

MMT NEWS

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Fig. 1: Shotley Chapel and the Hopper Mausoleum. (Copyright: RCHME)

HUMFREY HOPPER of BLACK HEDLEY, HIS BUILDINGS & HIS MAUSOLEUM

Windswept and isolated, the small chapel of St Andrew, Shotley, stands high up on the summit of Grey Mare Hill in Northumberland. It is a simple building, the kind of chapel which might have been built anywhere in the north of England to serve a scattered rural community. By contrast the Hopper mausoleum is an extraordinary structure, unlike any other funerary monument in this country. Capped with a lantern crowned with pinnacles it towers over the chapel nearby. (Fig. 1)

Who, you wonder, would build so lavish a tomb in this remote

place? The answer is Humfrey Hopper, but which Humfrey was that? There were several Humfreys among the Hoppers who lived at Black Hedley in the 17th and 18th centuries. The plaque on the south face of the mausoleum states that it was "Erected by Humfrey Hopper of Black Hedley, in memory of his wife Jane Hodgson, who died February 29th, 1752, aged 77." But as the plaque was put there in the second half of the 19th century the information is open to doubt. This, combined with the untutored classical style of the architecture, has led historians to suggest that the monument pre-dates the 18th century

and was actually built by an earlier Humfrey Hopper living at Black Hedley in 1663.

In an attempt to solve the mystery I have examined some printed sources of local history and visited the buildings where the family lived. Much of the historical information contained in this article has been drawn from the 6th volume of John Crawford Hodgson's *History of Northumberland* printed in 1902. From this I learned that there were Hoppers living in the district of Shotley Low Quarter from at least as early as 1570. At this date one Percival Hopper was a 'free tenant' paying 5s 0d

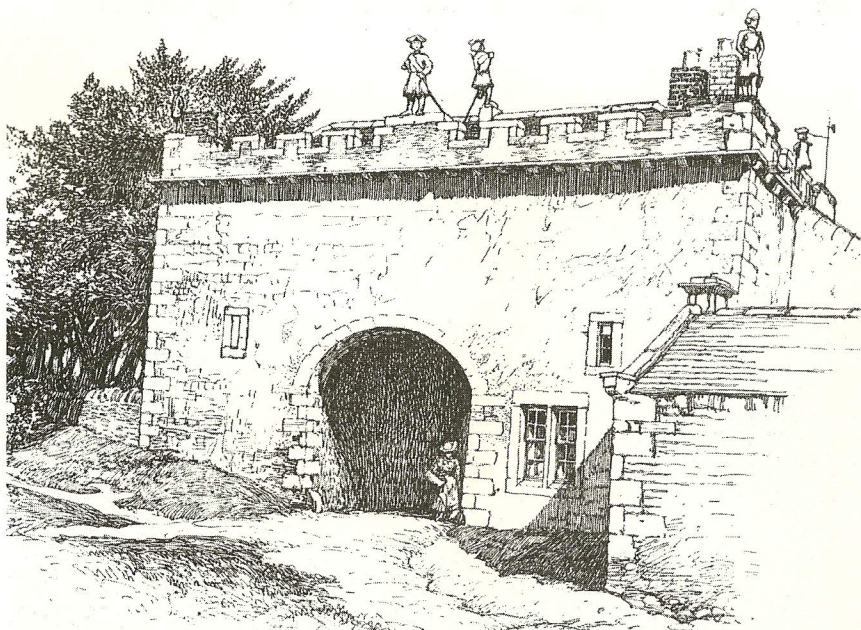


Fig. 2: Humfrey Hopper's 'Port' at Greenhead (from Hodgson)

a year for half a tenement of 'Blackeyad land' (Black Hedley) while the other half was held by John Swynburne. Black Hedley lies about two miles to the south of Shotley chapel.

The picture of the Hoppers that emerges in the 17th century is of a family whose members lived close to each other, probably in



Fig. 3: Statue at Shotley Hall

houses grouped round the farmyard at Black Hedley. Three of the four grandsons of Percival Hopper, Cuthbert, John and Thomas, are described as being 'of Black Hedley'. In this period the family is gradually increasing its land holdings; in 1632/3 the aforementioned Thomas purchased some land in Shotleyfield, an area to the north-east of Black Hedley, and in 1668/9, Humfrey Hopper, a great grandson of Percival, bought further land in the same district. Even so, this Humfrey was still paying rent for half the tenement of Black Hedley, the other half remaining in the hands of the Swynburne family. It does not seem likely that this Humfrey Hopper was in a position to build his family so grand a monument as the one in the churchyard at Shotley.

