. Farmers visited the area to learn the latest agricultural methods.

These improvements included the introduction of crops such as white and Swedish turnips. Swedes, or rutabagas, are still known locally as “bagies”.

Growing crops like turnips improved the quality of the land and provided winter fodder for sheep and cattle, allowing larger and fatter breeds of livestock to be developed. Turnips were grown to feed animals rather than humans.

PICTURE OF SEED DRILL

In the early 18th century, Jethro Tull had demonstrated the advantages of mechanical sowing of turnip seeds in rows, or drills, rather than by broad-casting.

The invention of advanced horse-drawn drills in the early 19th century made it possible to sow bone or other manure together with the seeds. This was known as the “Northumberland method”.

PICTURE OF TURNIP CUTTER

Lifting and cutting off the tops of the turnips, or “shawing”, was one of the most laborious tasks usually carried out by women workers. The turnips were then chopped into pieces to provide winter feed for the sheep in the winter and early spring. The cutting was carried out by hand until mechanical turnip cutters were invented in Victorian times.

PICTURE – SAMUELSON’S REAPING MACHINE

Traditionally, the harvest of grain was cut by bands of reapers, or “shearers” using sickles and scythes.

In 1826, the first British mechanical reaping machine was made by the Rev. Patrick Bell of Angus.

An improved version of Bell’s machine, manufactured by Crosskill's of London, was shown at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and reaping machines were soon being made by companies throughout the country, such as Samuelson's of Banbury and Brigham and Bickerton of Tweedmouth.

**TRIAL OF REAPING MACHINES - An interesting trial of reaping machines took place on Thursday week, on the farm of E. Henderson, Esq., Lowick, near Beal Station. Although late in the season, there was a large attendance of the first class farmers of North Northumberland. There were seven machines in the field, viz., three by Samuelson of Banbury, three by Brigham and Bickerton of Tweedmouth, and one by Gardener and Lindsay of Stirling. Two of the machines were self-delivering, and on those the greater part of the attention was directed. One of them, by Samuelson, appeared very ingenious, and did its work exceedingly well, eliciting the praise of all present. The delivery is effected by means of six self-setting rakes and the corn is laid in sheaves. A machine, which delivered in swathes, by Brigham and Bickerton, also appeared to work very well, and one of Samuelson's combined reapers and mowers worked well both on corn and grass. After the trial, a dinner was provided by Mr. Taylor, Blue Bell Inn, Lowick.
*Berwick Journal, 5th October 1861***

PHOTO – STACK YARD

The grain was cut just before it became ripe and gathered in sheaves that were set up as stooks in the field.

It was taken then to the stack-yard to complete the ripening process and then the grain was separated from the chaff in a thrashing, or threshing barn.

PICTURE – HORSE THRESHING MILL

Until well into the 19th century, thrashing-machines were powered by horses turning, through a system of gears, a large wheel in a round building attached to the thrashing-barn. These wheel-houses were known as gin-gangs in Northumberland.

PHOTO – GIN GANG AT FLODDEN

Mechanisation brought a rise in industrial injuries at harvest time.

ACCIDENT - On Wednesday forenoon, Mr. John Cowe, Spring Gardens, was thrashing corn at Mr. Douglas's machine in the Greenses. After breakfast the workmen returned to the work, Mr. Cowe feeding to the machine. Unknown to any of those engaged in the work, Mr. Cowe's son, six years of age, had at that time been looking among the machinery, and when it was put in motion he was caught among the wheels. The machine gave a jerk, and as it had not been going well in the morning, Mr. Cowe turned to look at the wheels, when he found that his son had become fixed among the wheels and was in a very dangerous position. The unfortunate child was extricated, and was found to be severely cut and bruised about the face and hands, part of one of his fingers being taken off. The assistance of Dr. MacLagan was called in, under whose treatment the sufferer now lies, and is progressing towards recovery.

Berwick Advertiser, 27th August 1864

PHOTO – STEAM THRASHING AT EYEMOUTH

The use of steam became increasingly common and the abundance of coal in Northumberland resulted in there being more steam-powered thrashing machines in the county in the mid-19th century than in any other part of the country. The chimneys of some of the old engine-houses can be seen on farms in the area today.

PHOTO – CHESWICK FARM

VICTORIAN FARMING

By the beginning of Victoria's reign, Britain had suffered a quarter of a century of depression in farming that continued until about 1850.

Many skilled farm workers emigrated to Australia or Canada. For example, on 29th May 1837, the "Cornelius" sailed from Berwick with some 150 emigrants, bound for New Brunswick, Canada. Amongst them was John Grieg, a farm labourer from Wooler, his wife Mary, their two sons and three daughters, and shepherd William Grieve, a shepherd from Whittingham, his pregnant wife Eleanor and their seven children.

The farm labourers' "betters" sometimes expressed concern that emigration may lead to the corruption of the simple folk of the Cheviots and the Tweed Valley:

WOOLER HIGH MARKET - We understand the hinds were all quickly hired, and that a number of farmers are still in want of hands. This class of men are not so numerous as they were a few years since; emigration has thinned them considerably, besides many of them have removed to Newcastle and other manufacturing districts where they obtain better wages than they receive in agricultural employment. We have however some reason to suppose that their morals are far from improved by the change. Their simple and natural mode of life so highly conducive to the improvement of the health and heart, renders them easily led away by bad example, too much of which abounds in more populous districts.

