

BANS Congress Harrogate April 7th – 9th, 2017

On Friday 7th of April four members of our Society, John Rainey, David Collins, Neil McCormick and Alan Dunlop set out from Belfast on the ferry to Cairnryan. This was the first leg on the journey to the BANS Annual Congress, this year to be held in Harrogate at The Crown Hotel.

The very early start ensured that the uneventful crossing was much appreciated. The early start was to enable us to do a bit of sight-seeing on the 200-odd mile route to Harrogate.

Neil had drawn up a tight itinerary which would get us into our destination in plenty of time despite the distance.

Our first destination and in truth the main reason for deciding to go this way was the famous Roman settlement of Vindolanda, just south of Hadrian's Wall and at about the midway point of the journey. We arrived within minutes of our scheduled time thanks to Neil's driving.



Vindolanda, one of Britain's most outstanding Roman sites, was a settlement housing a substantial military garrison and a large town supplying support and services to the surrounding area. It was established around AD75-84 and was not officially abandoned until AD410 some 330 years later. The site continued to be utilised to some extent until the late 9th century.

Excavations had been carried out on the site in an ad hoc manner since before the 2nd World War. With the establishment of a Trust in 1970, funds were made available and excavations have been on-going for the last 40 years. There were upward of nine phases of rebuilding on the site one on top of the other. According to one of the archaeologists on the site there is probably enough work for the next 200 years.

There are extensive standing remains and whilst we were there two areas were being excavated by teams of volunteers. We were able to chat to some of them and discovered that some coins had been excavated the previous day.



There is an excellent modern museum even though it is situated as far away from the entrance as it possibly could be. There is a fine section devoted to coins and there are plenty on display. The main historic treasure of the museum is without doubt over 350 partially burnt letters written on wooden sheets and preserved by the wet conditions on the site. These contain a unique archive of correspondence regarding daily life in the Roman Empire.

We were so enthralled with Vindolanda that we spent over an hour longer than planned and we were duly reprimanded by Neil. Our onward journey, though slowed a little by road works and Friday afternoon traffic, took us past 'The Angel of The North' and onward to Harrogate. Though we were a little later than planned we arrived just in time to be ushered in to dinner.



The Congress got underway immediately after dinner with a very topical presentation by Chris Barker from the Royal Mint Museum on 'The New £1 Coin' which had only been released into circulation a week beforehand. Afterward the opportunity was taken to renew old friendships and make new ones.

Saturday morning saw the start of the Congress Programme which was for the first time 'themed', the theme being

'Not from the Mint – Facsimiles, Fakes and Forgeries'

The first session included talks on 'Unofficial Roman Radiates, Tetrarchic Nummi, imitation Anglo-Saxon Sceats and Danelaw imitations of Alfred's Monogram London pennies.

After lunch a coach trip to Ripon had been arranged. Ripon was a major centre of religion and administration in Yorkshire during the Middle-Ages. After a short journey, we arrived in Ripon close to the Cathedral. The group was divided into two, one to visit the Prison first the second to go to the Cathedral first. Ripon Cathedral was built on the site of an Anglo Saxon church the crypt of which still survives intact. There were several major building phases, initially a Minster connected to an Abbey and the Archbishop of York the building has a mixture of styles with Norman and Gothic features still visible. Amongst later features are fine examples of 15th century wood carving in the form of Quire Stalls called 'Misericords' depicting scenes from the Bible and folklore said to be the work of a group of local craftsmen who plied their trade in the north of England at that time.

