

February 2013

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Notice board

If you have not already renewed your annual subscription, then now is the time to act.

The Annual General Meeting of the Society is at 7:30pm on 19th March at Barter Books. The formal business will be followed by informal activity themed around the Pants of Alnwick.



Annual General Meeting

All members are invited to attend the AGM of the Society (details, below left).

This is the main opportunity for members to influence priorities for the year ahead, and there are a number of areas where the committee is keen to sound out views: so prepare for a lively discussion.

For example: we can best maintain our position of influence by continuing to be active and by raising our profile. Membership subscriptions are the primary source of income, but subscription rates have remained unchanged for many years. With the current number of members and current levels of subscription annual costs are beginning to exceed annual income. We will continue to try to recruit additional members and we are also making moves to supplement subscriptions by claiming Gift Aid.

However, taken together we recognise that these may not raise sufficient additional income.

Postage charges have risen significantly, although we have alleviated these by delivering more newsletters by email or by hand. The expanded Newsletter has been well received but printing costs have risen as a result. We have also started to expand our presence on the web in our efforts to broaden our appeal.

The Executive Committee will therefore be putting a motion forward at the Annual General Meeting for an increase in all levels of subscription (individual, family and business), to take effect from 1st January 2014. If you have a view on what the rates should be, then please contact any executive committee member (see page 8).

Nominations for 2013 awards

We aim to encourage high standards in conservation and development. Each year we use the Civic Society Awards to recognise noteworthy projects, raise awareness, and stimulate interest.

Members are invited to submit nominations for the 2013 awards, which will be presented later in the year. Nominations can cover a variety of different types of project: recent awards have recognised new development, conservation, and innovation on the high street, including projects for residential, retail, hospitality, and community purposes. The only conditions are that they should be within Alnwick, have completed in the last year, and make a noteworthy contribution to the built environment of our town. Send nominations to any member of the committee (see back page for contact details).

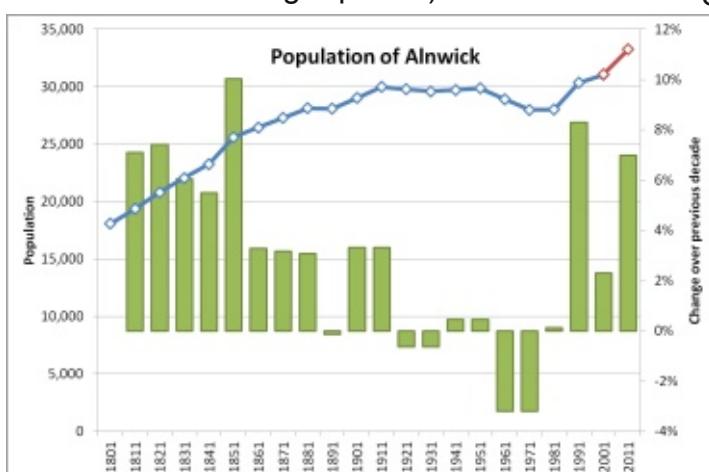
Inside: Old pants reveal more than we might think (page 4)

2011 Census

Figures from the 2011 census show that the last decade has seen one of the most rapid increases in the population of Alnwick since records began, with the biggest growth among those near or beyond retirement age.

The population of the town increased 5% from 6,445 to 6,766: rapid compared to the county, but slower than nationally (Northumberland grew less than 3%, England more than 7%).

Across the former Alnwick District the population grew 7% to reach an all-time high of 33,237. Growth was higher near the coast, and lower inland. (The chart shows trends for the whole district because comparable data is available over a longer period).



Coping with a growing population is not a new experience for Alnwick. Numbers rose through the 19th century, but were flat for most of the 20th. Until 1991 the population of Alnwick remained smaller than it had been in 1901. However, it has been increasing for the last thirty years, and is now 20% greater than it was at the start of the 1980's.

As a community we are getting older. The average age in the town is over 42, compared to 41 in the last census and 39 across England.