Berwick Advertiser, 16th March 1839

PHOTO HINDS AND BONDAGERS AT LOWICK

A method of hiring existed in Northumberland and the Borders called the "bondage system" by which a labourer, or "hind", was engaged on a year's "bond" on condition that he provided a female worker, or "bondager".

The hind was provided with a cottage and a plot of land where he could graze some cattle and sheep, and grow potatoes to feed himself and his bondager, with any surplus being sold for cash. He was paid mainly in kind, but the bondager received daily wages in cash according to the season.

POTATOES

PHOTO – SORTING POTATOES

Potatoes were a staple part of the diet by Victorian times but, in 1845 and several successive years, a devastating potato blight caused immense loss of crops throughout Britain.

HOLY ISLAND - Until last week we hoped that the disease with which the potatoes were last year affected would on the Island be very partial this season: we are sorry, however, to be obliged to state otherwise. During the dense fogs of last week the disease made its appearance in every plot of potatoes on the Island and so rapid is its progress that plots which a few days ago looked perfectly healthy present now the appearance of blackened and decayed stems. In many instances the disease had even already reached the tubers. Where it will end we know not.

Berwick Advertiser, 15th August 1846

By the 1850s, the worst effects of the blight were beginning to fade away and the new railways were carrying great quantities of potatoes from the area to feed the growing towns.

THE DEMAND FOR POTATOES – The transport of potatoes at present going on from this district for the London market is immense, and if they are consumed as rapidly as appearances indicate, the disease will find itself forestalled. Every day for the past week long trains of trucks laden with potatoes have passed along the North British Railway, the supply being procured at almost all stations between this and Edinburgh, and even as far as Aberdeen. On Saturday evening the longest train probably that ever passed along the North British Railway passed this for the south. It consisted of seventy four trucks laden chiefly with potatoes, each truck containing about four tons. It was propelled by two engines.

Berwick Advertiser, 22nd October 1853

PICTURE OF HIND'S COTTAGE

The farm labourer's accommodation was often very basic, though some enlightened estate owners were building more suitable cottages for their workers.

THE HIND'S COTTAGE - They have to bring everything with them - partitions, window-frames, fixtures of all kinds, grate and a substitute for ceiling - for they are, as I have already called them, mere sheds. They have no byre for their cows, no sties for their pigs, no pumps or wells, nothing to promote cleanliness or comfort. The average size of these sheds is about 24 by 16 feet. They are dark and unwholesome. The windows do not open, and many of them are not larger than 20 inches by 16. And into this space are crowded eight, ten, and even twelve persons. How they lie down to rest, how they can preserve common decency, how unutterable horrors are avoided, is beyond all conception. The case is aggravated when there as a young woman to be lodged in this confined space, who is not a member of the family, but is hired to do the field work, for which every hind is bound to provide a female."

"Peasantry of the Border", Rev. Dr. W. S. Gilly, 1841

At the end of his year's contract the hind would usually move on rather than re-engage with his master. By seeking a different employer each year, the hind took with him the best practice he had gained from his previous engagements.

This annual move was known as "flitting".

THE FARMING YEAR

PICTURE – PLOUGH MONDAY

The farming year was marked by traditional customs, beginning on Plough Monday, which was celebrated on the first Monday after Twelfth Night.

The local farm workers would process through their village with a gaily decorated "fool plough", collecting money for the village poor or for the ploughmen to spend in the local pub.

In Northumberland, Plough Monday processions were often accompanied by sword-dancers and mummers, or "guizards", who performed a play in which "Bess", played by a youth dressed as an old woman, representing the spirit of fertility, was "thrashed to death" then brought back to life again to symbolise the regrowth of the new season.

The custom had died out in Northumberland by the mid-19th century.

The season's first cut straw was used to make the "corn dolly" or "kern baby", in which the corn spirit was supposed to reside.

Traditionally, the dolly was kept in the house until the following Spring, then ploughed into the first furrow of the new season, on Plough Monday.

The tradition of the kern baby continued into the 20th century in the Northumberland village of Whalton.

PICTURE - HARVEST HOME

To celebrate the completion of the harvest, the last cart-load of grain was led home by a horse decorated with bells, ribbons and flowers.

When all the crops had been safely gathered in, the farmers treated the workers and their families to a "harvest home" or "kirm" with supper, dancing and entertainment, held in a decorated barn.

HARVEST HOME - Mr. Gillie, farmer, East Ord, having completed harvest work upon his farm, entertained his servants, to the number of about seventy, to a "harvest home" on Thursday night, in the barn, which was gaily decorated for the occasion. Mrs. Gillie provided an ample supply of spice loaf and tea, to which all did full justice, after which dancing commenced to the inspiring strains of two violin players from Tweedmouth. During the night other beverages were served, and the hilarity was kept up with unabated vigour till an advanced hour the following morning.

Berwick Advertiser, 15th September 1865

HARVEST TIME

At the height of the harvest, farmers relied on Irish, Scottish and other "stranger" workers to supplement the local workforce.

