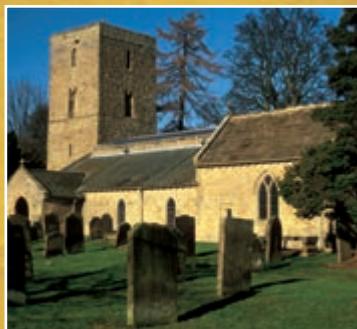
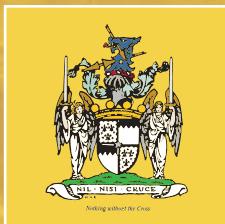


Bolam Lake /

A history of the area of Bolam



Bolam Lake, a vision of grandeur from John Dobson

John Dobson (pictured right) had an illustrious career, spanning more than 50 years, designing buildings across the North East of England. Today you can see his work at Newcastle Central Station, (Old) Eldon Square and the east side of Grey Street, Newcastle.



In 1816 local landowner Reverend John Beresford (who became Lord Decies in 1819) felt compelled to do something for the local people who were suffering due to a period of agricultural and economic decline. His answer was to ask Dobson to lay out an artificial lake, with a dam at its eastern end, 'necessary islands' and adjacent woodland plantations in an area to the south of Bolam Hall within the wider estate which he was also responsible for landscaping.

Did you know?

John Dobson's father was
a nurseryman

Bolam Lake is a rare example of his landscaping work. At Bolam he found that 'topography unites with history to provide the landscape gardener with a unique opportunity.'

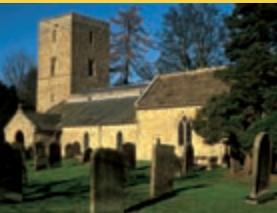




Bolam... a long and fascinating history?



Ancient settlement, Norman Barons, Border wars and the Black Death, Bolam has seen its fair share of drama!



Above: The Saxon tower of St Andrew's Church

Anglo Saxon Settlement

People have lived in the Bolam area for thousands of years. The name 'Bol' comes from the Scandinavian word for hill and evidence of early village life can be found in the Saxon tower of St Andrew's Church, cultivation of the land and the Iron Age Settlement at Slate Hill.



Right: Artist's impression of the settlement at Slate Hill

Illustration: Sandra Rowntree

Barons of Bolam

The Norman Invasion of 1066 brought in a new chapter in Bolam's history. Henry I created the title 'Baron of

Bolam' as part of a wider plan to place Norman supporters in strategic positions around the country. The Barons of Bolam ruled over nearby villages and woodland, built a castle, collected payments from villagers

and provided a Norman presence on the borders for the next 140 years, until the last male heir died in 1206.

Did you know?

'Bol' comes from the

Scandinavian word for hill



Border Wars and Unrest

Ninety years after the Barons of Bolam had died out, Bolam found itself at the centre of national politics and events when the War of Scottish Independence started between England and Scotland in 1296. King Edward I needed a strong, military presence in Northumberland so granted the land around Bolam to the de Raymes family.

Robert de Raymes came from a distinguished military family and had fought campaigns in Scotland and France. An effigy of a Knights Templar soldier (an elite Catholic military organisation) in St Andrew's church is believed to be Robert de Raymes. However, 20 years of continual conflict took its toll, and in 1316 Robert de Raymes petitioned King Edward II stating 'He had lost horses, armour and other goods to the value of a hundred marks, that his houses and lands in Northumberland had been burnt and pillaged and damage done by the Scots to the amount of a thousand pounds, that he no longer derived any income from his property, which had formerly produced fifty pounds a year.'

The devastation caused by war, was compounded by poor harvests and the Black Death, which wiped out between a third and a half of the country's population. Uneasy border relations continued until 1603, when England and Scotland unified under one monarch and Bolam was able to enjoy a more peaceful period of history.