Over the last ten years, the numbers of school age and below have fallen slightly. Those aged under 15 represent 17% of the town, compared to 19% in 2001. The numbers of working age have risen 6%, but the biggest increase has been among those aged over 60, where numbers have increased 9% (including a 50% increase among those in their early 60's).

Those aged over 65 now represent 23% of the district, and 20% of the town compared to 19% in 2001. This continues a long-term trend.

Throughout the 19th century only 5% of Alnwick was aged over 65, but the proportion

began to rise in the 1900's, reaching 12% by the middle of the 20th century and 20% by the end. The age profile of the town is now higher than nationally, but similar to the whole of Northumberland.

There have only been two other periods when the population of the district has increased by more than 2,000: the 1840's, and the 1980's. History tells us that growth can bring prosperity, innovation and investment; or put key services under pressure, and result in a shortage of decent homes.

Many will have welcomed the increased numbers who have chosen to live in Alnwick over the last decade. Few would argue that a declining population would benefit the town. Longer life expectancy is usually seen as a good thing. So the debate will surely concentrate on the rate of growth, and how this is best accommodated.

There are 3,150 households in the town, compared to 2,989 a decade ago. Owner occupation accounts for most of the increase. Some 7% of Alnwick households are viewed as over-crowded. The long-term trend is for households to become smaller, but over ten years the average Alnwick household has changed little at 2.1 people.

Fifty years ago it was more than three, and a century ago it was more than four people.

With all this in mind, the Northumberland Core Strategy suggested planning for 1,700 – 2,850 new homes in North Northumberland over the next ten years, with Alnwick as a hub. The Neighbourhood Plan consultation suggests a figure of around 750 new homes, and has highlighted tensions between the need to provide choice, demand for affordable homes, the availability of suitable land, the mixed quality of recent developments, under-occupation of existing stock, sustainability, etc. Will recent trends continue? A brief look raises many questions about future housing demand, but provides few answers. In the long-term we will know how things panned out in practice, and whether we were able to negotiate the issues successfully. But some decisions have to be taken in the short-term.

The census has shown that our community is getting older. Whether that makes us any wiser is another matter entirely.

News in brief

Local consultations

The Northumberland Core Strategy Preferred Options Consultation has moved to the next stage. Updated details are at <http://tinyurl.com/al7h82q>, and there is a drop-in session at Alnwick on 20th Feb.

Registration is required for a themed workshop on the Natural and Historic Environment (Diary Page 8).

The Neighbourhood Plan survey is now being analysed, and we expect to see results soon, as the next stage of plan development begins.

An outdoor challenge

February may not seem the ideal month to think of getting out and about to enjoy the surroundings of Alnwick, but we are planning two newsletters over the next six months, and we are looking for content that will interest readers. So we thought this would be a good time to invite members to describe a favourite walk that shows off the best of the area. We will publish as many as possible in the next couple of newsletters, so that all can share them over the summer months.

This is not a competition: the only prize is the gratitude of fellow members; and the rules are pretty much up to you. We are prepared to interpret the boundary of Alnwick quite widely, so anything in the former district is fine. It's reasonable to assume that our readership includes more than a fair share of people "of a certain age", with a keen interest in the local built heritage. But they may walk with friends or family: so alongside our main areas of interest it would be good to include some features which would appeal to different people. Unusual themes and a few surprises would not go amiss.

Please send your suggestions to the editor (contact details on page 8) or to any member of the committee. Include as much detail on navigation and points of interest as you think reasonable. We will take it from there.

2013 Programme

The Annual General Meeting is at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 19th March at Barter Books - see front page.

Following on from that we are planning a programme of activities throughout 2013, including events to recognise the winners of the annual essay competition in the summer; joint sessions with a neighbouring society, and presentation of the annual Civic Society awards in the autumn.

Details will be announced shortly.

Newsletter

National consultations

Civic Voice responds regularly on behalf of the civic movement to government consultations.