DUNSE - At the port (market) held here Monday morning last, there was a fair attendance of reapers, principally Irish, and a good many masters present. As the demand was expected to be great £1 per week with victuals was asked but the farmers were not inclined to give so high a sum. Both parties kept haggling from 5 o'clock until the forenoon, Pat insisting upon £1 and the farmers offering 18s. At last the boys sat themselves down in rows in front of the Townhall and commenced giving song in right Irish fashion - the farmers in the mean time retiring from the market to the front of the White Swan Hotel. What hiring ultimately took place was at 18s per week.

Berwick Advertiser, 22nd August 1846

PICTURE - HARVEST BEER ADVERT

One benefit for the agricultural workers was the harvest ale that was given them by the farmers to quench their thirst in the fields.

THE BORDER BREWERY COMPANY begs to inform the FARMERS of the District that the Price of their HARVEST BEER is 24s per Barrel of 36 Gallons.

Berwick & Kelso Warder, 18th August 1841

THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY

From about 1850, British farming enjoyed two decades of prosperity, stimulated by a rapidly growing population and expansion of the railways that linked the rural areas with the industrial regions.

Competition from imported foreign produce resulted in another agricultural depression from the 1870s into the early 20th century.

By 1900, migration from the countryside and mechanisation on the farms had greatly reduced the number of people working in agriculture.

FEMALES AND FARM WORK - A writer in the "Newcastle Chronicle" says:- In many districts in the North of England the scarcity of female workers has been a source of embarrassment to farmers for several years. With each successive season the dearth of this class of labour becomes more marked, especially in the localities adjacent to large towns. The explanation, of course, is that now-a-days young women prefer genteel employment, such as is found in the shop and office, or in dressmaker's establishments. In quiet rural districts, where domestic service is almost the only occupation open to women, they refuse to work in the fields, even for wages which are a considerable advance upon those paid a few years ago. Formerly the bondager system, under which every hind undertook to supply one or more women workers, was a great advantage to many agriculturalists. In most localities, however, that system is almost obsolete.

Berwick Advertiser, 10th March 1899

VICTORIAN ANIMAL BREEDS AND GROWTH OF LIVESTOCK SHOWS

By the beginning of Victoria's reign, improved methods of breeding and fattening livestock had doubled the weight of animals sold in the local livestock markets.

FAT OX – A very large short-horn ox, bred and fed by Mr. Thos Smith of Goswick, has been exhibited during the week in Mr. Kell's yard in Bridge Street previous to being sent off to London for exhibition before the Directors of the English Agricultural Society. The animal is computed, according to measurement, to weigh 180 stones, exclusive of offal. He is six years old in April ensuing. His dimensions are as follows:- Height at shoulder 6 feet: from top of shoulder to rump 6 feet 8 inches; girth, behind the shoulders, 10 feet 3 inches.

Berwick Advertiser, 20th February 1841

THE GREAT SHOW

PICTURE – THE GREAT SHOW

The 19th century saw the rise of local and county agricultural shows, which were an important influence in spreading good farming practice. The most prestigious to take place in Berwick was the Great Show held in 1841, by the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland.

THE GREAT SHOW, THURSDAY 1st October 1841

By 5 o'clock in the morning, which fortunately was a fine one, the Show Yard presented a most lively and animated appearance.

The Leicester sheep were truly splendid, and in number exceeded anything of the kind ever produced, while the hardy Cheviots vied in size and symmetry with the favoured flocks of the more cultivated places.

The short horns were noted for their size and fineness of touch, the Highlanders and crosses for their adaptation to almost every situation of soil and climate, while the pigs had been improved by judicious treatment and selection.

From the noble bull, to which was awarded the munificent sum of one hundred sovereigns down to the little tenants of the temporary piggeries, and up again to the majestic Horse in the departments suited to the plough, the race-course and the hunting field.

In the list of competitors again the premiums varied from the noble Duke of the palace to the industrious tenants of the cottage, each striving against the other with burning zeal and each, we are proud to say, emulating the other in the march of improvement, comfort and contentment.

The Show yard was open from 10 o'clock to visitors paying 2s 6d for admission; but from about mid-day to the time of closing, when the entrance money was 1s, an incessant influx may be said to have peopled its ample bounds.

Berwick & Kelso Warder, 2nd October 1841

BUTCHERS

PHOTO – ROSS'S BUTCHERS

Meat from the prize animals exhibited at the Great Show was soon being sold by local butchers.

CHRISTMAS BEEF - WILLIAM WIGHTMAN, Butcher, Wooler and ALEXANDER WIGHTMAN, Butcher, Belford beg to inform their numerous Customers and the Public generally that they have purchased from Colonel Landers, Fenwick Steads, three very superior WEST KYLOES, 6 years old, two of which gained a premium at the late Highland Society's Show at Berwick, and calculated to weigh from 90 to 100 stones each - which they will offer for sale at their respective shops in Belford on Tuesday 14th December, and at Wooler on Thursday the 16th December, and at each of the above places on the first week of January 1842.