Above: King Edward I

Below: An effigy in St Andrew's church believed to be Robert de Raymes, a Knights Templar soldier



A period of harmony, growth and landscaping



Peace, prosperity and the arrival of the Landed Gentry led to the landscaping of Bolam Lake



Above: Decies family

Coat of Arms

Reproduced with kind

permission of Lord Decies

With peace came prosperity

People returned to Bolam to farm the land. Improvements to roads made trade easier and industry sprung up around slate, coal, limestone, saddle making and thatching. When John Horsley purchased the Bolam Estate in 1727 it was a thriving and expanding community. His son Robert added grandeur to the estate by building Bolam Hall, near the site of the former castle. He died shortly after the hall was complete, in 1809, and his daughter, Charlotte Philadelphia, inherited the estate. She married Reverend John Beresford in 1810 and they moved into Bolam Hall.

Did you know?

The Decies family are originally from Waterford, Ireland

Right: Bolam Hall around the beginning of the 20th century





John Beresford (later Lord Decies)

John Beresford was keen to improve the Bolam Estate, perhaps to reflect the title of Lord Decies which he would shortly inherit in 1819. He was familiar with fashionable ideas through the influence of his sister (Louisa) and her husband Thomas Hope – a renowned interior designer – and his uncle, the Marquess of Waterford who resided at the impressive Curraghmore Estate in County Waterford. Nearer to home, his neighbours were making improvements to their estates. Sir Charles Monck was undergoing building and landscaping work on Belsay Hall and grounds, while Sir John Trevelyan kept a grand estate at Wallington.

John Beresford commissioned a young John Dobson to produce a landscape for Bolam Hall.



Above: Portrait of John Dobson

Newcastle December 28th 1849

"I John Dobson Architect and Landscape Gardener, of Newcastle upon Tyne, have followed that profession for upwards of Forty years, and have been extensively employed in the Counties of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and other Counties in England and Scotland besides having in youth the advantage of seeing the practical part of Planting and Gardening with my late Father, a Nurseryman and Gardener of Chilton."

Left: Extract from John Dobson's 1849 Affidavit

John Dobson and Bolam Lake

John Dobson was a young aspiring architect assisting Charles Monck on the redesign of Belsay Hall between 1810-1815. This is probably how he came to the attention of John Beresford who commissioned him to landscape land around Bolam. This is thought to be the only landscaping project Dobson undertook in a long and illustrious career which included the design of Newcastle's Central Railway Station, the east side of Grey Street and old Eldon Square.

Opposite page:
Extract from the 1828
Greenwood's map
detailing the estate
as landscaped by
John Dobson

Below: The sluice gate
to the east side of the
lake

John Dobson was influenced by the ideas of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (who was born only 5 miles away at Kirkharle just 100 years earlier) and he may have seen a selection of sketches and notes written by Humphrey Repton, which were kept in the library at Belsay Hall.



The landscaping needed to have a purpose – in this case to provide shelter from fierce northwesterly winds for Bolam Hall – while incorporating landscaping ideals of variety, association and grandeur. He achieved variety by planting a range of rich ornamental trees such as fir and spruce, intertwined with oak, lime, beech and elm. Views toward the 15th century Pele tower at Shortflatt gave the landscape architectural association. But the lake was to provide the grandeur: a jewel in the foreground, reflecting light, providing depth and variety and mirroring the brilliance of the plantation. The lake

