CONSETT MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 2018

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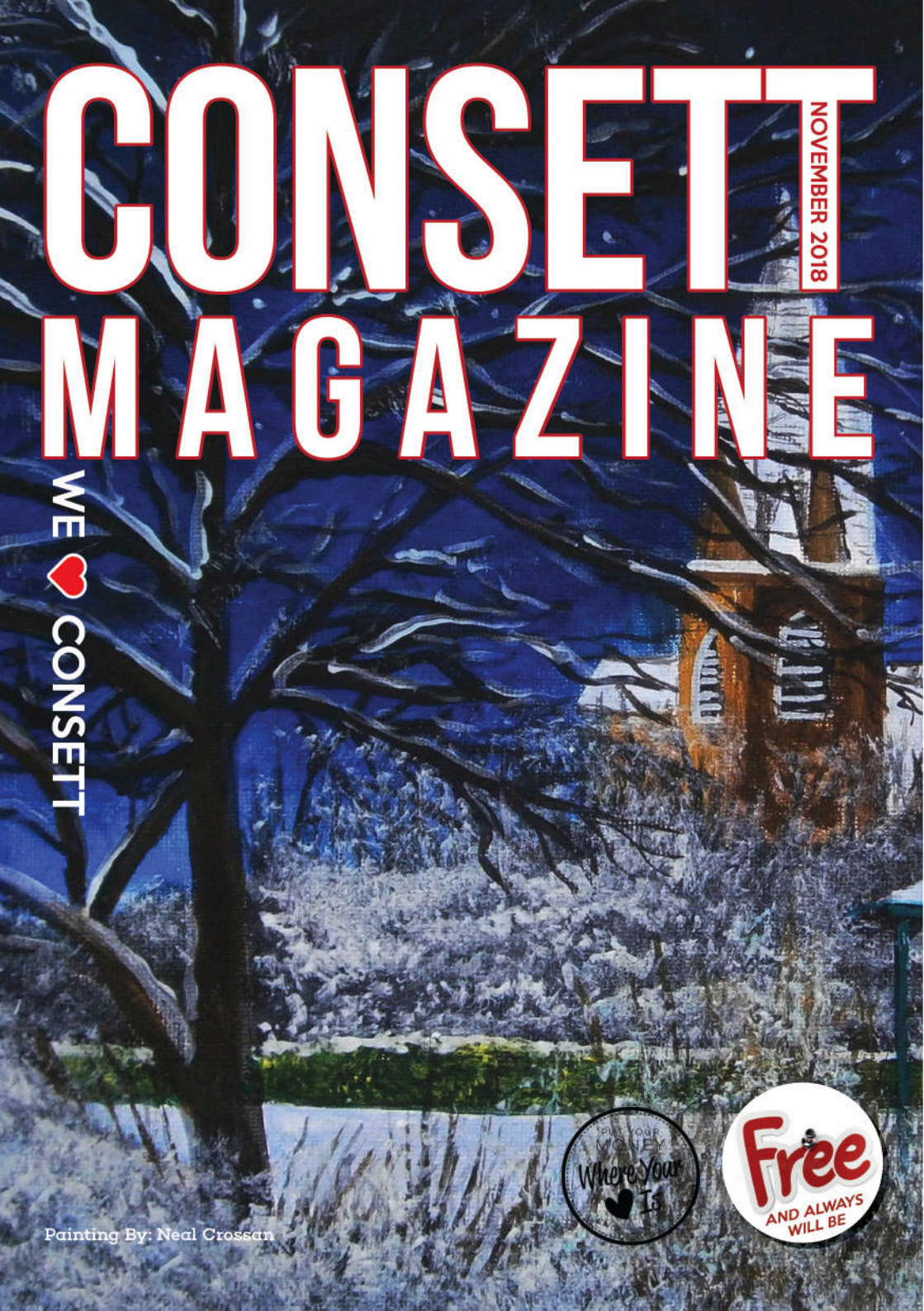

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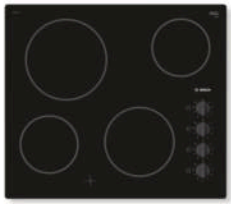

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Welcome

Thanks for picking up the November edition of the free Consett Magazine.

As always, we've got some wonderful local stories for you to feast your eyes on this month; both in the magazine you have in your hand now and online at consettmagazine.com (we're proud to tell you, last month the website received 198,996 hits).