More research would be needed to establish precisely why his grandson, the next Humfrey Hopper (1677-1760), was so

much wealthier than his immediate forbears. As the only male descendant of his generation, he inherited both his father's and his uncle's land. They died in 1679 and 1696 respectively and so, by the age of 19, Humfrey could call himself a man of property. The family papers show, moreover, that he also



Fig. 4: Statue at Black Hedley

owned lands at Barnard Castle and Rookhope in County Durham. He married twice. On the first occasion he was only sixteen for his first son, Thomas, was baptised at Shotley church on April 1694. The identity of this wife is not known, but perhaps she brought Humfrey land as her dowry. It is likely that she died in childbirth as, three years after the birth of his first son, Humfrey made a second marriage, this time to Jane Hodgson of Alwent near Staindrop in County Durham. Alwent Hall is about five miles from Barnard Castle so perhaps Humfrey's land in that area came from her.



Fig. 5: *The Hopper Mausoleum today (railings reinstated by the Churches Conservation Trust)*

In the 18th century, the second Humfrey Hopper clearly had the resources to embark on a series of building projects. At this time he built a substantial house at Black Hedley approached from two directions by avenues of trees. It was linked to the adjacent farm buildings by a high wall with an arched entrance hiding the farmyard from view. In the *History of Shotley Spa* written in 1841, the Rev John Ryan described Black Hedley as "...a noble rural mansion...a good specimen of the princely farm-houses of the olden times". No doubt the illusion of ancient

grandeur was just the impression Humfrey wished to create. According to Ryan the building "was surmounted with small cannon [and] a number of mili-

tary figures, which seem prepared either for fighting or play". There is now no sign of these though there is a large stone statue on the farmyard wall.

Humfrey also built a massive 'port' at the end of the avenue that led from the tiny hamlet of Greenhead to his house. Here again the building was surmounted by military figures but these were considerably larger than the ones at Black Hedley. (Fig. 2) The gatehouse was demolished in 1964 but two of the statues are said to have been placed on the gate piers at the entrance of Shotley Hall near Shotley Bridge. The surviving figure (the other one has been taken down) is dressed like a Roman soldier with a helmet, breast-plate and chain-mail jerkin, but his warlike appearance is belied by the cornucopia leaning against the back of his legs. (Fig. 3) The Black Hedley statue, on the other hand, does appear to be wearing contemporary military dress and resembles the soldier that once stood on the right hand side of the gatehouse battlements. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 6: *A pair of figures reclining on the cornice, south side*