Berwick Advertiser, 27th November 1841

The two main cattle breeds found in Northumberland in the Victorian period were Shorthorns, which had been developed from the Durham cattle, and West Kyloes, originally from the West Highlands of Scotland.

PHOTO – WILLIAM SHIEL DODS WITH PRIZE SHORTHORN/CHILLINGHAM CROSS

This animal, proudly exhibited by William Shiel Dods, butcher of Berwick, came from the Tankerville Estates. It was cross-bred between a shorthorn and a wild white Chillingham bull and was supplied to Sandringham for Queen Victoria.

SHEEP

PHOTO – LILBURN'S PRIDE LEICESTERS

Mutton from sheep over 2 years of age, rather than lamb, was eaten by all social classes in Victorian times.

The Cheviot was the breed associated traditionally with North Northumberland.

In the Scottish Borders, it was the Blackfaced sheep that had provided the mainstay of flocks since the 16th century.

During the 18th century, Robert Bakewell developed an improved, fast-growing breed of sheep on his estate at Dishley Grange, Leicestershire.

Two Northumbrian brothers, George and Matthew Culley, visited Bakewell at Dishley and, in 1787, they introduced New Leicesters to their farm at West Fenton in Glendale.

The Leicesters were inter-bred with hardy Cheviots and Teeswater sheep to produce the Border Leicester.

The growing popularity of livestock shows in the Victorian period encouraged the introduction of other sheep breeds to the area such as the Southdown, which originated in Sussex and produced particularly tender meat.

Local auctioneers gave the full sales pitch to encourage local farmers to invest in these new breeds.

MR. GOODMAN'S SOUTHDOWNS - On Thursday the 3rd instant, Mr. Samuel Donkins submitted about 120 of the celebrated Chevington Southdowns to public competition. Mr. Goodman having entertained the company to lunch after his wonted elegant style, and unequivocal proofs having been given of the perfect agreement between 40 years old port, the finest Madeira, and the most delicious Southdown mutton, the auction commenced with the most spirited bidding, evincing a growing anxiety to test the merits of a breed of sheep which is now attracting very general attention. *Berwick Advertiser, 12th September 1846*

COTTAGE PIGS

PHOTO – PIG KILLING AT MIDDLETON

Until quite recently, pigs were commonly kept by rural families and cottagers living in towns throughout the country. Even the lighthouse keepers on the Farne Islands had pigsties attached to their cottages.

Pigs ate domestic leftovers and waste from the gardens. Rural cottagers often grew a strip of barley to finish their pigs in autumn, and the barley residue from the malting and brewing industries was also used to supplement the pigs' diet.

It may seem gruesome, but the pig-killing was a prominent feature in the family's year. The work was carried out in the winter months by a local butcher, often in return for a share of the carcass.

The pig was left to hang and drain for a day, then it was cut up and every bit was used (except the “squeak”!).

The main cuts from the pig were cured in salt or brine.

Legs and sometimes shoulders produced the ham, while bacon and salt pork came from the belly and loin.

Blood was turned into black pudding, offal into faggots and intestines were used in chitterlings and sausages.

The head meat was boiled off to make brawn, cheeks were used for bath chaps, and trotters were lightly salted and boiled.

The fat was much prized and considered healthy. It was rendered as lard for eating or for cooking, leaving the crispy rind, or “scratchings”.

GUANO, BONES AND MANURES

PICTURE – GUANO ADVERT

A new form of fertiliser had been exhibited for the first time in Berwick at the Great Show held by the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland in 1841, and was advertised in the Berwick & Kelso Warmer of 25th September 1841.

GUANO

The SUBSCRIBERS having been appointed Agents for the Sale of this new and powerful MANURE, intend showing a Sample at the Great Agricultural Meeting on the 30th, when they will distribute printed circulars, descriptive of its introduction, application, etc., and will be glad to receive orders for delivery in October.

BANKS AND SON, Haddington

This exciting product was guano, or bird droppings and it was soon being imported to Berwick from Peru, Africa, and Western Australia.

PICTURE – JOHNSON & CO BONE MILL

Around the time that guano began to be imported it was discovered that fertilisers could be produced by the action of sulphuric acid on powdered phosphates.

At first, these new "manures" were made from animal bones, many of which were brought by sea from the Continent. Johnson and Company established a mill at Ord where bones were dissolved in tanks of sulphuric acid imported from Newcastle.

MANURES

Johnson & Co. Have on Sale and ready for Delivery at Ord Bone Mill

DISSOLVED BONES - SPECIAL MANURES – SUPERPHOSPHATES -

BONE DUST - SULPHATE OF AMMONIA - NITRATE OF SODA - SULPHURIC ACID

PHOTO – FACTORIES AT SPITTAL POINT

In the 1860s, factories were built at Spittal Point to produce fertilisers from animal bones, rock sulphate and potash imported from Norway, Prussia and North Africa, pyrites from Spain, as well as guano.

MANURES

CROSSMAN & PAULIN having lately erected WORKS at SPITTAL have now the undermentioned MANURES in Stock, and ready for delivery, either at the Works or at their Warehouses in Berwick

DISSOLVED BONES

SUPERPHOSPHATES from Bone Ash or Mineral Phosphates

SPECIAL MANURES manufactured for Cereals or Root Crops as ordered

BONE DUST

NITRATE OF SODA

MURIATE OF POTASH

ICHABOE GUANO

PHOSPHATIC GUANO

SULPHURIC ACID

AGRICULTURAL SALT, &c.