So, if you've not visited us online yet, now might be a good time to have a look and see what all the fuss is about!

Brian Harrison, your favourite local historian explores The Phantom Avenger (See page 4-5).

Lorraine Weightman is Staying Alive (See pages 10-11.)

This and much more in the FREE Consett Magazine.

Once again, thanks for reading this month's edition, please recycle this magazine after you're finished reading it by passing it onto a friend or family member. And do mention Consett Magazine when reaching out to any of our advertisers, they are the lifeblood of the magazine, without them this free publication could simply not exist.

So, thanks to everyone who advertises and contributes to the magazine each month.

If you'd like to get involved with Consett Magazine, share a story, or simply give us some news you'd like to shout about, then please contact us using the contact details on the bottom right of this page.

Warmest regards,
Barry Kirkham, Marco Elsy, and everyone who makes this magazine a success (you know who you are!)
PS- Book your space online or in print, just call us on 01207 438292 or email sales@consettmagazine.com to request our media kit (covering online, print, and digital marketing options).

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The Front Cover

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THE PHANTOM AVENGER OF NORTH WEST DURHAM

By Brian Harrison

It was mid autumn on what was described by the met office as a generally wet month in October 1935. It was a busy time for the farms of the area, harvesting the last of the crops, gathering in the hay and preparing for the winter. But unknown to the residents of Dipton and the surrounding area's this would become one of the blackest periods of terror that they would ever know.

Within the first few days of October came the first attack at Pontop Hall Farm, tenanted by Mr Usher Hunter. A corn stack had been set ablaze in such a way that it would continue to burn along the rest of the stacks. A chalked note found on a near by barn door stated "Don't wrong me again – I only warn once. The Phantom Avenger". Almost two weeks later, on Tuesday 15 October, at Mr Miles Armstrong's Flint Hill Farm he struck again, this time setting a 30 ton haystack ablaze. On a wall close by another message was chalked "This is my Second Victim – The Phantom Avenger". Mr Armstrong had been alerted to the fire by a stranger, a tall thick set man wearing a cap and slack coat who had knocked at his door; although Armstrong told police that a simultaneous knock had occurred at both front and back doors. When he ran to discover the stack on fire the stranger disappeared.

This series of events had already started to cause concern to the farming community. The police, having confirmed the writing at both events to be the same, stepped up their search. They didn't have to wait long for events to unfold. At midnight of the 22 October at the small holding of Mr James Lott there was yet another fire and once again a message, "My Third Victim – Beware – The Phantom Avenger".

With each fire the Phantom became bolder but always stayed elusive. At one point more than 40 police officers were patrolling the area, many in disguise, along with more than 60 farm hands. Farmers also took up armed night vigils, but no matter what precaution's were put in place the Phantom Avengers reign of terror continued. At his 4th fire a footprint was discovered and a plaster print was made. Superintendent Kirkup of Consett Police had also now taken over control of the case and all of the Consett force had been pulled off leave. Talking to the papers Kirkup told the press that they were following up on a number of leads which also included the footprint. In response the following day at a small holding of Mr P Nixon of Pike Street, Dipton the Phantom struck again burning down a small haystack and shed. The chalked note this time read " Supt. Kirkup. Phantoms don't leave footprints – Beware. The Phantom Avenger"

For a few weeks all was quite, but during the excitement of the General Election on the 14 November he saw his chance once again burning down 3



Front Street, Dipton

more stacks. The attacks took place at Catchgate, one a 25 ton stack at the farm of Mr J Ridley and the other two 20 ton stacks at the farm of Mr J W Dixon which destroyed one completely and the other was partially saved. At both sites a prop was found stuck in the ground with a chalked message confirmed to be that of the Phantom.

In a dramatic turn of events a medical herbalist by the name of Ernest Pearson, saw a tall stocky man emerge from the stack yard of a Farm at New Kyo. When the man saw him he took off in the direction of the Consett to Newcastle railway line. Pearson followed and when he made his way up the embankment was struck hard from behind leaving him unconscious. The previous day on the 19 November a message had been left on the gable end of a building in New Kyo, reputedly from the Phantom, stating: "Two Murders will be committed and two more stacks set alight before I give myself up – The Phantom Avenger". A number of letters were also posted bearing a Stanley postmark, one of which arrived at the home of Mr J Willis. In the letter it stated: "Beware Willis. Someone very dear to you, but not in your house is my next victim – The Phantom Avenger". The letter was taken very seriously by the police, the Consett Division now on a full scale man hunt.