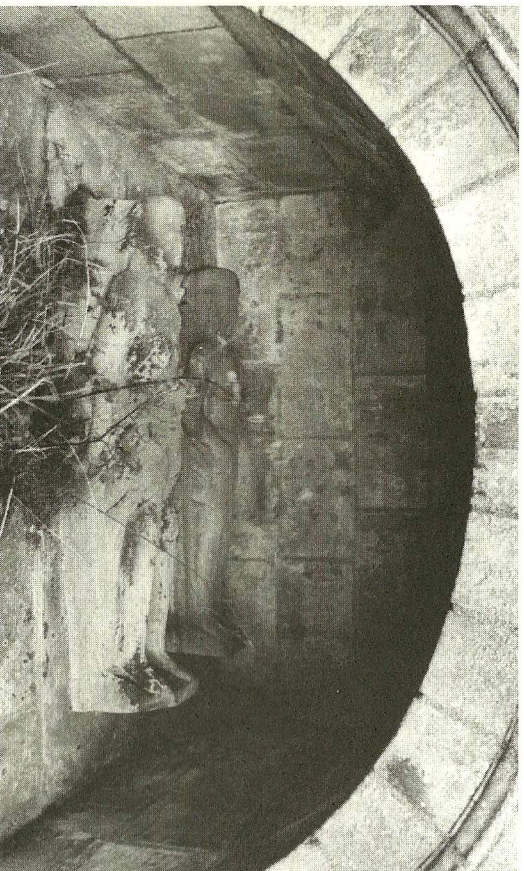


Fig. 7: The effigies at the base of the tomb

Statues of this kind, sometimes known as ‘defenders’, are displayed on the towers and fortified gateways of a number of castles in Northumberland and County Durham. These include the castles of Alnwick and Hylton in Northumberland and those of Whitton and Raby in County Durham, the latter no more than a mile from Jane Hodgson’s birthplace near Staindrop. But it is unusual, to say the least, to find such figures adorning the buildings of what was really no more than a sizeable farm. The unsophisticated style in which the statues are carved suggests they are the work of a local mason.

In the mid 18th century Humfrey turned his attention to the chapel at Shotley. By this time it was too small for the number of people attending services so Humfrey prevailed on Lord Crewe’s trustees, the patrons of the living, to make a grant of £20 for its enlargement. While carrying out this work, Hopper came into conflict with the antiquary, Dr Christopher Hunter, who owned the estate of

sent and was therefore illegal.

It is easy to read too much into accounts of this kind but, if Humfrey was overseeing the extension of the chapel and also, as seems likely, supplying the materials for the building, his motive in pursuing the development may have been mercenary rather than altruistic. And if, at the same time, he used the opportunity this work provided to build a grandiose memorial for himself and his wife then it is easy to see why a man with such pretensions might annoy his neighbour.

Although the Hopper mausoleum is far more elaborate than any of Humfrey’s other buildings, like those at Black Hedley and Greenhead, it dis-

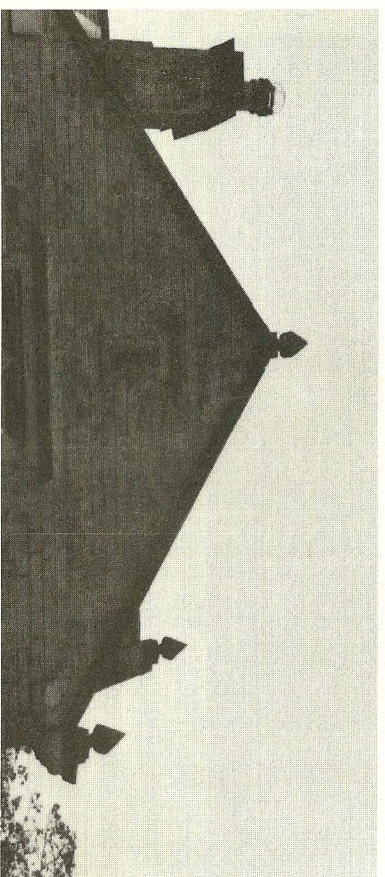


Fig. 8: Obelisk finials on the gables of Black Hedley Woodhouse

from Shotleyfell quarry, were driven across his land. He complained bitterly that “In promoting this work the said Mr Hopper has destroyed no small parts of my tenants’ crops of standing corn by his loaded draughts in bringing timber, stones, lime, mortar and water, whereby my freehold is visibly injured” and went on to claim that everything was being done without the parishioners’ con-

plays his fondness for figurative sculpture. (Fig. 5) In addition to six statues in the niches, there were pairs of reclining figures resting on all four sides of the cornice and two stone effigies under the arch at the base of the tomb. Sadly, not all the sculpture has survived; there are now only three statues in the niches and two of these are mutilated. The left hand one at the front, holding a book and scroll, is said



Fig. 9: Upper part of Thompson tombstone carved by John Lough

to represent bishop John Hooper who was burned at the stake by Mary Queen of Scots. Now he has lost his head. Some of the figures on the cornice have also gone, but the amusing pair on the north side is still intact. The one to the right lies on his side with his head propped on his elbow in the traditional manner, while the other lies flat on his back gazing up at the sky. (Fig. 6) Perhaps oddest of all, however, are the two effigies. Though very weathered you can still see, as Archdeacon Singleton remarked when he examined them in 1828, that they are both naked to the waist. (Fig. 7)