Berwick Journal, 17th April 1868

Herring guts were used to make fish and blood manure.

MALTINGS

PHOTO – TWEED DOCK MALTINGS

In the 19th century, several firms of maltsters became established in Berwick and sold their product throughout the United Kingdom.

Perhaps the best known company was founded by James Parker Simpson, an Alnwick corn merchant who built his first maltings in Alnwick in 1872.

Simpson acquired his first maltings in Berwick in 1888.

In 1902, the company built a new maltings at Tweed Dock, Tweedmouth to facilitate the export of malt to Ireland. At that time, Guinness took almost a third of the company's production. That huge maltingS burned down in 1930.

Malting begins with steeping the barley grains, or 'berries' in water. They are then spread for several days on the malting floor with air circulating to allow germination. The grains are turned regularly. The barley is then heated and dried in a kiln to stop the sprouting and reduce the moisture content.

Malting converts starch in the grain to sugar, which feeds the yeast in the brewing or distilling process to produce alcohol.

One ton of malt makes 14,000 pints of beer or 400 litres of 60% alcohol.

The town's malting tradition continues at Simpson's in Tweedmouth.

BREWING AND PUBLIC HOUSES

PHOTO – BORDER BREWERY - OLD

In the Middle Ages, brewing was literally a cottage industry, and was often an occupation of women. At that time, all brewing and selling of ale was regulated by the Guild of Berwick.

The Guild regulations ordered that “No woman shall sell ale, from Easter to Michaelmas, at dearer than twopence a gallon; nor, from Michaelmas to Easter, at more than a penny. And the names of the ale-wives shall be registered.”

The Guild records also show that ale was made from oats, as well as barley.

In the 19th century, the growth of woollen-mill towns like Galashiels, Hawick and Selkirk provided a ready market and Berwick became a centre of the brewing industry.

Fuller's 1799 'History of Berwick' mentions the Tweedmouth brewery of Sibbit, Dickson & Co., which later became part of the Border Brewery Company that also had premises in Silver Street in Berwick. The complex of 18th and early 19th century buildings of the old Border Brewery stand at the junction of Brewery Lane and Brewery Bank in Tweedmouth. They include drying sheds, a malt kiln, cooper's workshop and a building with a wagon entrance in the gable end onto Brewery Lane.

The Border Brewery also owned premises in Silver Street in Berwick and the rival Tweed Brewery of Johnson & Darling Ltd. was located at the former Governor's House in Palace Green.

In 1841, there were 57 licensed public houses in Berwick, 15 in Tweedmouth and 9 in Spittal, many of them tied houses that belonged to the brewery companies.

MILLING

Historically, there were flour mills located close to the Castle and at New Mills where the Whiteadder joins the Tweed. These were, of course, water-powered, like the mill still operating at Heatherslaw. There were also several windmills in the town; one on the site of the Lions House gave the name to Mill Mount or Windmill Bastion, and another stood between Castlegate and the Tweed at a spot known as Windmill Hole.

By the end of the 10th century, steam was replacing water-power and the old mills were being converted or sold off.

Borough of Berwick-on-Tweed - TO BE LET for the Term of 12 years from the 11th November next

ALL that WATER CORN MILL on the River Whiteadder within the said Borough known as "New Mills", together with the dwelling house, cottages, and other buildings, and 18 acres or thereabouts of land, as presently occupied by the representatives of the late Mr./ James Hay. The Mill consists of Three Water Wheels, Two pairs of French Hurl Stones, Two pairs of Grey Stones, Three Harley Mills, Drying Kiln and other machines for carrying on a large business.

Berwick Advertiser, 9th September 1887

BAKING

Even in the mid-19th century, the comparative qualities of white and wholemeal bread were understood by campaigners concerned to improve the national diet, especially for the poorer classes. White bread was considered by many to be purer and of higher quality, but the whiteness was often achieved by adding ingredients that were far from beneficial.

WHITE & BROWN BREAD - Mistaken notions respecting the quality of different sorts of bread have given rise to much waste.

The general belief is that bread made with the finest flour is the best, and that the whiteness is the proof of this quality; but both these opinions are popular errors.

The whiteness may be, and generally is, communicated by alum, to the injury of the consumer; and it is known by men of science that the bread of unrefined flour will sustain life, while that made with the refined will not.

Keep a man on brown bread and water, and he will live and enjoy good health; give him white bread and water only, and he will gradually sicken and die.

The meal of which the first is made contains all the ingredients essential to the composition of nourishment of the various structures composing our bodies. Some of these ingredients are removed by the miller in his efforts to please the public; so that the flour, instead of being better than the meal, is the least nourishing; and to make the case worse, it is also the most difficult of digestion.