With almost a sixth sense the Phantom, knowing it would be to dangerous to continue in his present approach, turned to another set of crimes. On Friday 21November Police Sergt. Burrell was doing his rounds when he came across a number smashed windows. The first was to the Northern Echo building in Station Road, Stanley which had been smashed through by a brick. On the remaining window, etched with what appeared to be a glass cutter was the words PHANTOM AVENGER. The second window being that of Mr Teasdale the Cobbler. 2 weeks after at Catchgate, his attention turned to the bowls pavilion at Annfield Plain Park at which he smashed out all 48 windows, his calling card found near by confirming it was him.

The whole area was in a state of terror. Women and children stayed in their homes as men kept watch in the streets. A glimmer of hope was had when a gift of 9 pairs of Nylon stockings were left as a gift to a local women by the name of Elizabeth Oswald of Ryde Terrace, Catchgate. On the window sill was the message " A Gift from the Phantom Avenger". The stockings were of an expensive brand and hopes were that they would be able to track the purchase back to an individual. But no luck was had.

There were a number of more fires and smashed business windows totalling damages in excess of £5000 at the time, approx £345,000 in today's money. The last arson attack took place at around 1 am on 12 March 1936 at the property of Mr W Maddison farmer of Catchgate. The note on the wall at New Kyo predicting two more fires was correct, but luckily the promised murders never came to fruition. Although the police hunt continued no one was ever caught. Why the Phantom stopped his reign of terror was unknown, maybe he had had his revenge for what ever it was that had started him off the 6 odd months earlier. Maybe the police were getting to close. No matter the reason it came as a massive relief to the people of the area. In the end it had finished the way it had all started, on the Phantoms terms.


Along the Tops - Dipton to Lily Gardens


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25 YEARS OF DURHAM CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Durham Christmas Festival has introduced a new charity preview to its plans as it celebrates its 25th year.

Often cited as one of the UK's best Christmas Festivals, Durham Christmas Festival is expected once again to bring thousands of visitors from across the North of England and beyond into Durham City Centre from Friday 30th November to Sunday 2nd December. Visitors will come not only to shop with more than 250 independent traders, but also to enjoy seasonal entertainment. For the first time, there will be a Special Charity Preview Evening of the Craft and Gift Marquee on Palace Green on Thursday 29th November, in aid of St Cuthbert's Hospice.

Festive entertainment being planned include Santa's Grotto on Palace Green, the Children's Lantern Procession from the Market Place to Durham Cathedral's St Nicholas Service and Carols for All in the Cathedral, as well as numerous performers throughout the city centre bringing a Christmas feel to the entire city.

The heart of the festival is a double marquee on Palace Green, housing more than 180 independent traders offering gifts, homewares, decorations, food and drink. In addition to the regular three days of the festival, for the first time Durham Christmas Festival is inviting shoppers to get an early preview of the stalls and support local charity St Cuthbert's Hospice at the same time. Profits from all tickets sold for the preview evening on Thursday 29th November will go to St Cuthbert's Hospice 30th Birthday appeal.

Colin Wilkes, Managing Director of Durham Markets which organises the festival together with Durham University, said: "When we introduced the Christmas Festival, we never thought we'd still be here 25 years later. Over the years the festival has brought thousands of people into Durham City Centre, both locals and visitors, and many keep coming back.

"Durham Christmas Festival is a great way to showcase this beautiful city, as well all the independent businesses who come along. The Charity Preview evening will be a wonderful addition to the festival, hopefully an evening event which will attract new visitors as well as support our local hospice in its special year.

Durham Christmas Festival is made up of four markets; the Craft and Gift Marquee on Palace Green; the Regional Producers' Market in the Cloisters of Durham Cathedral; the Festive Outdoor Market in Durham Market Place and Durham Market Hall just off the Market Place. Entertainment planned for the festival includes fire eating and juggling on Palace Green, Carols for All in Durham Cathedral, static birds of prey, children's Christmas storytelling, the annual Children's Lantern Parade and much more. Always a highlight of the Festival, the Lantern Parade will leave the Market Place on at 3.45pm on Saturday 1st December, winding its way up to Palace Green behind the Chester-le-Street Salvation Army Band, and arriving at the Cathedral in time for the St Nicholas Service at 4.10pm.

