



THE JOSEPH THOMSON LOCAL HERITAGE CENTRE

This might make a nice bike ride depending on your starting point, and no parking required!! If you are interested please reply to the organisers (RSVP) by 25th April. info@penpontheritage.co.uk

The Joseph Thomson Local Heritage Centre is run by the Joseph Thomson Group, a registered charity consisting entirely of volunteers. It is housed in Sundial Cottage in Penpont, in which Joseph Thomson was born in 1858.

Thomson would become best known for the two African expeditions he led for the Royal Geographical Society. The first one, in 1879-80, into what is now mainly Tanzania, gave him the chance to prove his mettle as a 21 year old geologist attached to the expedition led by Keith Johnston. Unexpectedly, Johnston died of fever not far into the trek, leaving Thomson in charge. Three years later Thomson led an expedition into what is now Kenya, where his presence is still echoed in the names Thomson's Falls (called after his father) and Thomson's gazelles. He became famous too for the books he wrote about his travels, and developed a reputation, quite unusual at the time, for finding amicable solutions to the inevitable crises that would occur during the long treks. One of the rooms in the cottage is devoted to the story about his life and travels.

Of course Joseph Thomson is only part of our local heritage. Focusing primarily on Penpont and the neighbouring communities of Keir and Tynron the subject matter in our archives ranges from Tynron village life to Kirkpatrick Macmillan (inventor of the bicycle); from a history of house occupancy, minutes of the Rurals and Community Councils to an appreciation of local artists and writers; from local events such as the Penpont Gala to family histories and an insight into the daily life from the past. We have available paper files, books, audio-visual material and photographs besides a display of local historic artefacts. The other main room in the cottage is devoted to this part of our collections.

Of further special interest is information on the Penpont Rifle Volunteers (1860-1885). This can be viewed in the armoury at the back of the house, where the Volunteers stored their rifles. The armoury was built for the purpose by Joseph Thomson's father.

The cottage itself also acts like a time capsule. Mrs Carson, who was the occupant from the 1920s through to the 90s, kept it mostly in its original state. As a result the house and outbuildings can be seen much as they would have been in Thomson's time. This makes it the ideal location for our heritage centre. Upon Mrs Carson's death in 1996 work was set in motion to secure the building for community use, in which the Buccleuch Estate, of which the cottage is part, has been instrumental.

Now that Sundial Cottage is fully fitted out and ready to go we are looking forward to carrying on with our work in expanding our archives and research in our chosen fields, besides widening our contacts with others working in local heritage, the tourism industry and with countries and organizations associated with Joseph Thomson.

Besides giving us the opportunity to thank all the many volunteers who have offered their time and expertise over the years, we hope the happy occasion of the Official Opening will launch our plans for the future, and be the start of a long cooperation.

Project funded by:

