

Murder, Mystery and Mayhem by Ruth Robson

Created for Durham Book Festival 2021

1. Millennium Place – The Journey

Welcome to Durham, and this literary walk around this historic city. We will hear how crimes gone by have been recorded through the written word and discover how the city and its hinterland provide a backdrop and have been incorporated into crime fiction and writing about crime.

Murder, Mystery and Mayhem has been created by Ruth Robson for the 2021 Durham Book Festival, a Durham County Festival produced by New Writing North, with support from Durham University and Arts Council England. Durham Book Festival was established in the 1980s and is one of the country's first literary festivals.

Crime fiction is a hugely popular genre, possibly because unlike all real crime, fictional crime always has a resolution.

It could be said that Durham exists because of crime. It's formation as we know it today is a direct consequence of raids and pillaging along the North East coast by marauding Vikings. The island of Lindisfarne, home to the Anglo-Saxon monastic community of St Cuthbert, named after their beloved saint and former bishop, was their first target in 793.

Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin of York wrote "Never before has such terror appeared...as we have now suffered from a pagan race...The church of St Cuthbert is spattered with the blood of the priests of God, stripped of all its furnishing, exposed to the plundering of pagans."

Constant raids led to the monks fleeing Lindisfarne. They travelled around the North of England and parts of southwest Scotland looking for somewhere to settle, taking the body of St Cuthbert, his relics and their library of illustrated manuscripts.

The monks arrived in Durham in 995 following relatively stable periods in Chester-le-Street and Ripon. They built what was known as 'the white church', the forerunner of today's Durham Cathedral.

The statue 'The Journey' by renowned sculptor Fenwick Lawson is symbolic of their arrival in Durham. It depicts six monks carrying Saint Cuthbert in his coffin.

Saint Cuthbert's journey is also represented in Bernard Cornwell's epic series of books and the subsequent TV series "The Last Kingdom" with its stories of Alfred the Great and his descendants through the eyes of Uhtred, a boy born into the aristocracy of ninth-century Northumbria. Uhtred is captured by the Danes and raised as a Viking. Though technically historic fiction rather than crime, there is plenty of wrongdoing and issues of justice. The Community of St Cuthbert feature in the third novel 'The Lords of the North'. There are numerous references with principal characters paying homage. In

one, Uhtred, as narrator, describes how the character Father Hrothweard insists they have a duty to protect Saint Cuthbert. “‘If the saint falls into the hands of the pagans,’ he shouted at Guthred, ‘then he will be desecrated!’”.

Durham is a city with a rich medieval history. Booker Prize winning author Barry Unsworth was born in 1930 in a nearby mining village. His father had made the move to an insurance job at a young age, breaking the tradition prevalent in mining communities of sons following their fathers down the pit. Unsworth left school to go to Manchester University, and then travelled, which led to lecturing in Greece and then Turkey. He also started to write, in time focusing on historical fiction. He continued to travel, moving to the United States, finally settling in Italy where he died in 2012.

Unsworth’s book *Morality Play*, published in 1995, is an historical detective novel set in an unnamed village in Northern England towards the end of the 14th century. Plague and war is rife, with the protagonist, a fleeing priest, unintentionally witnessing the death of a member of a troupe of travelling players. The priest is discovered and explains, “...that it had been the spirit of inquiry that kept me there watching and I went on to point out that this is no vice as the vulgar sometimes suppose, calling it curiosity; on the contrary the spirit of inquiry in a well-ordered soul springs from a sense of common humanity...”.

Morality Play was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, as have three other of Unsworth’s novels, with *Sacred Hunger* jointly winning in 1992 with Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*.

The walk continues to Durham Market Place.

2. Durham Market Place

A well-known crime writer based in North East England is Ann Cleeves, former probation officer and author of the Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope novels. A TV series ‘Vera’ based on her stories, has become associated with the vast, sweeping landscapes, sky and coast of the North East, particularly Northumberland, though the filming locations vary using the whole region. The original stories cover a wider geographical area reaching into Yorkshire at times.