Lanterns can now be booked for the Children's Lantern Parade (recommended for children up to age 12). Tickets for the Craft and Gift Marquee, including tickets for the Charity Preview Evening, can now be purchased in advance at a discounted price from the festival website www.durham-christmasfestival.com. Full details of Durham Christmas Festival can be found on the website, www.durhamchrist-masfestival.com, which will be regularly updated up to and throughout the festival.

HEDGELAYING CONTEST HELPS KEEP ANCIENT RURAL CRAFT ALIVE



Determined hedgelayers battled against strong winds and heavy downpours in an annual contest celebrating the ancient rural craft.

The Durham Hedgelaying Competition returned to Woodlands Hall Farm in Knitsley, near Consett, this month, with 18 competitors from across the country braving Storm Callum to showcase their skills.

Now in its 20th year, the contest is organised by Durham County Council's Hedgerow Partnership and aims to encourage more people to take up hedgelaying. It sees hedgelayers compete in three classes – open, intermediate and novice – to lay seven meters of hedgerow using traditional techniques in just five hours.

This year, Peter Gibson, from Cumbria, reclaimed his position as overall champion after triumphing in the open class and cutting contest. Peter last won the competition in 2016.

The competition promotes the benefits of using traditional rural skills for conservation and hedgerow management. Encouraging young people to get involved is another key aim, and organisers were delighted to see the contest's youngest entrant, Aiden Hanley, walk away with two prizes.

The 15-year-old, from Cumbria, not only won the Novice Cup but the Andrew Adams Junior Champion Cup.

Cllr Ossie Johnson, the council's Cabinet member for tourism, culture, leisure and rural issues, said: "I would like to congratulate Peter and Aiden for doing so well in this year's competition, and thank all of the hedgelayers for taking part.

"Hedgelaying is essential to the continued survival of the county's miles of hedgerows, and competitions such as this do a fantastic job keeping these skills alive."

Woodlands Hall Farm has been hosting the competition for the last three years and farmer, Neil Hunter, is passionate about traditional techniques.

He said: "When I arrived at the farm almost 30 years ago there wasn't much wildlife here. I started to replace fences with hedgerows and, as they have matured, I've seen more and more birds following the hedge lines, including grey partridges and barn owls."

Grants are available to carryout field boundary management in County Durham.

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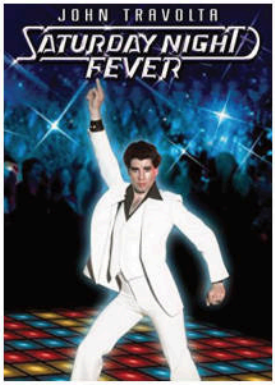
STAYING ALIVE

Although disco music had been around for a while it was only when the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack was released, that everyone jumped on the Bee Gee bandwagon and imagined themselves to be budding John Travolta's; embracing disco fever to the full. Soon every dance floor was filled, as the loud pulsating beat enticed even those with two left feet with the words, 'You Should Be Dancing' - yeah!

The blockbuster film's soundtrack after smashing the American charts, hit the UK and then the dance floors of Consett.



And by far the best dance floor around was The Freemasons Arms in Front Street. It had seen it's day as a popular ballroom and banqueting suite so the floor was spacious and ideal for all the tricky twists and turns.

The disc jockey was on the stage and as the lights flashed so did everyone else in their fluorescent tops, jumpsuits and lurex ensembles.

As usual most of the girls were straight up carefully placing their hand bags safely in the middle of the floor while they attempted to strut their stuff.

Tables and red padded chairs with curved edges were positioned neatly around the dance floor and the room - which was always packed - had its own bar, separate from the main one, where the shyest of dancers hung out, having a few drinks to give them Dutch courage before sliding their way back sporting their 'Boogie Shoes'



Even the male stalwarts of denim were persuaded to splash out on a pair of high waisted beige or white flares to hover grandly close to their platforms. In fact, some guys opted for the whole regalia, velvet jackets over shirts opened to the navel, to reveal finely combed chest hair and a swinging medallion! To complete the look, long flowing locks and a droopy moustache like Jason King's were preferable!