The loss is, therefore, in all respects, a waste; and it seems desirable that the admirers of white bread (and especially the poor) should be made acquainted with these truths, and brought to enquire whether they do not purchase at too dear a rate the privilege of indulging in the use of it. The unwise preference given so universally to white bread led to the pernicious practice of mixing alum with the flour, and this again to all sorts of adulteration and impositions: for it enables bakers, who were so disposed, by adding more and more alum, to make bread made from the flour of an inferior grain, look like the best or the most costly, and to dispose of it accordingly, at once defrauding the purchaser, and tampering with his health.

Berwick Advertiser, 23rd May 1846

VEGETARIANISM

PICTURE – GRAND SHOW OF PRIZE VEGETARIANS

It has to be said that the Victorian attitude to vegetarianism was a little less well-informed than we consider it today!

MARKETS AND SHOPS

The market rights and tolls in Berwick were founded on the Charter of 30th April 1604, and confirmed by Act of Parliament in the following year. The Charter gave the market rights, lands and other rights to the Freemen.

The arrangements and charges for stallholders were recorded in the Berwick Journal of 20th September, 1888:

In the Exchange, poultry, butter, and eggs are sold every Saturday. There is no charge for poultry or butter, but for every 30 eggs there is a toll of one egg collected by the beadle. One penny weekly is paid by stallholders in the streets, the revenue from this source being something like 3s 6d per week. Fish stalls in High0street pay nothing. I don't know why poultry and butter are privileged. It has always been the custom.

The Treasurer: A pig market may be held in front of the Townhall every week, and for which no charge can be made. The Townhall belongs to the freemen. Shops have been built under the Townhall, in what used to be butchers' stalls. One shop – a fish dealer's – pays £4 rent; the others pay £3 10s on leases of 15 years, the shops being fitted up by the people themselves. The total revenue from the shops is £14 a year.

Unlike today, the availability of fresh produce depended on the season

BERWICK MARKET - Green pease were for the first time this season exposed for sale in our market on Saturday last, and sold for 2s a forpitt. Cherries and strawberries also have now made their appearance.

Berwick Advertiser, 14th July 1838

At the end of the 1830s, seasonal fruit and vegetables were being brought to Berwick by the new steamships

LOCAL NEWS - On Wednesday last a large quantity of green peas and gooseberries were imported by the Glenalbyn steamer from Hull, and were exposed for sale in our market, the former at 6d and the latter at 5d per forpitt.

Berwick Advertiser, 13th July 1839

SHOPS

A well-known local fish merchant moved into Bridge Street in the 1850s.

Ralph Holmes begs to inform the inhabitants of Berwick and its vicinity that he has opened that old established shop recently occupied by Mr. Ralph Smith, fishmonger, in Bridge Street, Berwick where in addition to his wholesale business, he intends to carry on retail in all its branches, and he hopes by keeping every article of the best description and punctuality to all orders entrusted to him to merit a share of the Public Support. Shell Fish of Every Description, Haddocks, Cod, &C, Fresh Every Day.

Berwick Advertiser, 18th November 1853

CAKES AND CONFECTIONERY

Berwick Cockles had been manufactured in the town since 1801 but, in Victorian times luxury goods such as cakes and confectionery, once the preserve of the upper classes, were becoming more widely available and affordable further down the social scale.

CONFECTIONERY ESTABLISHMENT

MISSES KENNEDY & STEVEN

BEG to inform the Public of Berwick and Neighbourhood that they have Opened That SHOP in WESTERN LANE, opposite to Mr. Gilchrist, painter, where they intend carrying on the Business of GROCERS and CONFECTIONERS; and they trust that by strict attention to all Orders entrusted to them, and by supplying Articles of the best quality, to merit a share of public patronage.

In connection with the Shop a REFRESHMENT ROOM will be OPENED, where REFRESHMENTS will be obtained on the Shortest Notice.

CONFECTIONERY

In all its Branches made on the premises

MARRIAGE AND CHRISTENING CAKES

PASTRY, TEA CAKES, BISCUITS, PRESERVED FRUITS, &c.

EVERY VARIETY

CAKE ORNAMENTS OF ALL KINDS

DISHES COVERED AND TARTS MADE TO ORDER

ICES, SOUPS, &c, MADE TO ORDER AND SENT OUT

GROCERIES OF ALL KINDS

BUTTERS FROM THE FINEST DAIRIES - AND AT LOWEST PRICES

Berwick Journal, 24th July 1868

And advertisers were becoming more inventive!

PIRIE'S CELEBRATED

LUNCH CAKE 8d per lb.

If you want a good cake as may possibly be

At a thoroughly moderate charge

To PIRIE'S of Berwick, you should instantly go

And his number of patrons enlarge.

WILLIAM PIRIE, CONFECTIONER

HIDE HILL, BERWICK

Berwick Journal, 22nd September 1860

The 19th century also saw the early days of the department store and the “supermarket”. For example, Berwick’s branch of Walter Willson’s store opened in Hide Hill in 1887.

PRISON FOOD

PICTURE - DIETARY FOR BERWICK GAOL 1849

From luxury goods to the diet for prisoners in Berwick's newly-built gaol in Wallace Green.

What the prisoners were given depended on the terms of their sentence.

For example, Class One were the prisoners employed at hard labour for more than 21 days, but not more than 6 weeks, or not employed at hard labour but imprisoned for more than 4 months.