For the 2020 Durham Book Festival, Ann Cleeves was commissioned to write a short Vera story as the festival’s Big Read, a book selected for festival and distributed via the county library system, with accompanying readings and workshops. *Written in Blood*, the subsequent short story, unfolds at a fictional book festival crime writing workshop taking place in Durham Town Hall, the historic building in the North West corner of Durham Market Place built in the mid 19th century. Vera has ventured south, out of her patch covered by the fictitious Northumberland and City Police. As a favour to a friend, she finds herself in Durham speaking at the workshop, “So here she was in a small room in the town hall on a foul October day. Outside, it was blowing a hoolie, and the noise of the rain on the window made it seem as if they were cut off from the rest of the city, cast adrift.”

Ann Cleeves' first Vera Stanhope novel 'The Crow Trap' is set in the North Pennines, the majestic, soaring landscape to the west of Durham City designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and UNESCO Geopark. It has heather moorland, upland water courses, deep dales, ancient hay meadows and picturesque stone-built villages. There is evidence of an industrial past such as lead mining.

Central to the plot of the 'The Crow Trap' is a ground survey of land identified as a possible quarry. One of the surveyors is out working, "In the sheltered bank by the side of the track there were primroses in bud and violets and the sun felt warm on her back. From a rise in the land she had a view of the old lead mine and thought it would be interesting to survey a square close to there. Old lime spoil could encourage quite a different sort of vegetation."

The marks left by lead mining which peaked in the late 18th and mid-19th centuries, are slowly being reclaimed by nature. Coal mining has equally left its mark on County Durham, and again, as a consequence of nature, and some carefully planned interventions, land is being reclaimed as wildlife habitats, footpaths, cycle paths and other uses such as housing and modern industrial use.

The statue of a gentleman on a horse in regimental attire is the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry and was unveiled in 1861. The subject is a controversial figure, at times a hero because of his philanthropic gestures in the communities where he owned land, and at times a villain because he is considered by many to have exploited his mine workers for great financial gain.

In 1873 a book was published, written by a Mr Richard Fynes of Blyth, called "The Miners' of Northumberland and Durham. A history of their social and political struggles from the earliest period to the present day." The 3rd Marquess of Londonderry appears in a number of chapter headings, the most telling being that of chapter fifteen, which has a rather long title, "The Inhumanity of the Ejections. Attempt by the Men to Settle the Dispute. Conduct of the Coal Owners Generally, and of the Marquis of Londonderry in Particular. The Workhouse Closed Against the Men."

The year 1873 is significant as in 1872 the 'bonding' of miners was made illegal. That is a system of what amounted to legal temporary serfdom, where miners were bonded to a particular pit, for little substance, and subject to various fines and conditions. Breakers of a bond were liable to arrest, trial and prison. Going on strike was largely against the law, standing on a picket line was seen as coercion. Those attempting to unionise were intimidated or dismissed. The law could order transportation to the colonies, and even the death penalty.

The walk continues past the Market Place, left onto Elvet Bridge.

3. Elvet Bridge

Elvet Bridge is the second oldest bridge in Durham built in 1160 on the order of Bishop Hugh Le Puiset, known as Bishop Pudsey. The oldest bridge in the city is Framwellgate Bridge built in 1127 on the order of Bishop Ranulf Flambard. The bridges are 300 metres apart because of the way the River Wear meanders around the peninsula that holds its famous cathedral and castle. Both Bishops lived what would be regarded as an unconventional life for a bishop by today's standards, though Bishop Flambard's story is perhaps the most colourful.

Ranulf Flambard was part of the court of William the Conqueror, holding the position of keeper of the King's Seal and Justiciar of all England, that is the principal minister to the King. Flambard is listed as a clerk in the Domesday Book, the audit of the lands carried out in 1086, twenty years after the Norman invasion as William looked to ascertain their worth and raise taxes.

Whilst continuing as a servant to the King, Ranulf Flambard became a Prebend (priest) initially at Salisbury Cathedral. There is an account by the chronicler Ordericus Vitalis, writing in the 1130s about events in 1089, of Ranulf Flambard who, "unsettled the new king with his fraudulent suggestions, inciting him to revise the survey of all England and convincing him that he should make a new division of the land of England and confiscate from his subjects, natives and invaders alike, whatever was found above a certain quantity."