Recent subjects include Listed Buildings, Planning Performance, the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, and Planning Practice Guidance. They publish details at: www.civicvoice.org.uk under "Live Consultations"



Loss of conservation expertise

Research by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (www.ihbconline.co.uk) has found a 6% fall in the number of local authority conservation staff, but even more worryingly, that a third of those lost were the most experienced .

Problem reporting

This seems a good time for a reminder of methods to report problems which appeared on roads or footpaths during the winter months. There are links to www.lovenorthumberland.org.uk and www.fixmystreet.com on the Civic Society website, the county's Customer Service Centre is on 0845 600 6400, there is an email address at ask@northumberland.gov.uk, and there are also various forms on www.northumberland.gov.uk for issues such as potholes, fly-tipping, street lights, etc. We have been told that all these mechanisms for reporting problems work well, but with so many different options, we are interested to hear experience of which prove most effective.

National recognition for Alnwick trail

In their annual review Civic Voice recognised the Inspired Alnwick trail (produced by the Civic Society with Christians Together) as one of the Civic Society achievements of 2012. Our congratulations to all involved.

Travel to work

2011 census figures show that 30% of people in Alnwick walk to work - the highest proportion in Northumberland.

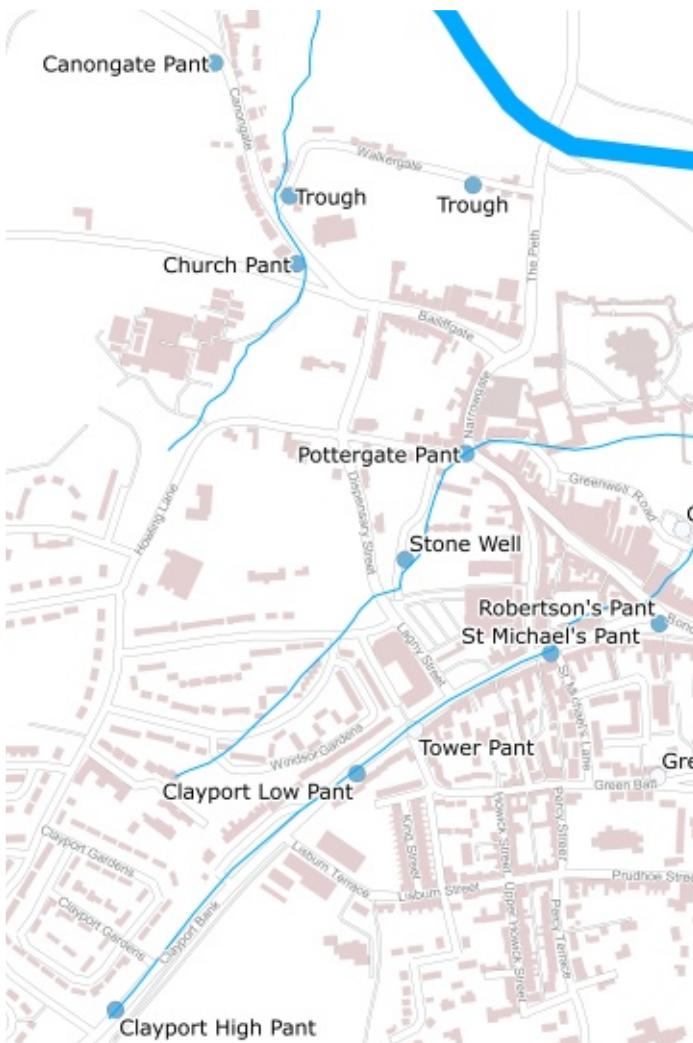
Pants of Alnwick

The Society is involved with others in a project to enhance and promote the pants of Alnwick.

We expect this to result in a number of initiatives during 2013, including a new town trail. We are currently assembling material on the history of the pants, and welcome any information or photographs that members can share. There is more on our web site at

<https://sites.google.com/site/pantsofalnwick/>

Alnwick's water first came from streams and wells, but more than 400 hundred years ago the town started to draw water from public fountains called pants. More pants were built as the town prospered in the 18th century, but by the middle of the 19th century they could no longer supply enough clean water for a growing population. After an outbreak of cholera in 1849 an advanced water system was installed. Most houses were connected by the mid 1860's but pants continued to be used. Some have been removed, but most are maintained and can still be appreciated as important features of the townscape.