At the date of his visit there was no inscription, but the Archdeacon said in his report that the monument had been built in 1752. If further evidence is needed, an examination of the decorative detail of another house built by Humfrey helps to confirm the date of the mausoleum. The house in question is Black Hedley Woodhouse, where Humfrey spent his last years. It stands half a mile to the east of Black Hedley. The gateposts at the end of the drive that leads to the house resemble

the piers in front of the mausoleum, but more striking still is the use of precisely the same type of obelisk finial on the roofs of both buildings. (Fig. 8)

Although the figurative sculpture on Humfrey's buildings may be described as naïve, he clearly had an ambitious and enterprising mason at his command. Some of the carvings, such as the pair of figures on the cornice of the mausoleum mentioned above, as well as the fox and otter that decorate the dove-cote cottage at Black Hedley, have a lively charm. The fox and otter, it has to be said, are sometimes attributed to the well known sculptor, John Graham Lough, who was born at Greenhead in 1798. So if they are his work (which I think unlikely) they must date from the 19th century. More relevant to this essay, however, is the fact that, as a lad, Lough was apprenticed to John Marshall, a stone mason at Shotleyfield. The trade of stone masonry was often practised by families who passed on their skills from one generation to the next. Is it fanciful to suggest that Marshall's father, or grandfather, may have

been the mason who worked for Humfrey Hopper?

Lough's earliest recorded works, carved before he went to London to study at the Royal Academy, are three tombstones in the churchyard of Shotley Chapel commemorating members of the Thompson, Gibson and Chatt families of the early 1820s. (Fig. 9) Even at this stage Lough's ornamental carving was far more refined than that found on any of the sculpture on Humfrey's buildings. But as a child growing up in the lee of the gatehouse at Greenhead, he may have been profoundly impressed by the 'defenders' standing on the battlements, and later this led to his choice of career. So perhaps Humfrey Hopper's pleasure in, and demand for, figurative decoration, may have fired the enthusiasm, and then nourished the talent, of Northumberland's greatest sculptor.

Teresa Sladen

Shotley St Andrew was vested in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust in 1973 along with the churchyard, Hopper mausoleum and hearse house. Repairs were made in the 1970s but now, owing to the exposed site, more conservation is required. This work is scheduled for 2005/6. The church is open during daylight hours and visitors are welcome. The CCT website address is:

www.visitchurches.org.uk

MMT VISIT NEWMAN BROTHERS COFFIN FACTORY

About 40 members converged on Newman's for a talk and tour led by the enthusiastic and knowledgeable Elizabeth Perkins of the Birmingham Conservation Trust (BCT). What we saw was a moment in time - a 'Marie Celeste' of a factory with boxes opened for stocktaking, papers on the desks and ashes under the furnaces.

The factory had been purpose built for the Newman family firm in 1892 and the architectural drawings are still extant. The building is typical of the old Jewellery Quarter with long lines of cast iron windows and two long back wings. It was designed to be as flexible as possible with the back wings available to let out if there was a downturn in the core business. The Jewellery Quarter was established in the 19th century by many skilled artisans setting up small businesses, untrammelled by a guild system. It still



Fig. 1: The pressing room

has the largest concentration of jewellers and gold and silver smiths in the world. English

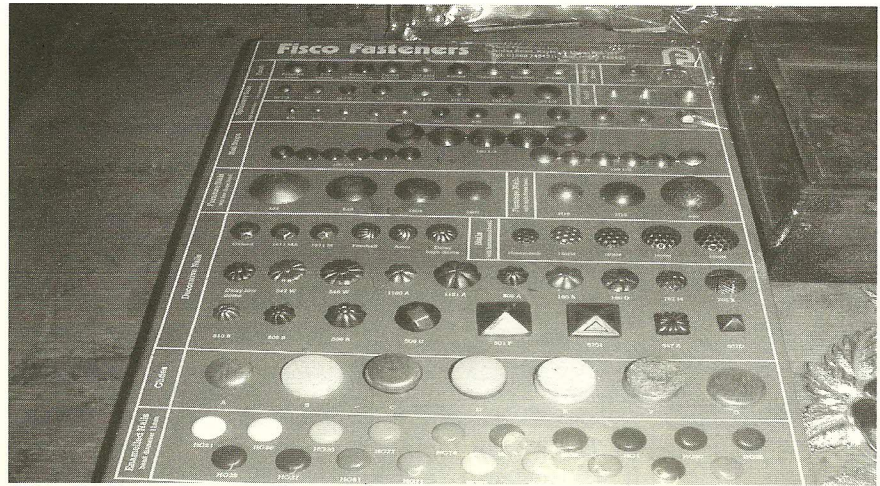


Fig. 2: Sample tray for studs

Heritage have surveyed the Jewellery Quarter recently and listed many buildings, including Newman's at II*.