The 'new' king is William Rufus, William the Conqueror's son, who Ranulf Flambard continued to serve. There is no evidence of a new survey being commissioned and Ranulf Flambard became Bishop of Durham in 1099. Upon the succession of Henry I to the throne in 1100 Flambard was thrown into the Tower of London, constructed by the Normans as soon as they occupied London, and ironically, he himself overseeing the construction of its outer wall. There had been much corruption during William II's reign, and Henry I wanted to hold people to account and considered Flambard guilty of embezzlement.

Ranulf Flambard has two claims to fame at this time, he was the first ever prisoner held in the Tower of London, and secondly, he was the first prisoner to escape. There is a popular legend that tells of Flambard having a flagon of wine smuggled into the tower, plying his guards with wine, and then escaping in the barrel, as it was lowered by rope through a window. A cunning plan supposedly executed with the help of his minder William de Mandeville.

Ranulf Flambard fled to France, though was pardoned in 1101 and restored as Bishop of Durham, returning to the city in 1106. He withdrew from political life and served as Bishop until his death in 1128, having overseen the completion of the building of Durham Cathedral and the reburial of St Cuthbert in his new shrine at its East End.

Elvet Bridge itself was built with a chapel at each end, illustrating its significance as a point of arrival and a point of departure. The *Foedarium* of Durham Priory, a 15th century publication, records it as "the New Bridge to distinguish it from the other bridge, already built, which is called the Old Bridge." The easterly Chapel was dedicated to St

Andrew, and the westerly to St James. St James Chapel was replaced by a House of Correction – a prison – in 1632. On our return we will go under the bridge, see part of the House of Correction, and hear of its most famous inmate.

The walk continues by crossing the bridge, turning right towards Durham City Police Station.

4. Police Station

There are a number of contemporary crime writers based in North East England, or those who hail from the region and use it as the setting for their stories.

One such writer is Howard Linskey who was born in Ferryhill, County Durham, and now lives in the South of England. He created the haphazard yet amiable Detective Constable Ian Bradshaw, who always seems to be working in parallel with a journalist or two. The first ever DC Bradshaw book is called 'No Name Lane', which I suspect is a nod towards the tiny County Durham village of 'No Place', where residents have fought hard to keep its quirky title.

Early on there is a description of one of the characters watching a TV news report about a missing person, most likely victim of a murder, in a village in County Durham, that happens to be the village where he grew up. "*Michelle Summers has not been seen since leaving her local youth club in the village of Great Middleton, at around 10pm on Thursday evening.*" There then followed a brief physical description of the girl. '*Police have appealed for anyone who may have seen Michelle to come forward.*'"

Fairly soon, we read how DC Bradshaw "drove down to 'the cottages', a series of council-owned old-folk's bungalows filled with ex-miners. The ones who survived thirty-odd years of cave-ins and coal dust could spend a humble retirement here, in a simple one-bedroomed property with a small, rectangular, allotment-style garden at the rear. Bradshaw was not from Great Middleton but knew from his years as a County Durham police officer that he was more likely to engage with the pensioners who lived here if he went round the back of their properties, avoiding the formality of a knock on their front door."

Howard Linskey is a former journalist, turned crime writer. Newspaper reports are an invaluable source of information about historic crimes. There are many contemporary reports of crimes gone by in Durham, and equally reports of heroic deeds by members of the Durham Constabulary.

On Friday 21st February 1902 the Durham Chronicle had a headline 'Ice accidents on the Wear – Four persons in the water, a constable to the rescue'. It reports 'Despite the thaw which set in early on Wednesday morning, a number of boys were so venturesome as to indulge sliding on sheet ice near Framwellgate Bridge.'

Next, we read how the mother of one of the boys and his brother also end up in the water, attempting a rescue. A PC Morgan is passing by and sees the incident.

The newspaper report continues. “Without hesitation he [PC Morgan] ventured onto the ice which gave way beneath him and he was immersed in the water up to his chest. By dint of perseverance and determination, he managed to get hold of Elizabeth Carroll, a married woman who lives in Back Lane and assisted her to the edge where a Mr Matthew Raw, 5 The Avenue, Hetton le Hole was waiting to get her onto shore.”