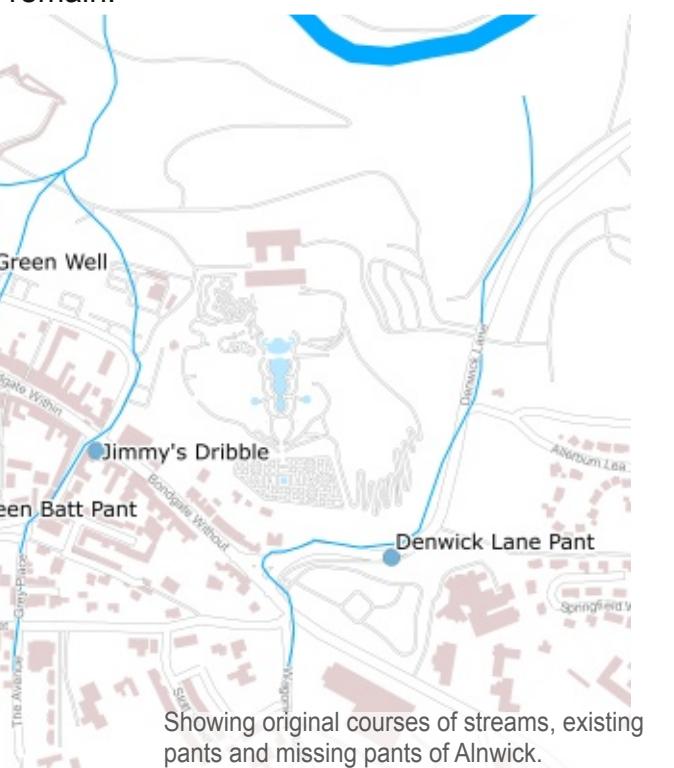
The first Alnwick settlement was at the junction of three roads: travellers followed the edge of the Aln valley, on firm ground, where tributaries could easily be crossed. The town was circled by two tributaries of the Aln, and a third ran through the centre. For a thousand years Alnwick's water was supplied by these streams and associated wells.

The first Alnwick pant, in Pottergate, existed by the 17th century. More were built as the town prospered in the 18th century, but when the population rose in the early 19th century the pants were unable to provide sufficient water. Sewage would leak into the pipes from nearby ash pits and pollute the water. 136 people died of cholera in 1849: mostly in an area of overcrowded, damp and insanitary housing between Clayport and Pottergate.

A Board of Health was formed to improve public health. They built an advanced water and sewage system, and by the mid-1860's all but a couple of houses were connected to the new supply.

After that, more decorative pants from the late 19th century commemorate local figures.

Some older pants were removed because the water was deemed unsafe, some were destroyed by vehicles, and some were moved to make way for other developments, but most remain.



Showing original courses of streams, existing pants and missing pants of Alnwick.

Base map © OpenStreetMap contributors

The need for a supply of water near the market was recognised as early as 1709, but the first pant erected proved inadequate. A second attempt led to the construction of **St Michael's pant** in 1755. It was restored by F. R. Wilson at the end of the 19th century and is now Grade II* listed.

Robertson's Pant / Fountain (Grade II listed) of 1890 was the gift of Alderman Adam Robertson, founder of a local decorating firm and a leading local figure. He lived across the road in "Fountain House" (now HSBC).

Pottergate Pant (Grade II listed) is thought to stand on the site of the first pant in Alnwick, which dated from before 1611. It was supplied from the overflow of the Stone Well. The present pant was built in 1875, replacing another from 1790. It commemorates William Dickson, a local solicitor (who paid for it).

Clayport Low Pant (Grade II listed) is in the form of a squat pillar with a panel inscribed with names of 18th century chamberlains.

Clayport High Pant (Grade II listed) is recorded as a pant, but it is actually a valve house used to control the flow of water into town.

