

## **Wallington Hall and its residents.**

Buildings consist of more than stone and mortar. Over time they absorb an essence from occupants and events to become imbued with 'a Spirit of Place'.

On 13<sup>th</sup> February Elizabeth Finch, a volunteer speaker from the National Trust, gave a talk to in which she brought the spirit of Wallington Hall to life – a spirit of politics, intellect, learning and enquiry.

The story of Wallington is essentially a story of three families – the Fenwicks, the Blacketts, and the Trevelyans – which runs from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Between them these families provide a cavalcade of the local and national life of that period.

Sir John Fenwick, third baronet, came of a landowning Northumbrian family of ancient lineage. He acquired Wallington by succession in 1676. He was an MP and Jacobite who plotted against William III. Financial difficulties forced the sale of Wallington to Sir William Blackett in 1688. Money was not the only thing Fenwick lost – his machinations against William led, in 1697, to the loss of his head.

Sir William Blackett was responsible for building the hall that we see today. The Blackett family was prominent in trade in Newcastle and were Jacobites/Tories. Sir William's son, also a William, started as a Tory then later stood on a joint interest with Matthew Ridley, a Whig. This may have been because he was heavily implicated in a failed Jacobite plot and, threatened with arrest on a charge of treason, he kept a low profile for the rest of his time!

The next incumbent was William's nephew, Sir Walter Calverley Blackett. A gentle character, he loved his dogs, his tenants and his estate, and brought about many improvements both in the agriculture of his estate and the living conditions of his tenants, including building Cambo village. In contrast with the rumbustious political antics of his forebears, he was the epitome of an enlightened country gentle man. He also employed a young neighbour in his gardens – a young man who went onto greatness as 'Capability Brown'.

After the Blacketts, ownership passed to the Trevelyans.

The Trevelyan family is the one that put the greatest of that spiritual input into the building. As a family renowned for their intellect and independence of mind, they were not afraid to put their beliefs and political principles down on paper or into public service.

Charles Edward Trevelyan was a reformer who believed in the free market and the operation of natural causes. It is this last point that has caused much controversy because he was the government minister responsible for famine relief during the Irish potato famine: his role in that event has left a legacy that is still argued over, overshadowing his considerable reforms of the civil service and public administration.

His son George Otto gets a more even press. A historian, classical scholar, Liberal MP, writer and statesman, his political career lasted for thirty years, serving in all of William Gladstone's administrations. He died at Wallington in 1928 aged 90.

George was succeeded by his eldest son, Charles Phillips Trevelyan. Handsome, intelligent, wealthy and of high social position, he was described by his friend and fellow socialist Beatrice Webb as “a man who has every endowment”. He sat for Newcastle Central in the House of Commons and served in Labour’s first governments in 1924 and 1929. His chief interest was education. He died in 1958 aged 87.

Wallington Hall and the estate then came into the ownership of the National Trust under an arrangement made by Charles in 1942.

Wallington stands today as a vibrant living testament to values that can seem somewhat anachronistic. Knowledge for knowledge’s sake, and the notion that those who have wealth are custodians and that privilege brings with it great responsibilities are ideas that, in a more cynical and materialistic time, are often overlooked.

After Elizabeth’s talk her audience was left with the feeling that those Blacketts, Fenwicks and Trevelyans would have approved of what the house has become.