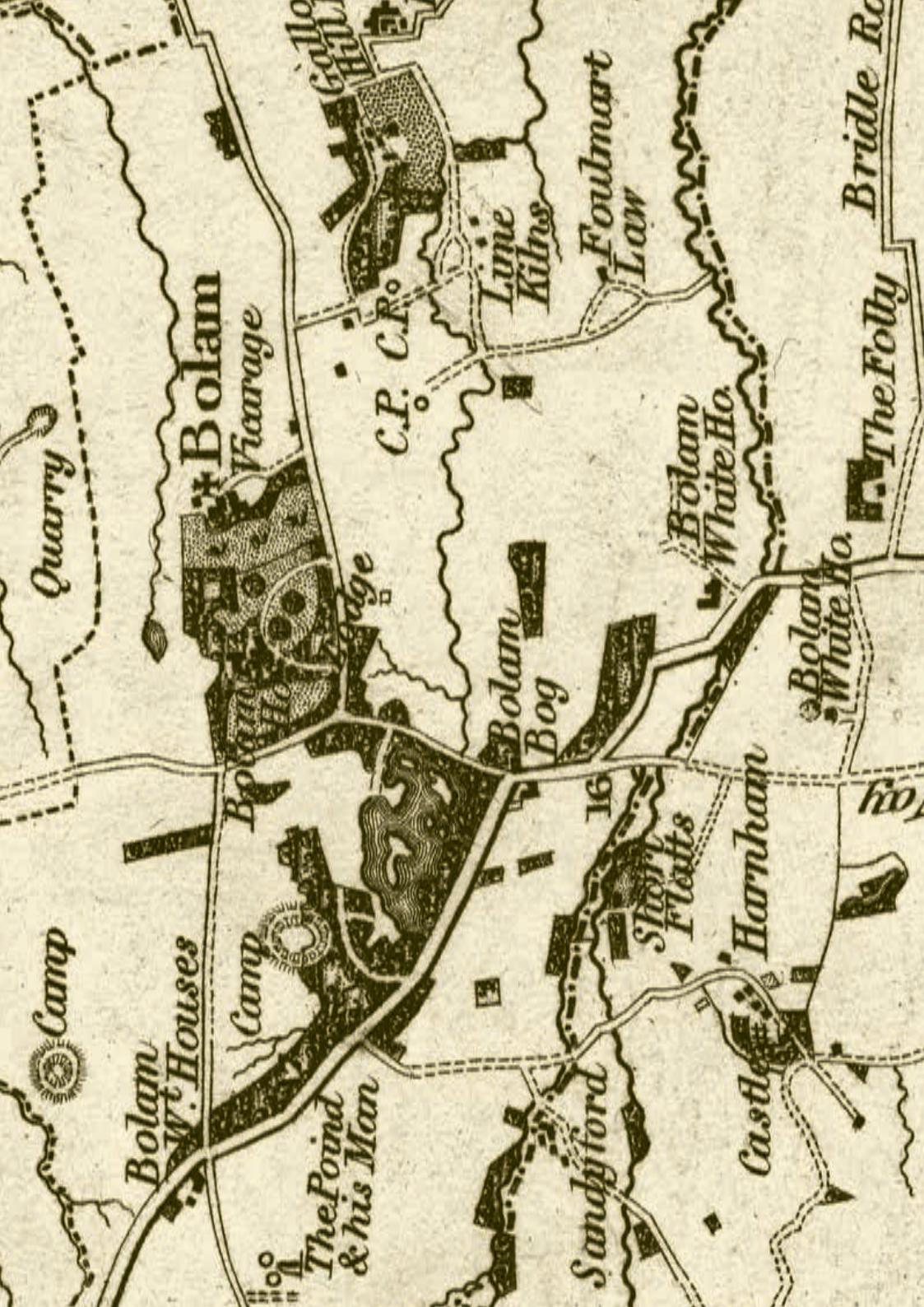
also included technical elements such as sluice gates, dams and overflow pipes which have helped maintain it for 200 years.

Did you know?

The lake is lined with
'puddled' clay

The creation of Bolam Lake gave much needed work to local labourers, who were paid 1 shilling a day and only returned if they wanted to. It took 2 years to complete and it transformed the land from boggy marshland into a sheltered beauty spot.

It also transformed the fortunes of Bolam village.





Above: The new lake was stocked with trout so Beresford and his guests could enjoy a spot of trout fishing

Bolam Village 1818 - 1830

A new vicar arrived at St Andrew's church in 1818 and kept a diary of 'occurrences' around the village. Firstly the vicarage was renovated: a coal and ash house was built; a loft room was added to the stables and the vicarage was thoroughly cleaned, painted and wall-papered. Improvements were made to the church with the installation of a new stove to provide heating, and a new Sunday school opened which attracted 60 – 70 children. Most of these improvements were paid for by John Beresford. Finally, a new society was formed of 'horses, men and dogs' called the Northumberland Hunt with the object of 'the destruction of foxes and the pleasure which the members have in pursuing these pernicious animals.' Beresford and his guests could also enjoy trout fishing in his new lake. Bolam now had the trappings of a country estate.

90 people lived in Bolam village in 1820. The wider parish had a population of 595. This was a thriving community of agricultural labourers, gardeners, blacksmiths, joiners, woodmen, servants, shopkeepers and their families.