Denwick Lane Pant (Grade II listed) originally stood near today's war memorial. Like the Pinfold, it was moved when the Tenantry column was erected in 1818.

Church Pant was rebuilt in 1848, and holds a panel of St Michael killing a dragon taken from an earlier pant of 1780 that stood on the other side of Canongate.

Jimmy's Dribble is a 1993 reconstruction of Fleece Pant, which was one of two 18th century pants in Bondgate. It was destroyed by a vehicle in 1953. No evidence remains of the pant, or pump that once stood in **Green Batt**. It was built in 1753, and removed in 1882 because the water was deemed unsafe.

Tower Pant, at the corner of Tower Lane, was built in 1752, to replace a well in Clayport Tower. The pant was destroyed by a runaway vehicle, after the brakes failed on Clayport Bank.

Springs on the site of the brewery fed the **Stone Well** at the end of Stonewell Lane. When St Andrew's Hall was built it was repositioned around the corner of the hall.

The only remaining evidence of the **Green Well** is in the name of the road and lane. It originally stood near the information board in the car park.

In **Canongate** the remains of a trough can be seen by the side of the road below the Parish Hall, and there is a small pant near the lane to the kennels.

Another trough can be seen in the retaining wall along **Walkergate**. It dates from the early 18th century, and we are told it has been called the Horse Pant.

Picture quiz: Pants

We understand that some members felt the previous picture quiz (on Alnwick's lanes) was too easy. So for this one we show only fragments of six pants. Any reader who can identify all of the pictures without leaving their armchair deserves double points. Readers who ignore the answers on the back page, and venture out to check their answers on the ground are entitled to feel virtuous and claim double points as well.



Picture A



Picture B



Picture C



Picture D



Picture E



Picture F

Planning matters

January was fairly quiet, but November and December were busy months for planning applications, with a total of 22 over the last two months of 2012. The application of most interest to members will be the proposal to convert (Grade II listed) Pottergate Tower to holiday accommodation.*

The history of this tower is well known. Originally one of four gates in the town's medieval defences it was rebuilt in 1768 at a cost of £580. Initially it was topped by an impressive crown similar to the spire of St Nicholas Cathedral in Newcastle. In 1812 the crown was damaged by a storm and deemed unsafe - so it was removed. In the 20th century, further damage was caused by wartime defence installations, and subsequent weathering forced major refurbishment work which received an award



from the Civic Society in 1993.

More recently the parapet has been rebuilt using the original stone and anchored with stainless steel after earlier iron cramps had deteriorated.

The executive committee has examined the proposals, and (as always) welcomes comments from members on this - or on any other planning application over which they have concerns.

In recent months we have commented on proposals for Bondgate Hall and the Corn Exchange.

There has certainly been much discussion in the town since Weatherspoon's application for the old Corn Exchange was submitted. The general consensus does not seem in conflict with the Civic Society response (see below).

Corn Exchange considerations

Alnwick Civic Society broadly supports the application by J D Wetherspoon as it brings back into use in what appears to be a relatively sympathetic manner an historic building for which over many years no viable alternative use has been found. However, there are a number of issues which we feel need further consideration.



1. We are concerned that the impact on residential neighbours should be minimised and given that Wetherspoon's offer is normally of pubs with "family" appeal we would suggest that the proposed operating times are excessive and should be more limited than they propose.

2. The proposed kitchen air input and extractor on the western roof slope will spoil the clean lines of the building and may also result in unacceptable smell pollution for the neighbours in St Michael's Square. An alternative, less intrusive solution should be sought.

3. Given that the main pedestrian access is via a long flight of steps, we welcome the revised plans which show the removal of an intrusive disabled access ramp from the front elevation. We would also welcome a revision to the plans to make the front elevation more symmetrical by converting the left-most

door to match the right-most window or vice versa.

4. We welcome the specification of wooden framed windows and doors throughout but are concerned at the lack of detail. They should as far as possible match in style, colour and composition the age of the building.