Everyone who was anyone wanted to be seen and seventies fashion did the trick. However Consett's November



weather played havoc with pale flapping flares as they made their way from pub to pub. So by the time they reached the Freemason's most people's pants weren't as pristine as John Travolta's. The clinging red dust and tiny specks of steel flecked dirt adhered to hems and seams, so a trip up the wide stairs to the toilets to sponge them down was usually in order before they got back to 'Jive Talkin'.



I had a royal blue pair of satin trousers, which I teamed with a sparkling matching top that I'd asked my Mam to run up on her sewing machine. Looking back I must have looked like the peanut cracknell in a box of Quality Street but at the time I thought I was the bee's knees.



As the night wore on we hardly had time to breathe or take a sip of our lagers and lime as the hits rolled out, 'If I Can't Have You,' More Than A Woman and 'How Deep Is Your Love'.

The electric and noisy atmosphere prompted some over enthusiastic gyrators doing 'The Bump' to cause a domino effect which produced just a few minor injuries, easily treated with Elastoplast!



Looking at the time and knowing the experience was nearing a close I was determined to dance till the end but unfortunately trying to perfect my version of 'The Hustle' while dancing to 'Disco Inferno' my ever so tight shiny disco pants refused to take the strain and split at the seams!

So I ended off the night dancing to 'Staying Alive' wearing a camel duffle coat I'd found hanging in the cloakroom!

mind | Derwentside
for better mental health

Derwentside Mind, a small, independent mental health charity, has recently moved to new premises in Trafalgar Street Consett.

Centrally located next to the Library the charity offers a variety of well-being services which include, health and wellbeing courses, one to one talking therapies, holistic therapies and activities.

Although Mind is a national charity, Derwentside Mind do not receive funding from a national source and are reliant on local fundraising, sponsorship, and donations to provide these much needed and well used services in our area.

Derwentside Mind - as well as self-referrals for assessment - welcome referrals from community groups, voluntary and statutory organisations, businesses and other agencies. They can offer a full information and advice service as well as the opportunity for social, recreational and self development groups.

Unfortunately because of underfunding some of the services have been affected and staff have reluctantly been forced to set up waiting lists.

In today's society we all bear the responsibility of encouraging good mental health so by supporting



experts such as Derwentside Mind we can make a difference.

Local businesses who feel they would benefit from a health and wellbeing support package for their Staff or colleagues should get in touch. Or if they are able to provide sponsorship or funding for any of the services Derwentside Mind offer they would be warmly welcomed and appreciated.

Derwentside Mind now have a My Donate page on their website.

Please Contact the following for further information:

Derwentside Mind
Brenda/Liz
5 Trafalgar Street, Consett, DH8 5AP
Telephone: 01207 591705
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helpdesk@
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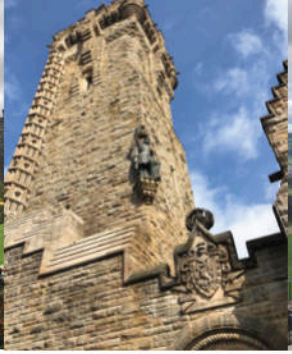



Places to Go: Stirling

I was preparing this article on a train to Edinburgh for a meeting, and had in my mind's eye a walk over Old Stirling Bridge, up towards the Wallace Monument, back through Cambuskenneth to the abbey ruins and over the footbridge to Stirling city. Amazingly, when I spoke to the man sitting next to me in the meeting, it transpired that he lived on Stirling Riverside and did this very same walk (minus the climb to the Wallace Monument) with his dog regularly.

The east coast main line operator LNER offers one train a day to Stirling, the Highland Chieftain service to Inverness which is a diesel hauled IC125 locomotive, soon to be replaced by the new Azuma trains. It leaves Darlington Monday to Friday at 1423 (Newcastle 1454) arriving Stirling 1719, and the return journey is at 1032 from Stirling, arriving 1253 at Newcastle and 1324 at Darlington. To make the most of your day or days in Stirling you can use an earlier train north changing to Scotrail at Edinburgh, and return home later, and there are plenty of cheap seats on this route. Different timings apply on Saturdays and Sundays for the Highland Chieftain.