The vicar also kept a record of deaths and Bolam, like other places, faced outbreaks of diseases with little medical help. Of the 125 people who died between 1818 and 1830, 1 in 5 were babies, almost a third of deaths were caused by consumption (tuberculosis) and 1 in 11

Right: Parish Record of Deaths from 1830

1830. - During the last 11 years from Jan. 1818. to Dec. 1829.	
Total Burials	125
of these from 6 parishes	103
One year old & under	25
Two to Ten years old	21
Less than One year	3
Ten to 30 (Adults)	11
Thirty to forty	6

Causes of Death:

Consumption	45
Inflammation	25
Scarlet fever	10
Cholera	1
Stomach & Bowels	10
Childbirth	2
Unknown	1

were caused by scarlet fever. His diary also shows that some people died because they were ‘worn out’.

Bolam also suffered a rash of suicide attempts in 1820, when three people attempted to take their own lives over a two month period (only one successfully). Perhaps more worrying are the changes to society in general, with large factories replacing cottage industries and the growth of towns and cities. The vicar writes in 1820: ‘This year is a dreadful year for England – sedition, blasphemy and all sorts of evils spreading like wildfire among the lower orders in the manufacturing towns and districts.’



Above: In the early 19th century large factories were replacing cottage industries

Bolam Lake Revisited

Almost 30 years after Dobson completed Bolam Lake and grounds he returned to find the landscape ‘in a most neglected state.’ His ambition for the lake and plantation included: ‘a spread of trees with a hanging and playful outline, giving variety and extent to the whole’. By 1849 this had become ‘a few bare, unhealthy trees, allowing the eyes to pass over the whole surface of the water producing the effect of a mere pond.’ He described many of the trees as looking like ‘scaffolding poles’ carrying ‘poor and unhealthy tops’ and providing ‘no shelter to the house from the cold and heavy north west winds.’

Dobson was furious. He set about identifying what needed to be done, in some cases cutting down two thirds of the trees, in the hope that the remaining trees may throw out their branches. He entrusted his plans to Thomas Coxon, a woodman, and hoped that ‘the great expense which Lord Decies has experienced I trust will not be entirely wasted.’

The Decies family were only to enjoy the estate for another 50 years. In 1902 they sold the estate to Mr Frank Buddle Atkinson before moving to Ireland.

Heading into a new millennium



Colourful characters, two World Wars and the arrival of day trippers



Above: Frank Buddle Atkinson

Bolam Lake in the 20th Century

Frank Buddle Atkinson was a keen sportsman, amateur jockey and colourful character. He raced in the 1892 Grand National, though his horse, Midshipman, failed to finish. He joined the Durham Light Infantry and fought in World War One, rising to the rank of Captain. He visited New York in 1939 and in 1941 he became the High Sheriff of Northumberland. He was master of the local foxhounds, played in the cricket team and bred pheasants and partridges for sport. The lake at Bolam was well stocked with trout and the estate had a small army of workmen: three gamekeepers looked after the pheasants and six woodmen managed the plantations. The hedges were trimmed regularly and the roadside verges were mown each summer. A private police force patrolled the perimeter to keep out poachers.

Did you know?

Frank Buddle Atkinson is rumoured to be buried in his hunting boots!

However, despite his energy and efforts, by 1945 Bolam had grown wild and Frank Buddle Atkinson moved to Surrey where he died in 1953.

World War II

During World War Two, Land Girls of the Timber Corps worked on the estate. They were paid 12 shillings per week to cut timber. It was very dirty work, and water



was rationed: they were only allowed one scoop of water to wash in! Italian Prisoners of War worked alongside them, and although they weren't allowed to fraternise with them, friendships between the women and Italian prisoners sprung up.

Jo and Monica Bogie remembered the long hours and learning to drive a tractor to drag timber over the boggy land where it was loaded into lorries. There was even a light railway used to transport the logs over boggy ground.

Jo had been a secretary at a tobacconists in Newcastle before the war then trained as a timber measurer. At Bolam lakeside the felling was done by 20 girls and 100 Italian PoWs from Ponteland. She lived with the gamekeeper's family in a cottage on the corner of the lake.