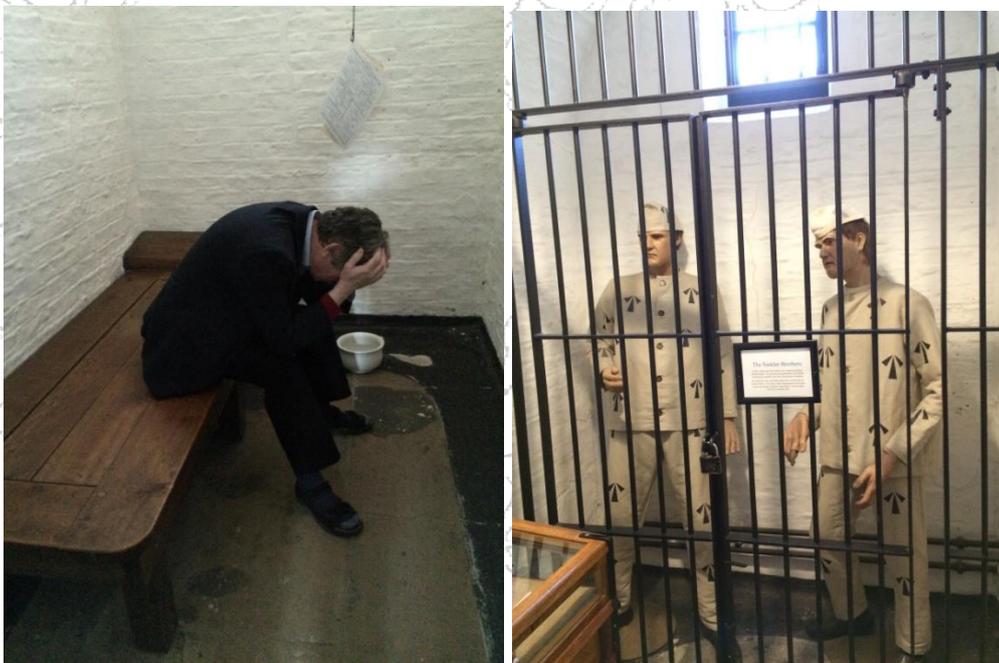


The works of art are not confined masterpieces of the medieval period but also include a fine bronze pulpit of an Art-Deco / Art Nouveau style made in the early 20th century as well as several modern stained-glass windows.



Our ability to savour all the delights of the Cathedral were a little hindered by the Spring Charity Fair being held inside, but still it gave the place a sense of warmth.

After a period in the Cathedral we changed places with the other group and headed to the prison. Ripon because of its vulnerable position close to the Borders had a long tradition of self-protection and from Anglo-Saxon times had 'Night Watch' under the command of mayor, whose job it was to protect the town in periods of unrest and attack. This tradition carried on in later centuries with the establishment of courts and a prison in the town. The old prison has been preserved almost intact since 18th century. We were treated to a very interesting tour of the building which houses many interesting exhibits in keeping with a house of correction including the cells in which offenders were kept.



There were plenty of displays not least of which was a room devoted entirely to medals, badges, buttons and awards connected with the police of the area.