Stirling was created a royal burgh by King David I of Scotland in 1130, and our present Queen gave it city status at her Golden Jubilee in 2002. Stirling, "like a huge brooch clasps the Highlands and Lowlands together", and it is often quoted that "he who holds Stirling, holds Scotland, as a result of its key position as the traditional lowest bridging point of the River Forth. I often visited the city as part of a single day tour for my railway station apprentices covering Edinburgh and Glasgow too, but a full day can be enjoyed in Stirling alone, visiting the Castle high on a rock, the jail (closed for the winter) and the Wallace monument just north of the town, easily walkable or use a local bus. The oldest known citizen of the Stirling area is Torbrex Tam (Torbrex is a suburban area of Stirling), whose bones were dated between 2152 and 2021 BC. The most significant battles in the area, both of which were lost by the English, were in 1297 at Stirling Bridge and 1314 at Bannockburn involving "Braveheart" William Wallace and Robert the Bruce respectively.

The Church of the Holy Rude is one of the town's most important buildings, founded in 1129, and reputed to be the only surviving church in the UK excepting Westminster Abbey to have held a coronation. On 29 July 1567, the infant son of Mary, Queen of Scots, was anointed James VI of Scotland in the church, later to be King James I of England from the union of crowns in 1603 to his death in 1625.

The city has a population of nearly 50,000, and it is an important regional centre with about half of Scotland's population living within an hour's travel time. The Castle is open through the winter, administered by Historic Scotland, and the tall Wallace Monument too. The Museum and Art Gallery is free to enter, and also open during the winter. Cambuskenneth Abbey, a village across the River Forth accessed by footbridge, is where William Wallace's remains were buried, but not until after he had been taken to London's Smithfield in chains, hung, drawn and quartered and his head, dipped in tar, was exhibited on London Bridge. The giant monument, erected in 1869, which can be climbed by visitors, is a more fitting memorial to one of Scotland's most famous sons.

Photographs by Melissa Middlemiss, Slimming World Consultant

ALEX NELSON

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BUSINESS IS ROSY FOR ARTIST ALEX

By Keith Newman

A lifelong love of animals and wildlife has been the inspiration for one of the region's best kept cultural secrets and a multimillion pound business success that is literally sending greetings across the world from Derwentside.

Brought up near Shotley Bridge on the picturesque Northumberland / County Durham border, artist Alex Clark has loved the countryside and animals all of her life. As a young teenager, she would exhibit her animal drawings and paintings at the annual Snod's Edge Art Show little thinking that in future her work would be a familiar sight all across the globe on greetings cards, pottery, notepads and a whole host of other collectable and functional items.

Alex's artwork is now a worldwide phenomenon with her stylised, quirky interpretation of farm animals, birds, cats and dogs and other wildlife instantly recognisable in gift shops and major outlets by characteristic rosy cheeks and beaming smiles on the animal's faces.

Those beaming faces now grace wholesalers and retailers all across the world including Canada, Australia and New Zealand but it is in the UK where 75 per cent of Alex's work is sold in the highly competitive greetings cards and gifts sector.

A huge ambassador for the North East, Alex studied Biology at Newcastle University and sold her artwork to fund her degree mainly by painting pet portraits. After graduating, the lure of the paint brush was still very strong and she focused on selling her work in craft fairs. The small local craft fairs migrated to large national events as her work grew in popularity.

"I was painting pet portraits and working on commissions for fine art wildlife paintings and I found that this was taking up a lot of my time. I was in the process of opening a shop in Weardale to supplement my sales at craft fairs and realised that I didn't have enough art work to display in the shop," said Alex.

"I developed the idea of humanising the animal paintings by giving them huge smiles and rosy cheeks. This type of artwork took less time to complete and the public loved the quirky look of the animals. It helped me to fully stock the shop and I found that these new designs were selling as fast as I could paint them. I even had my mum helping me to deal with the growing demand for my work by delivering stock to our customers."

The journey from selling her art in craft fairs in Durham and Northumberland to today's multimillion pound global business with a 15,000-sq. ft. warehouse in Consett and retail outlets in Corbridge and Stanhope has been testament to her talent as an artist and designer and the business acumen of her long-term partner and co-director Erik Nielsen.

Erik's sales pedigree was first established when he ran a reproduction art print and card distribution business in Scotland and Northern Ireland. His knowledge of the business has helped to propel millions of units of Alex's work into homes all across the world. The couple met in 2002 when Erik acted as her Scottish agent where he quickly identified the huge potential popularity of Alex's work. Working closely with Alex he helped develop a strategy to grow the business from cottage industry to global entity.