A description of the rescue of all who are in water follows, with the report concluding, “There were several eyewitnesses of the plucky rescues rendered by PC Morgan with the kind assistance of Mr Raw. Considerable excitement prevailed at the time of the rescues, and there was a large crowd gathered when the three boys and the woman were brought to shore.’

PC Morgan, joined by Mr Raw of Hetton le Hole, were clearly in the right place at the right time.

The walk continues south up the hill and along Halgarth Street, turning left to the Tithe Barn.

5. Tithe Barn

The Tithe Barn dates to 1453 and is described by Nicholas Pevsner in his County Durham Edition of the Buildings of England as a ‘remarkable medieval relic’. It, and the surrounding buildings, once formed part of the farmstead of the Durham Cathedral monastery. These days the main stone building is a Prison Officers’ social club and is available for hire with the stone and timber building being used as a small museum about crime and prison escapes.

A famous escapee from Durham Prison is John McVicar, who ended up serving 26 years for robbery and escaping from custody. He spent two years on the run before being recaptured. McVicar wrote his autobiography called *McVicar* by himself, which became the basis of a film with Roger Daltry of the rock group The Who playing McVicar. The film in turn influenced Stephen King’s novel *The Shawshank Redemption* which too became a movie. McVicar was inspired to write by reading *De Profundis – From the Depths*, by the 19th century Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde’ – written when Wilde was in Reading Gaol.

The forward for *McVicar by Himself* describes the book as “painfully realistic in that it shows what certain types of prisoners and prisons are really like. McVicar takes the reader inside – the real inside of prisons and prisoners. Yet, however ghastly, dreadful and in some cases, evil the prisoners are, they are never stripped of their humanity.”

A barn further afield is the byre – the cow shed – of Belmont Farm in the County Durham village of Hunstanworth near Blanchland. It is the setting of what became known as the Blanchland Murder.

Tommy Armstrong – a 19th century County Durham miner turned poet and entertainer, famous for documenting life in the mines and surrounding communities through his words – wrote a poem about it called ‘The Blanchland Murder’.

The crime took place on New Year’s Day 1880 and there are various accounts of what happened. A commonly accepted version seems to be that 26-year-old Robert Snowball who lived with his elderly father and housekeeper, left the farmhouse to go his workshop in the byre. He was possibly then going on, to meet with friends in Blanchland. He never came home, not making it as far as Blanchland, with his body discovered the next day.

The last verse of Tommy Armstrong’s poem reads:

A quantity of blood was found while looking in the byre.
Where it came from the old man then began to enquire;
Ascending to the room above, o'er him there came a dread-
The first thing that his eyes fell on was his son Robert-dead.
The tears came trickling down his cheeks, as near his son he stood.
A hammer also stood close by, bespattered o'er with blood.
We hope that God in heaven will not let the murder rest;
We trust that Robert Snowball's soul is mingled with the blest.

The housekeeper, Jane Barron, was put on trial, acquitted and the murder never solved.

Jane’s name appears in the Newcastle Courant in January 1881, in a report of her suing the Consett Guardian and the Durham Advertiser for libel. Both papers had mistakenly reported she had been admitted to a lunatic asylum. She is awarded an amount equalling to three years’ salary for a housekeeper at the time.

On a cheerier note, the village of Hunstanworth near Blanchland, is a ‘Thankful Village’. That is a village where none of its population who went to fight in the First World War died. The parish church has a carved alabaster plaque on its west wall which reads:

We thank thee, LORD, for bringing back, our soldiers, safely home, 1914-1918.

The walk continues eastward and then north, past the main entrance of Durham Prison, arriving close to the original entrance to Durham Prison when it was built in 1819.

6. Crown Court / Durham Prison

Tommy Armstrong was a prolific writer and also wrote a poem called ‘Durham Gaol’. It has six verses and a chorus and until recently it was believed that Tommy Armstrong wrote it based on direct experience from spending six months in Durham Prison in 1882, supposedly having been convicted for theft of a pair of stockings when drunk.