Above: Jo Brown (nee Bogie)

Below: The Badge of the Women's Land Army Timber Corps



Left: Jo working at Bolam during WWII





The impact of the war also affected Viscountess Allendale who resided at Bolam Hall. An article in the Chronicle newspaper on the 1st August 1941 stated ‘activities limited by petrol rationing meant she could only go to Newcastle once a fortnight, the kitchen and store room lent to the community to make preserves, lawns turned to hay.’ Even her nursery governess and housemaid had been called up!

If you pay a visit to Bolam Church look out for the repair made to the walls following a bomb hitting the Church on the 1st May 1942 during a failed raid. The German Dornier 217 bomber ditched its deadly cargo of four bombs to gain speed whilst being hotly pursued by RAF Bristol Beaufighters from Acklington. Three of the bombs exploded harmlessly in the surrounding fields but one went through the churchyard wall, bounced off a gravestone and right through the wall of the Hedley-Dent (Shortflatt) chapel, rattling around in the chancel and damaging the harmonium, luckily it didn’t explode.

Right: Bolam Church
(St Andrew's)





The vicar's wife at the time, Mrs Hutton, wrote the following to her son John, a Flying Officer stationed in the Middle East: '...Jerry paid us a visit at 4am May 1st. He was being hotly pursued by two of our fighters who were on his tail. He was very low down, and discharged the whole of his load in order to get away... 4 bombs 2½ tons in all. One fell, just missing the walnut tree, which still stands, 30yds from houses wall. An unexploded one lay in the chancel, it had passed through the lower part of the wall in the H-D Chapel, smashing all the furnishings in that part of the church, none of any value, injuring some windows... the remaining two bombs only made large craters in Windmill field...' (these can still be seen in the fields beyond the church).



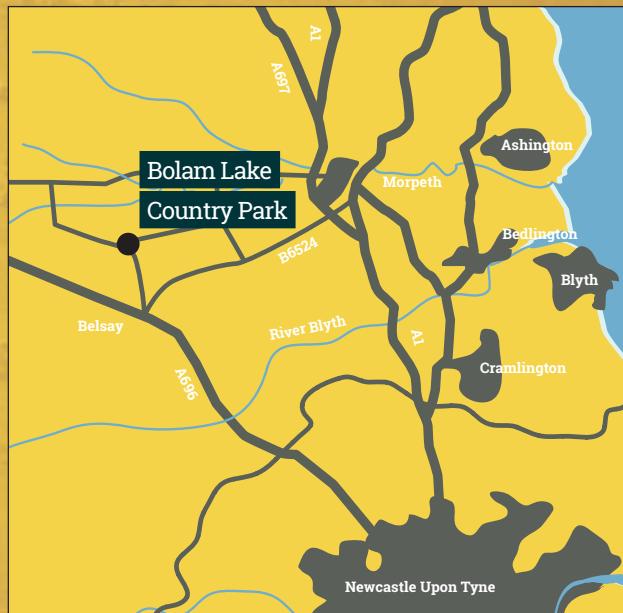
Above: The repairs made to the church wall following a bombing raid in 1942

After the War

The arrival of the motor car and charabancs made day trips from cities and towns into the countryside easier and affordable. Bolam Lake was a popular destination, and in 1970, after years of constant trespass, the Trustees of Bolam Estate decided to sell the lake and adjoining woodland to Northumberland County Council. Bolam Lake Country Park opened to visitors in 1972 to provide a space for: 'passive recreational activities with the existing rural character and attractiveness of the lake and its surroundings remaining unspoilt.'

Did you know?

The largest pike caught in the lake weighed in at 26lb



Bolam Lake Country Park, Near Belsay, Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 0HE

We hope you have enjoyed this publication and for further information please email bolamlake@northumberland.gov.uk or telephone the County Council on 0345 600 6400

Acknowledgements:

Funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund in 2016 to recognise the work of John Dobson at Bolam.

The Bolam@200 project would like to thank the following for their support and contributions to this booklet:

Lord & Lady Decies

Muriel Sobo

Friends of Bolam Lake

Caroline Metcalfe, Woodhorn Trust

Victoria Coxon, Woodhorn Trust

Liz O'Donnell

Fiona Green, Northumbria Gardens Trust

Frances Povey, Northumberland County Council

Christopher H Slaughter, Northumberland County Council

Sandra Rowntree

Heritage Lottery Fund