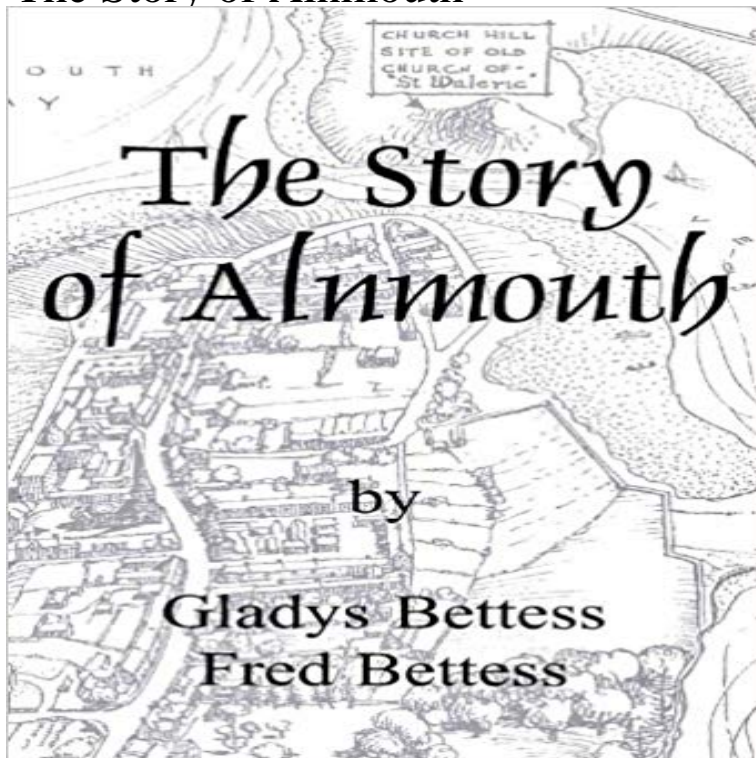


The Story of Alnmouth



The story of Alnmouth begins about 5,000 years ago, at least that is the age of the earliest surviving traces of human beings which have been found in the area. The first part of the story is fragmentary, pieced together from the small items that have fortuitously survived; each one separated from its neighbours by long periods of time, but each is evidence of a human presence. Later, the impact made by succeeding generations on the landscape, and other material evidence which they have left, allow more details of the picture to emerge. Eventually written records become available to supplement the account; again at first sporadic and difficult to interpret but gradually becoming clearer and more plentiful in modern times. Why tell the story of Alnmouth? At first sight it appears to be a quiet, unspoiled village on the coast of Northumberland, favoured by families, the elderly and retired, where change, if any, proceeds at a leisurely pace. If you dig into the history of any village it is likely that you will find interesting stories, and Alnmouth has had a particularly eventful history. It has seen expansion and decline on more than one occasion, prosperity and poverty, conflict and violence, depopulation and growth, local strife and dispute, and at one point a story plot which Dickens might have invented. It takes little imagination to visualise the human stories which must have been played out in this small place over many centuries. What adds to the fascination is that these were real people going about their business over the same ground that we now tread, and unlike many places, a great deal of the evidence of their work is still there to be seen. There has not been a comprehensive account of Alnmouth since that given over a century ago in the Northumberland County History, and in that time there have been changes in the methods and content of local history, and much additional material about the

village has come to light, particularly concerning its earliest phases. For this book a large number of sources have been consulted, and these have been supplemented by field work in and around the village. Some of the features which have been examined are in danger of being lost through erosion, or misuse through lack of knowledge of their significance, making it all the more important to put their story on record now before they are gone for ever. Several strands run throughout the story of Alnmouth and their interplay has had a profound effect, sometimes favourable and sometimes the reverse. The first has been the ever present influence of the sea, the river and its estuary, which together have given the village its peninsula site and provided the means for much of its subsistence. The second is the physical landscape which has to a large extent, controlled and determined the layout of the streets and buildings right up to the present day. Unlike many other medieval settlements its geographical location has remained static, although over the centuries the village nucleus has experienced periods of expansion and contraction. The area of the agricultural land allocated to the village at its foundation was quite small, but alterations of boundaries, different methods of cultivation and alternative forms of land use are all reflected in it, and their traces are still identifiable. In a wider context, Alnmouth's geographical location as a safe natural harbour between the Tweed and Tyne has played an influential part in its economic fortunes, in fact the geographical and economic aspects of its history are inextricably intertwined. The historical background of the region inevitably played its part in the fluctuating fortunes of Alnmouth, situated as it is close to the Scottish Border, the source of disputes and strife for so many centuries. National and even international events have had repercussions for this small community which at first sight seems to be a quiet backwater, sheltered from the wider world.

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