In 2010 one of Tommy’s grandson’s, Ray Tilly published a book about his grandfather called Tommy Armstrong – The Pitman Poet which includes new information about Tommy and previously unpublished work. Ray is a retired detective and researched his

family history in the same forensic manner he would have applied to a case and considers the story of Tommy being in Durham Jail a myth. He concludes it is a poem based on stories told by others of being in Durham Jail.

Verse three of Tommy's poem reads:

The forst month is the worst of aal;
Your feelins they will try
There's nowt but two great lumps o' wood,
On which ye hev to lie.
The after that ye get a bed,
But it's as hard as stanes;
At neet ye dorsen't mek a torn,
For fear ye brek some banes.

The 'new' Jail on Elvet was opened in 1819, with prisoners transferred from the House of Correction on Elvet Bridge, and the County Gaol which had been built over the North Gate of the Castle on Saddler Street in the early 15th century. We will hear more of that gaol further on. The courthouse next door with its splendid portico and Tuscan columns opened in a few years earlier in 1811.

The creation of the new prison coincided with the publication of prison reforms and new rules following a tour of the prisons of the North of England and Scotland by social reformers Elizabeth Fry and Joseph Gurney. Conditions slowly started to improve, though note that Tommy Armstrong's poem is a significant number of decades after their work began. A local social reformer was Dora Greenwell, 19th century poet and essayist born in Lanchester, to the west of Durham City, who worked with the poor in Durham's workhouse and prison.

Novelist Violet Hunt, who was born at 29 Old Elvet opposite Durham Prison in 1862, co-founded PEN with Catharine Amy Dawson-Scott in 1921, which grew into the international organisation it is today, championing freedom of expression through the written word, including those imprisoned for their writing.

Richard Hardwick's book *The Truth About Prison: Prisoners, Professionals and Families Speak Out*, was published in 2017. Reviews include comments such as "Different to any other book on prison. Compelling and quite breath-taking in its scope of insights" and "As a former prison officer of some 20 years I can highly recommend this book." Another book by Richard Hardwick is *Shattered Images and Building Bridges: A Collection of Writing and Artwork from three Durham Prisons*. It was the result of a two-year programme of creative workshops held in HMP Durham Prison, HMP Frankland Prison – a high security prison on the edge of the city and HMP Low Newton - a remand centre, also on the edge of the city.

Back to times gone by. Northeast based journalist and local historian Nigel Green has written a book called *Tough Times and Grisly Crimes, A History of Crime in Northumberland and County Durham*. It is not for the faint-hearted, documenting

gruesome acts, many of which were punishable by hanging, the last of which took place in 1964 with it finally being outlawed a few years later. In his book Nigel tells of how Britain's executioner William Marwood always stayed at the Dun Cow pub on Old Elvet when visiting Durham to carry out a hanging, "a pub he liked, not least because it was only a couple of minutes' walk from the prison."

Prior to 1869 hangings were public, with the law changing to prevent a public spectacle. In 2018 Northern Echo journalist Chris Lloyd, renowned for his intriguing local history features, wrote a story about the "hanging balcony" which can be seen as part of No.30 Old Elvet. From 1816 hangings took place outside the new court and prison frontage. Chris tells how the balcony was built specially to provide the best view of the hanging of a murderer in August of that year, with the property owner believed to have sold tickets for the occasion.

Infamous inmates of the Prison include Mary Ann Cotton, who was born and lived in, and around County Durham in the 19th century, and was Britain's first female serial murderer. She killed her victims with arsenic tea. In 1873 when hangings were no longer public, she was hung within the walls of the Prison. Inevitably, there is a nursery rhyme.

Sing, sing, oh what should I sing?
Mary Ann Cotton, she's tied up with string.
Where, where? Up in the air.
Selling black puddings, a penny a pair.

Norfolk born crime writer Alan Hunter set his 'Detective Inspector George Gently' novels in East Anglia. North East born writer Peter Flannery adapted them for television choosing to place 'George Gently', in Durham. Many an episode features the view from the front of Durham Prison, east to west across the city skyline.