On two days a week they received oatmeal gruel and bread for breakfast and supper. For lunch on two days each week they were given 1 pint of soup and 8oz of bread; on three days, 3 oz of meat without bone, 8 oz of bread and half a pound of potatoes; and on two days a week, lunch consisted of 8 oz of bread and 1lb of potatoes.

At the extreme end, Class 9 prisoners, who were in close confinement for prison offences for terms of not more than 3 days received 1pint of gruel and 8oz of bread for breakfast and supper, and 8 oz of bread for lunch.

FEEDING THE POOR

PICTURE – OLIVER TWIST

In the days before provision of state welfare benefits, temporary soup kitchens were set up to sustain families whose breadwinners were temporarily out of work during periods of harsh winter weather. The soup kitchens were supported by private charitable subscriptions.

THE SOUP KITCHEN - On Tuesday last, a public meeting was convened in the Townhall, for the purpose of re-establishing the Soup Kitchen. The Mayor took the chair and briefly opened the business for which they were assembled. Dr. Cahill said it was scarcely necessary for him to allude to what was manifestly apparent, namely that by the intense winter in which we had been so suddenly enveloped, great distress must have been occasioned amongst a class of masons, slaters and other indigent artisans. It occurred to him that the only means of relieving the distress was by re-opening the Soup Kitchen; he therefore had to submit to the meeting the following motion:- "That it has become necessary, from the extreme severity of the season and the wants of the poor classes, to re-establish the Soup Kitchen. That the distribution of Soup commence tomorrow, and that the inhabitants of Berwick and of the townships of Tweedmouth and Spittle be alike entitled to the benefits of the charity."

Berwick Advertiser, January 20th 1838

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act established Poor Law Unions run by locally elected Boards of Guardians who were responsible for providing workhouses for the destitute, funded by local rate-payers.

The Belford Union Workhouse diet in 1839 provided 1 pint of oatmeal porridge and 1 pint of milk per day for both breakfast and supper. Lunch on two days each week was 1lb of bread, 6 oz of meat (5 for women) and 1lb 6 oz of potatoes or bread (1lb 5 oz for women). On 2 day a week, lunch comprised 1 pint of soup or broth and 8 oz of bread (6 oz for women), on another two days the bread allowance was reduced to 4 oz of bread (3 and a half oz for women). On Tuesdays the inmates received 20 oz of wheaten cake or dumpling (16 oz for women).

There were some comforts for the workhouse inmates.

BOARD OF GUARDIANS - The Workhouse Committee reported that they had advertised for and received tenders for supplying the Workhouse with provisions and clothing, and the out-door poor with bread and oatmeal. The following principal traders have been accepted – John Davidson, 6 cwts sugar at 45s 9d per cwt; tea at 8s 8d per lb; George Weatherhead, coffee at 1s 2d per lb; William Cowe, tobacco at 8s 6d per lb, snuff at 8s 5d per lb; Robert Wood, beef at 7s 6d per stone; houghs at 8s 5d per stone; mutton at 7d per lb; John Crosby, in door fine bread at 5d per 4 lbs; ditto coarse bread at 4d per 4 lbs; John Winter, outdoor coarse bread at 6 lbs for 6d; ditto oatmeal at 8 lbs 14 oz for 6d; Robert Rutherford and James Small obtained the contracts for the clothing and Francis Lough for the coffins.

Berwick Journal, 24th September 1859

The members of the Board of Guardians enjoyed a more substantial lifestyle.

DINNER OF THE GUARDIANS – On Monday that annual dinner of the Guardians was held at the Kings Arms. Hide Hill, when twenty of this body sat down to an excellent dinner, provided by Mr. Montgomery, in his usual first-rate style. The company kept it up till a late hour, when all departed, highly satisfied.

Berwick Journal, 7th April 1860

SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

Berwick celebrated Burns Night for the first time in 1859, on the centenary of his birth.

BURNS FESTIVAL - THE CELEBRATION IN BERWICK

DINNER IN THE RED LION HOTEL

In the assembly-room of this inn there was assembled a company of forty gentlemen, comprising the Mayor in the Chair, having on his left hand Capt. Smith RN, P. Clay Esq., R. Home Esq., and Mr. Joseph Wilson; on his right R. Ramsey Esq., Rev. W. Gray, W. H. Logan Esq., J. R. Dunlop Esq., and Dr. Cahill. The Sheriff occupied the Vice Chair. A very excellent dinner was set up by Mr. Wilson. While it included the viands usual on public occasions, the Scotch haggis was conspicuous at the head and foot of the table, and a well dressed sheep's head and other Scottish dishes occupied various parts of the table. The grace and the thanksgiving were given by the Rev. Wm. Gray. In the course of the evening a handsome punch bowl, handed down from the period of Robert Burns, and understood to have belonged to his family, was placed before the company, filled with punch.