"We very quickly went from a turnover of £100k to around £1m simply by having the right product and getting the optimum sales packages to our customers. Our range appeals to everyone from children to grandparents and wholesalers are desperate for Alex's latest designs," said Erik.

The Alex Clark brand is steadily expanding with some 3000 designs across all product ranges and the business is currently turning over around £2.5m per annum. A remarkable achievement especially as the growth of the whole business has been self-funded by the couple themselves.

Despite being such a global phenomenon, the shops and warehouse all retain a cottage industry family feel. Alex employs more than 20 staff in warehousing, packaging, admin and sales roles and her mum who helped her out in the early days still enjoys working in the Corbridge retail outlet.

The future for the business looks as rosy as the cheeks on Alex's animals with Alex and Erik currently showing the latest designs and products at trade fairs. They have also just released a very special Christmas Card for the National Trust featuring one of their three beloved family dogs.

"We're a nation of animal lovers and I'm really grateful that so many people appreciate the artwork that I do with animals. I really do have one of the best jobs in the world working with a great team in a lovely part of the world that has so influenced my work," said Alex.

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ASK The VET

PRINCE BISHOP VETERINARY HOSPITAL

By Christina Stubbins
Prince Bishop Veterinary Hospital

HOW TO MAKE A VISIT TO THE VETS AS STRESS-FREE AS POSSIBLE FOR YOUR CAT

Many cats find visits to the vets stressful but there are some things that can be done to make it a more enjoyable experience for you and your feline friends

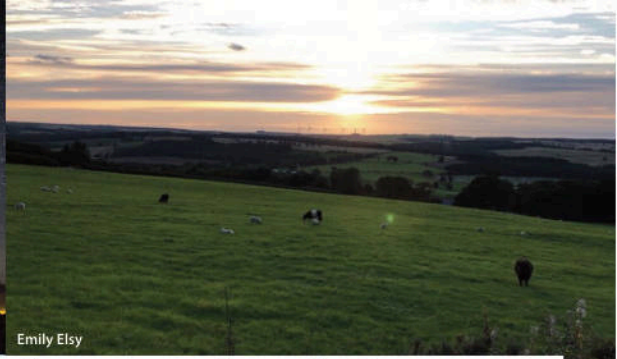
1) Choose a cat carrier that completely unzips, or where the top can be completely removed. This allows them to be slowly exposed and lifted out if necessary, rather than being dragged out a front opening box.
2) Make the carrier a part of the furniture. Leave it in the living room with the front/top open and place their favourite toys, treats or catnip inside so they are intrigued to go inside. Don't just get it out when you know you need to take them to the vets.
3) Try to get them to enter the carrier voluntarily by using their normal bed, treats and toys inside.
4) On the day of the visit, spray a feline facial pheromone spray (such as Feliway) inside the carrier 30 minutes before you leave to help keep them calm.
5) When in the car, secure the carrier on the floor, or on a seat with the seatbelt fastened.
6) When you get to the vets, raise the carrier off the floor by placing it on the seats or on an elevated shelf if available. Consider covering the carrier with a blanket or towel.
7) If you know your cat is becoming stressed while waiting for your appointment, let the reception team know and they may be able to move you to a quieter area of the practice.

http://princebishopvets.co.uk/client-advice/



Mark Tee





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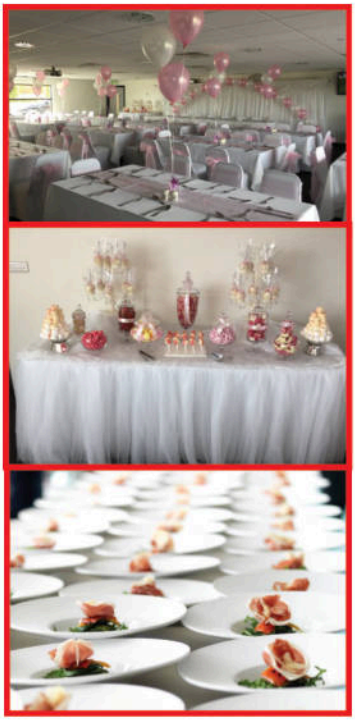

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