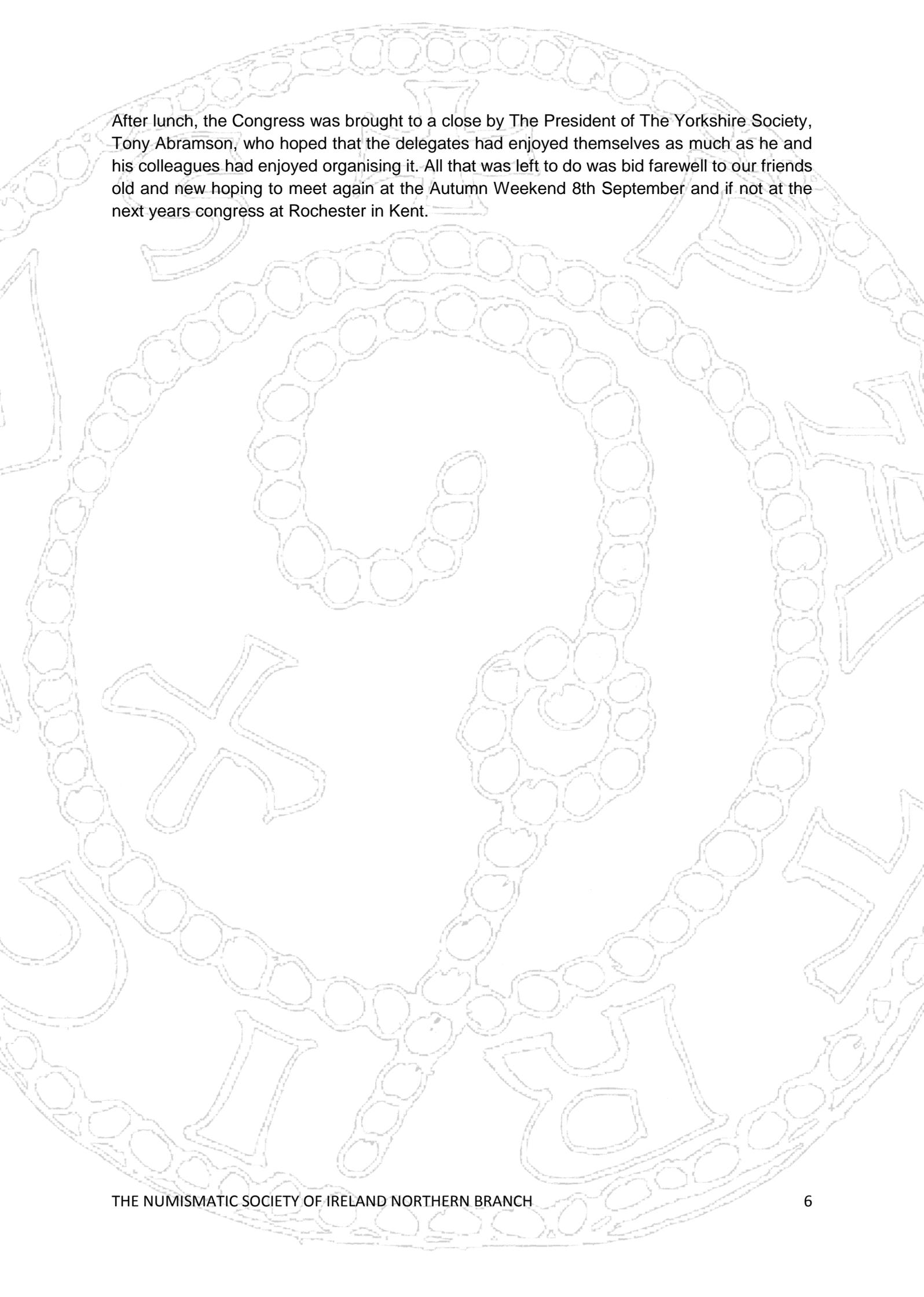


The final location of the day was the Courthouse (formally the Archbishop of York's Palace) where we were treated to the re-enactment of a trial of a famous 18th century counterfeiter. The cast was made up of some of the delegates who had learnt their lines beforehand. All in all it was most enjoyable for those watching but I dare say the original defendant would not have been so amused. It was an excellent afternoon and well organised. Ripon is another place well worth a second trip.



Then it was back to the hotel to get ready for the dinner after which we enjoyed the usual numismatic chatter and during which a few coins were bought and sold but mostly just discussed and compared.

The next morning was again devoted to papers on numismatic subjects ranging from the use of jettons, both English and European in England during the middle-ages, A piece on the history of Yorkshire during the English Civil War and its effect on the deposition of hoards and single pieces, an interesting introduction in to the fascinating world of tokens and their use and development in York. Finally, Chris Comber explained the results and conclusions regarding the Irish Harp Groats of Henry VIII, a subject to which he has been devoted for many years.



After lunch, the Congress was brought to a close by The President of The Yorkshire Society, Tony Abramson, who hoped that the delegates had enjoyed themselves as much as he and his colleagues had enjoyed organising it. All that was left to do was bid farewell to our friends old and new hoping to meet again at the Autumn Weekend 8th September and if not at the next years congress at Rochester in Kent.