Berwick Journal, 20th January 1859

PICTURE – THE PIC-NIC, PUNCH CARTOON 1851

PIC-NIC ON THE BANKS OF THE TWEED – The people numbering 260 with their families in the employment of Messrs. Y. Trotter and Son, Chirnside Bridge, were allowed a day's pleasure on Saturday 2nd instant, and resolved to hold a Pic-Nic on the banks of the river Tweed. Mr. Hood of Fishwick Mains very kindly granted them the use of his beautiful heugh named "Blue Shiel", opposite Horncliffe, about a mile and a half above the Chain Bridge. The company assembled at the works at 7 o'clock, accompanied by the Chirnside Instrumental Band and two violins, with flags waving – the one in the van having on one side a representation of a paper machine with the words "By paper we get knowledge" and on the other a steam engine with the words "Queen of the Whiteadder" and "By knowledge we get power". All seemed to enjoy the ride in the carts very much and were greatly pleased with the scenery as they passed along. They arrived shortly after 9 o'clock at Fishwick, where the horses were to be put up for the day; and they walked on to the heugh preceded by a cart heavily laden with all the necessary provisions for the day's sport. The company arrived on the ground a little before 10 o'clock and seated themselves on the grass, and were supplied with a hearty repast of bread and cheese, and a plentiful supply of ale to wash all down. The repast over, the fiddlers were soon called into requisition, and the dancing commenced in right earnest. It was kept up till about 1 o'clock, at which time Mr. Cranstoun, the proprietor of the works, arrived on the ground and was greeted with a hearty welcome.

Berwick Advertiser, 9th July 1853

CONSTABLES "KETTLE"

On Tuesday one of those much enjoyed treats, usually called a "kettle", took place in Gainslaw garden, on the banks of the Tweed, under the auspices of the constables of the borough, who, having a large surplus of funds on hand this year, kindly invited a number of their friends of both sexes to enjoy the treat along with them.

The company assembled by early noon and continued to enjoy themselves in high glee until darkness threw her mantle o'er the scene. The good things of this life were served out in rich profusion - there was enough and to spare: indeed the fragments filled several baskets.

Salmon, as a matter of course, was the chief dish.

The field adjoining their garden was kindly granted by Mr. Brown of Gainslawhill, for the purpose of carrying on the various sports, which were entered into with great spirit, by nearly all who were present.

After a plentiful supply of strawberries, a contra dance and a final bumper, the company betook themselves to their several conveyances, and reached home about eleven pm, no accident having occurred to mar the harmony of the proceedings.

Berwick Journal – 16th July 1859

Harvest Festival services became popular in churches throughout the country during Victorian times.

The custom began in 1843, at St. Morwenna's church, Morwenstowe in Cornwall, when the Rev. Robert Hawker organised a special service of thanksgiving.

HARVEST THANKSGIVING - On Sunday special services were held in Berwick Parish Church to celebrate the ingathering of the cereal crops. The interior of the edifice was decorated in a more elaborate style than usual. On the sill of the eastern window of the chancel there was a layer of white wool upon which were scattered flowers, ivy leaves and grain. The centre was raised and it was tastefully ornamented with a floral cross. Miniature sheaves of corn, and a vase of flowers stood upon the altar, above which was fixed against the wall the scriptural quotation "I am the Bread of Life" wrought in white letters upon a scarlet background, set off with flowers, leaves and grain. The sills of the side windows in the church were covered with foliage and a few floral ornaments, while on the communion rails and the fronts of the sidestalls were bunches of corn and flowers. About the lectern was a profusion of floral embellishments, while the reading desk and pulpit were set off with grain, ivy leaves, flowers and red berries.

Berwick Advertiser, 29th September 1876

As Charles Dickens reminds us, Christmas during Victoria's reign was a time for charity and liberal hospitality.

ROAST BEEF FOR THE POLICE – Alderman James Allan, of Ava Lodge, who was Mayor of the borough during the Jubilee Year, and who was then prevented by indisposition from dispensing hospitality as he had purposed doing, presented each member of the borough police force with a fine roast of beef as a Christmas gift, and in commemoration of the Queen's Jubilee.

Berwick Journal, December 27th 1888

PICTURE – CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE WORKHOUSE

At Christmastime, even the workhouse inmates were not forgotten by their more fortunate "betters" - and so we shall leave the subject of Berwick's Victorian Food Heritage on a seasonal Dickensian note.

CHRISTMAS CHEER IN THE WORKHOUSE – To the number of 147, the inmates of the Workhouse were supplied with the usual Christmas fare of roast beef and plum pudding. Those well and able to move about were feasted at one o'clock in the dining hall, which was most tastefully decorated with evergreens, flags, seasonable mottoes, and lanterns, and which looked better than we have ever seen it look before. Due attention was paid to those of the inmates confined to their wards. After dinner, Mr. Wilson, (vice chairman of the Guardians) wished the inmates "A very merry Christmas" and hoped that they would all yet see many such joyous occasions. He was glad to see them all looking so well, and so happy, and as comfortable as the Guardians wished them to be. On the motion of one of the inmates, Leonard Short, an old Tweedmouth man, cheers were given for the Guardians, and similar compliments were passed to Mr. and Mrs. Graham, the Master and matron; and to the other officers in the House, the last round being given "For Everybody", indicative enough that though there may be those apt to forget the poor at the Festive season, the poor are not unmindful, despite their surroundings, of their more fortunate neighbours.

Berwick Journal, December 27th 1888