**January 2023 The History of Lindisfarne Castle**

**Speaker: Nick Lewis**

Lindisfarne Castle, on Holy Island ─ or *Insula* *Sacra* as the Normans called it – is a well-known, iconic feature of northern England and has a remarkable history. Our speaker, Nick Lewis, a post-graduate historian, had researched its history and explored the fabric of the building in fine detail, unearthing newmaterial and historical evidence hitherto unknown.

Nick revealed some new evidence in a gallop through the centuries. He began with the building in later Tudor times of the castle we know, on an outcrop of whin sill rock, and he showed an early sketch dated 1680 (there was an earlier, smaller fort nearby, dating from 1548/9). The castle was built by government as a military garrison to protect Holy Island harbour from attack and was strategically linked with Berwick. Holy Island was often under seaborne attack leading to frequent exchanges of cannon-fire, and stories of intrigue and siege were not unknown. In 1715 the Jacobites, aided by the French, briefly captured the castle in the name of James, the Old Pretender. In 1798 all cannon were removed, but three new guns were installed by the Royal Artillery in 1858.

By 1893/4, lack of interest in the castle as a military base led to its decommissioning as a garrison. Edward Hudson, a wealthy Edwardian gentleman (the publisher and founder of *Country Life* magazine) bought the castle and in 1903 recruited the leading architect of the period, Sir Edwin Lutyens, to convert it into a private house. Lutyens’ design changed it from a utilitarian, defensive structure into a romantic, Arts and Crafts style holiday home where Hudson could hold house parties for his circle of renowned guests. One such guest, Gertrude Jekyll, contented herself with populating the castle’s rocky foundations with wildflowers, the seeds for which were distributed from a gun she fired, and scattered by a small boy who was lowered in a basket from the high castle walls! She also designed the small walled garden that had been used by soldiers to grow vegetables, turning it into a flower garden to complement the castle’s new look. The renovation of the castle was featured on pages in *Country Life.* Hudson befriended a local fisherman family, the Lilburns, who acted as caretakers of the Castle until it was sold to the National Trust for posterity.

The castle has been challenged on many fronts: by political factions, church authorities – Henry VIII’s Reformation saw the end of Holy Island being governed by the Durham Prince Bishops ─ but perhaps its greatest challenge comes from the weather, since easterly storms batter the castle on a more regular basis than cannons have done. Much of the castle is built with sandstone, which is subject to erosion, from the ruined Anglo-Saxon priory on Holy Island. Foe example, the Lutyens window frames have failed to secure the fabric of the castle from indurations of lashing rain.

The National Trust initiated a plan for restoration with work beginning in 2013. Employed by the Trust for fifteen years, now as *Collections and House Officer*, Nick cares for historic buildings and their collections at Lindisfarne & the Farne Islands, and he has overseen this renovation of Lutyens’ work, which has been modified and adapted by skilled craftsmen to better withstand the rain.

The programme of work aimed to ensure the castle could withstand longer term climate extremes – it was hoped there would be no need for remedial action for at least a decade ─ but five years later it is already being tested!

Good luck and thanks to Nick and the team who care for this invaluable part of our history.