The walk continues, crossing Elvet to the entrance of Durham University playing fields which are known as the Racecourse.

7. Entrance to Racecourse (Hild / Bede)

The hillside view across Durham University's Racecourse playing field is of one of Durham University's many colleges, the College of St Hild and St Bede. It was formed from two single sex colleges in 1975, bringing together the College of the Venerable Bede for men and St Hild's College for women.

One of its alumni George Lazenby played James Bond in the 1960s film of Ian Fleming's book *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Lazenby followed Sean Connery in the role of Bond, but only played the character once. The film met with mixed reviews, though success at the box office. Retrospective reviews have been much kinder.

Durham University or fictional reiterations of it feature in several crime novels. Mari Hannah is a former probation officer, married to a detective, living in Northumberland, who has turned her hand to crime writing.

In 2010 Mari won a Northern Writers' Time to Write Award for her second novel, *Settled Blood*. It is peppered with scenes set in Durham. A female body has been discovered and pathologist Tim Stanton explains to DCI Kate Daniels how he "...found a receipt in the pocket of her jeans. It's from Durham University Bookshop. If her reading material is anything to go by, I'd say she was a med student."

Helen Cox is a crime writer from Yorkshire who lives in Sunderland. Much of her work is set in Yorkshire though her character Kitt Hartley who is a librarian cum ace private investigator becomes embroiled in a case when visiting a friend, Grace who is studying at Durham's fictitious Venerable Bede's Vocational Academy. The book is called *Death Awaits in Durham*. Early in the narrative, Grace looks out of a window over the city. "From this vantage point she could see how leafy Durham was. The trees dazzled in rich shades of red and gold. Between this and the ornate historic buildings the place seemed nothing short of idyllic. It was hard to believe that such tragedy had struck in the sacred resting place of not one but two saints." Durham Cathedral houses not only the St Cuthbert but also the tomb of the Venerable Bede.

Hugh Walpole, who lived across the turn of the 19th century to the 20th, lived in Durham for a time. His father was principal of the College of the Venerable Bede from 1896–1905. Hugh had been sent away to prep school and then a series of public schools as a boarder and was terribly unhappy. He was brought to Durham where he attended Durham School as a day pupil. He went on to graduate from Cambridge University and by 1909 was living in London as a writer. His career was interrupted by the First World War when he served in the Red Cross on the Russian-Austrian Front followed by a spell working for the British propaganda in Petrograd, now restored to its name of St Petersburg.

Over his lifetime he published more than 30 novels, many of which feature the fictitious cathedral city of Polchester, reflecting aspects of Durham. Some of his work has a more macabre side with his crime novel *The Killer and the Slain* being published posthumously in 1942, a year after he died.

A new edition was published in 2014 with a forward by John Howard, which starts, "Hugh Walpole was a man at war within himself. On one side was the hugely popular author and accomplished speaker who moved in the best circles; on the other was the gauche and insecure boy who had never ceased to crave love and affection. Their struggles usually revealed itself in the depths of his solitude or, sometimes, in the presence of close friends. But they also fought their battles in front of millions – in the pages of his fiction."

The Killer and Slain starts with the killer penning a written confession to be read upon his death, part of which reads:

“Because in the course of this narrative I confess to a crime this document will be kept in the greatest possible secrecy. I have no desire to suffer at the hand of the common hangman before I need. That I do not consider myself to *feel* it to be a crime matters nothing. I am afraid, to the Law. One day, when the important elements in such matters are taken into account rather than the unimportant, justice will be better served. But that time is not yet.”

The walk returns to Old Elvet, crossing over Elvet Bridge, turning under the arch on the left-hand side, following the path down underneath the bridge to its north side.

8. Under Elvet Bridge

Take time to look at the entrance to the bar Jimmy Allens and the surrounding building, tucked under the northwest side of Elvet Bridge. This is part of a House of Correction – a prison, constructed in 1634 with the popular drinking spot being named after its most famous prisoner James Allen, or Jimmy as he was known. He achieved celebrity status in his lifetime and much has been written about him. A book called *A New, Improved, and Authentic Life of James Allen*, was published in 1828 with a new edition being released as recently as 2017. It’s forward observing that memories of Jimmy “have been published by various persons and have commanded different degrees of attention and approbation.” In essence Jimmy Allen was regarded as a likeable rogue who occasionally found himself on the wrong side of the law. He was born in a Gypsy camp near Rothbury and at one time was the official piper to the Duke of Northumberland, playing the Northumbrian pipes, bellow-blown pipes, not mouth-blown like the Scottish bagpipes, with a gentler, sweeter sound.