Newman's started off as a castings business but soon gained an international reputation for the high quality of its coffin fittings with ex-members of the royal family amongst its customers.

The firm stayed in the family until it ceased work in 1998 when everyone finally put down their tools and just walked out. By then its original staff of 100 had reduced to a skeleton one of 5, all of whom were very elderly and were producing goods just to keep them employed as orders had diminished. It was put on the English Heritage 'At Risk' register and a feasibility study was commissioned by the National Trust and Birmingham City Council in 2001. Following negotiations between the Birmingham Conservation Trust and the last member of the family, Miss Green, Newman's was bought by the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands in April 2003. It is run by the BCT, who propose to

remove the contents for cataloguing and then return them. The building will be conserved, the 1950s wing and part of the other wing will be let commercially as small workshops to provide income and the main range will open to the public 'as found'.

In the stockroom plates, coffin studs, wreath fixings, handles, crucifixes, Masonic symbols, memorial plaques, brown paper parcels tied up with string, were all strewn around waiting for an undertaker to choose the adornments for his coffins. Up the rickety stairs is the shroud room full of gowns, satins, braids, sample books for the linings, cutting machines, sewing machines under the long windows - and a speaker linked to the antiquated intercom/radio in the office, so the workers could listen to the Light Programme. There are machines for cutting scallop-edges, cardboard patterns for cutting collars - most gowns are backless, some with separate sleeves. Fans of Aston Villa or West Brom could be buried in their team colours nicely done in satin. The hand

hoist, which is listed II*, connects to the Engine Room below.

Vacuum Plating took over from Electroplating as a more efficient and less hazardous form of metal



Fig. 3: The Hoist

coating - although the Vacuum Plating Room would terrify the Health and Safety Executive. This room led on to the Engraving Room with its pantograph for engraving memorial plates, the Casket Handle Assembly Room, the Finishing Room containing thread-making devices for screws and other intricate tools. Cardboard boxes of carborundum wheels cluttered the Polishing Room where the polishing machines had a very rudimentary form of dust extraction. The presses in the Pressing Room, surrounded by scraps of metal, and coffin ornaments, are still in working order. This cannot be said, fortunately, for the deep, encrusted tanks of the Electroplating Room with its faintly sinister 'Brides-in-the-Bath' atmosphere.

BCT thinks it will cost about £2.5 million for the capital works to catalogue the contents, to decontaminate (asbestos and toxins) and conserve the building and contents. The MMT was very privileged to be able to see the works, with its plethora of fascinating objects strewn around, in its 'before' state.

The Wake

The group repaired to the Rose Villa Tavern for the Wake – an ample cold collation in the upstairs room of a splendid Edwardian pub built in 1919-20 in commemoration of Joseph Chamberlain's 1903 visit to South Africa. Suitably fortified we walked to the Cemetery.

Kate Harwood

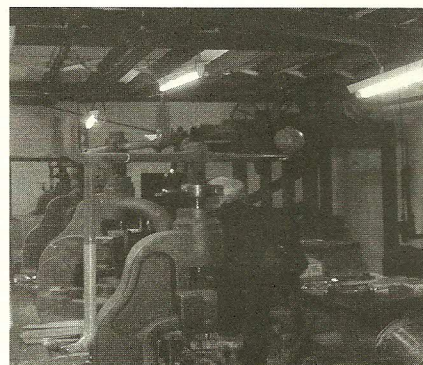


Fig. 4: Pressing/cutting

Editor's note: owing to space reasons, we have not been able to print the second half of this article, very kindly contributed by Kate Harwood, which deals with the two cemeteries that were visited the same day: These were Key Hill and Warstone Lane Cemeteries. It may be possible to print this half of the article in a subsequent newsletter.