In 1803 Jimmy was convicted of robbery and sentenced to death, though the sentence was never carried out. First, he was granted a pardon by King George III on condition he be transported to Australia, and then, as his health deteriorated, a petition was raised asking King George to grant a free pardon. This was finally given but was too late, the pardon arrived in Durham a few days after Jimmy had died, whilst in prison. It is possible the Duchess of Northumberland was his petitioner. It is said if you stand by Elvet Bridge at midnight you can hear the ghost of Jimmy Allen playing his pipes.

There is a fascinating publication called *A History of the County of Durham* by William Page which was published in three volumes in 1928. It tells the life of the city and wider county from its very beginnings, referencing settlements ahead of the arrival of the community of St Cuthbert up to its date of publication.

In a section about the latter part of the 17th century, there is a very telling throwaway line that states “Regular stagecoaches did not yet run.” The Great North Road developed from medieval times as a coaching route from London to Edinburgh, reaching its peak ahead of the opening of public railways in the 1820s and 30s. The section from York to Edinburgh was the last section to be established, and at the time of the comment did not exist as a regular mail coach route. The persistent Anglo-Scottish wars

from the 14th century to the 16th century and border reiver activity – that is constant fighting and raiding between border families each fighting to survive in what were sparse, isolated conditions - made it too dangerous. Geoffrey Watson in his book *The Border Reivers* states “Two and a half centuries of violent, if intermittent, warfare between England and Scotland were enough to reduce the Borders to a charred wilderness. When armies were not on the march, frontier raids were encouraged by both sides in order to wear down the enemy. So much so that, for centuries, men living within fifty miles of the Border could rarely go to sleep without fear of attack.”

Sir Walter Scott lived from 1771 to 1832 and came from a Scottish border family. There are many references to the border reivers in his writing. His poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* tells of border wars through the voice of a minstrel as this extract shows.

The last of all the Bards was he,
Who sung of Border chivalry;
For, welladay! their date was fled,
His tuneful brethren all were dead;

In 1707 the Act of Union brought together England and Scotland within one legal framework, rather than them being two separate countries that happened to share the same monarch. This allowed for further development of the Great North Road from Yorkshire to Edinburgh. As the route developed, coming directly through the medieval streets of Durham and beyond to Newcastle and Scotland, so did the activity of highwaymen.

Nigel Green in his book *Tough Times and Grisley Crimes* tells the tale of highwayman Robert Hazlitt robbing and killing his victims as they travelled on an infamous stretch of the Great North Road on the approach into Gateshead, about 10 miles north of Durham. Hazlitt was finally caught and hanged in Durham in 1770 and Green describes how “his corpse was then thrown into a cart and carried to Gateshead Fell, where it was hung in a gibbet, close to the scene of his crimes. The frequent robberies stopped, indicating Hazlitt was the main culprit.” A gibbet is a structure where the body of an executed criminal was hung in full public view to act as a deterrent to other budding criminals. The practise was formally stopped in the 1830s.

Now proceed back onto Elvet Bridge and to Palace Green, the centre of the Durham UNESCO World Heritage Site. As you go look for a blue door, with a plaque above it, on the west side of Saddler Street, shortly before the turn up Owengate that leads to Palace Green.

9. Palace Green

The blue door you have just seen is what is left of North Gate Gaol. The gate itself was built around 1070 as the northern entrance to Palace Green, the Castle and Cathedral. The buildings on the other side of the Street – the east side – roughly form the line of

the castle walls, it's Bailey with part of the walls remaining in the grounds behind the buildings. Around 1415 a gaol was built over and beside the gate becoming the County Gaol, with an extension in the 1770s, ahead of the 'new' prison being built at Elvet in the early 19th century.

Prison reformer John Howard visited the North Gate Gaol in 1774 noting in his report that "The men are put at night into dungeons, one seven feet square for three prisoners - another, the Great Hole, has only a little window. In this I saw six prisoners, most of them transports chained to the floor. In that situation they had been for many weeks and were very sick."

By the early 1800s North Gate Gaol was considered not fit for purpose. The Bishop of Durham at the time, Shute Barrington, also regarded it as obstacle for travellers making their way to the Cathedral, and he duly provided £2,000 towards the building of a new gaol away from the peninsula. The gate was demolished the new prison was built.

Prior to North Gate Gaol criminals were held on Palace Green, with parts of the castle and its associated buildings being used as cells. There are also prison cells within Durham Cathedral.

Durham Cathedral and Castle were also used as a prison during the Commonwealth, the years from 1649 to 1660 after the English Civil War when English was ruled as a republic by Oliver Cromwell, with the monarch Charles 1st having been executed. The Scots continued to recognise Charles' son as the monarch which led to a faceoff with Cromwell at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650. The English won with Cromwell's army marching around 4000 prisoners taken captive in the aftermath south. Many died on the way. The remainder were imprisoned in the Castle and the Cathedral, which was empty and abandoned. Cromwell had evicted the Dean and Chapter, as he suppressed the Church across England.

In November 2013, building work was taking place at the back of Palace Green Library, a building on the east side of Palace Green. A grim discovery was made. Multiple skeletons were exposed. Work stopped immediately and it was suspected the skeletons were those of the Scottish prisoners who had died and were buried in Durham. A team of Durham University archaeologists investigated and found evidence they were. A fascinating book called 'Lost Lives New Voices' written by the team of archaeologists involved, provides insights into the story. Not all the prisoners died, some were taken as indentured servants to North America. Durham, Dunbar, and the story of the Scottish prisoners has featured in the American version of the television programme 'Who Do You Think You Are' with actor Jon Cryer being a descendant of a Scottish prisoner.

Murder, Mystery and Mayhem started with an account of the community of St Cuthbert fleeing Vikings, and it ends with St Cuthbert. Bestselling crime writer L J Ross is a lawyer turned author, who is from and lives in Northumberland. Her Detective Chief Inspector Ryan series of murder mysteries takes place in the North East with each title called after a well-known place or landmark which provides the setting for the story. The first in the

series is called Holy Island, followed by titles such as Sycamore Gap, Angel, Highforce, Cragside, Penshaw and more.

In 2020 L R Ross published *The Shine*. Chapter one commences with a description of Palace Green, clearly during university term time. "It was a perfect spring day. Sunshine bathed the city of Durham in golden light, warming the ancient stone wall of the castle and neighbouring university, where students spilled out of its panelled hallways to sprawl over the grassy quadrangle known as Palace Green."

A few lines later it continues with a description of the cathedral walls "...rising up over two hundred feet to dominate the landscape for as far as the eye could see, casting long shadows over the people who scurried like ants far below."

The narrative progresses with a dramatic incident inside Durham Cathedral and a mystery ensues relating to St Cuthbert. I won't say anymore as I have been careful throughout not to give out any major spoilers for the crime fiction included in this walk. If you want to find out more, you'll have to read the book.

I hope you have enjoyed this literary walk about crime in Durham and its hinterland. You are now on Palace Green at the heart of the Durham UNESCO World Heritage. Why not take the time to visit Durham Cathedral or Durham University's Palace Green Library.

As a postscript there is a link between 12th century Bishop of Durham, Ranulf Flambard and the 20th century London gangsters, the Kray Twins. Bishop Flambard was the first to be imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1066 and almost 900 years later the Kray Twins, who also served time in Durham Prison, were the last to be held in the Tower of London, which is a great anecdote. However, it does have a flaw. They weren't technically imprisoned in the Tower. At the time, it served as the barracks for the regiment they were both assigned to for their national service – that is a period of mandatory military service for Queen and County which continued after the Second World War until the early 1960s. They had misbehaved and were confined to barracks for a period of time, therefore held in the Tower of London. It's a great story.