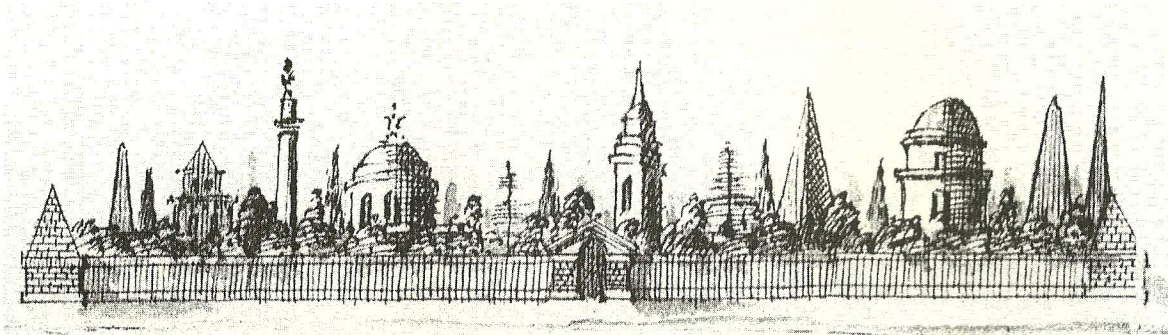
VANBRUGH and the MAUSOLEUM

In a recent book, "Sir John Vanbrugh and Landscape Architecture in Baroque England," ed C. Ridgeway and R Williams, Sutton, 2000, Robert Williams in his chapter has looked at Vanbrugh's ideas on mausoleums and cemeteries. It turns out that Vanbrugh drew on his own experience of India in making his suggestions about mausoleums and cemeteries, contained in the document "Proposals about Building Ye New Churches." (1711)

This document, under the heading "Mr Van-Brugg's Proposals" has been reprinted in the *Architectural Review* CVII (March 1950), pp 209-10, together with comments by Sir Howard Colvin.

In his proposals, Vanbrugh lays down a list of rules for building churches, then moves on to burial places. He wants there to be "Cemeteries provided in ye skirts of ye town." He continues, "If these cemeteries be consecrated, handsomely and regularly wall'd in and planted with trees," there is no doubt but "ye rich" will think themselves "more honourably remembered by lofty and noble Mausoleums...than by little tawdry monuments of marble stuck up against walls and pillars."

Together with his Proposals, Vanbrugh included a sketch of the cemetery at Surat, (See page 8) which is shown in "Mr Van-



Vanbrugh's sketch of the cemetery at Surat, drawn in 1711, 25 years after his time there

Brugg's Proposals" and in the chapter by Williams. Williams says "this ideal burial place was to be a tree-filled necropolis packed with massive domed mausolea, colossal pyramids and even lofty, bust-capped columns."

Williams points out that in 1711, "the freestanding parkland or cemetery mausoleum was still nothing more than an exercise." However, things were changing. He continues, "It was Vanbrugh, not Hawksmoor, who from the early 1720's was in discussion

with the Earl of Carlisle about building a mausoleum at Castle Howard." But Vanbrugh died in 1726; so it was Hawksmoor who designed and built the mausoleum from 1729 on.

Essentially though it was the conceptual not the stylistic issue that Vanbrugh wished to convey in his Proposals, says Williams. Both the cemetery and the mausoleum idea were to become part of the English landscape, even if no mausoleum by Vanbrugh was ever built.

And it would seem that these two key ideas are illustrated in the sketch above. And that this sketch is Vanbrugh's memory of his "time in India" when he was working in Surat as a factor for the East India Company, 1683-85. (As was first explained by Robert Williams in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 5031, Sept 3rd, 1999, pp 13-14.) The sketch remains as a tantalising reinterpretation of what Vanbrugh once had seen.

David Sladen

EVENTS 2005

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| 12 April | Lecture: <i>Peter Howell – Monuments for Posterity: the Triumphal Arch</i> |
| 19 April | Lecture: <i>Richard Barnes – The Obelisk: a Monumental Feature in Britain</i> |
| 21 May | Visit to St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough |
| 11 June | Visit to Butterfield Chapel at Royal Hants Hospital, Winchester |
| 16 July | Open Day at Heathcote Mausoleum, Hursley |
| 10 September | Visit to Poole area |
| 19 November | A special afternoon in association with the Wildgoose Memorial Library & Vanitas Press |

Further details will appear in the next edition of the newsletter, to be published in March 2005.