5. Stonework repairs and alterations should be carried out in accordance with the Alnwick Civic Society's Stonework Repair Guide, which was adopted by the former Alnwick District Council.

6. We would like to see details of the proposed external lighting to ensure that it is in context with the historic surroundings and also does not produce light pollution for the residential neighbours.

7. The plans show an outdoor seating area at the rear of the building. This appears to encompass the right of way which we believe was confirmed several years ago and which resulted in the removal of part of the galvanised iron paling fence which had been erected to prevent movement directly between the Roxburgh Place car park and St Michael's Square. Likewise the front access to the Corn Exchange building from Bondgate Within is a right of way based on the ancient lanes. Any attempt to extinguish or restrict these rights of way should be resisted.

8. The steps from Bondgate Within are an important historical feature of Alnwick, being formed of huge stone slabs. Some of these are admittedly worn and rather than replace them with more modern and less appropriate materials, the scope for turning them over and using the reverse sides should be examined.

9. The clock over the entrance to the Corn Exchange courtyard on Bondgate Within must be preserved.

10. We suggest that a bell might be installed in bell tower over the front elevation.

Alnwick Town Centre – a personal view

It is six years since the Civic Society carried out its Streetscape Study. Under the leadership of Peter McIlroy, we assessed the appearance of the town centre, and the impact of traffic. With the support of the former District Council our report was published in August 2007. There is a summary here:

<http://tinyurl.com/a62of99>. Regrettably, the onset of the banking crisis and the demise of the District Council halted further progress.

The gist of the report was that the quality of our streetscape was being eroded by clutter and neglect. The experience of being in the town centre was devalued by the dominance of traffic. Given the road layout, it was never going to be possible to remove vehicles but we recommended that pedestrians and vehicles be put on a more even footing: by narrowing the carriageways with a central reservation for pedestrians in Bondgate Within, and by blurring the distinction between carriageways and footways. The whole town centre would be subject to a 20 mph limit; parking and loading would be allowed only where designated.

We were inspired by Bury St Edmunds, where such an approach had already been successfully adopted. Subsequent examples can be found in Kensington High Street, Sheaf Square and Howard Street in Sheffield. But perhaps the best example of such shared space in the UK today is in Ashford, Kent (<http://tinyurl.com/cnr835t>). Some European towns are ahead of us. The shared space concept originated in the Netherlands, but the example I know best is in Germany. Villingen is an old walled town with four main streets and numerous narrow side streets, most of which are shared space. A webcam looks down on one of the main streets: (<http://tinyurl.com/b8ofwq>). In summer it is a hive of activity, with shops and cafes spilling over on to the street but in winter it can appear very empty with few vehicles or pedestrians in sight. Early in the day, delivery vehicles predominate. Thereafter, only the occasional car or van can be seen. Last year I was there in all seasons so I know that cars, vans, people and bikes share the main streets with little or no conflict. Even on a busy Saturday, you may become aware of a vehicle behind you, so you walk to one side and let it pass. Cars are more frequently encountered in the narrow minor streets but the same live and let live attitude applies. This is why I get particularly angry when I join the line of pedestrians on Market Street as traffic accelerates past, or try to cross the full width of Bondgate Within to get to the bank.

I also feel strongly about the loss of the Market Place as the only traffic free space in the town centre. Before the current parking anarchy it was a pleasure to be free from the fear of being blasted by a motorist. We used to see mothers letting toddlers run free on entering the square, but no longer.

Newsletter

So have we made any progress at all since 2007? A couple of years ago I was told that it would not be possible to use the narrower, paler yellow lines which have been permitted in town centres and conservation areas for many years because drivers here “would not understand them”. So I was pleasantly surprised to see such lines appear recently in Green Batt! I also detect a shift of opinion in favour of pedestrianising the short length of Narrowgate from the bottom of Fenkle Street to Bondgate Within. But these are straws in the wind, now blown away by the decision to permit parking and loading in the Market Place at all times. The scheme shows numerous signs forbidding parking, use of yellow and white lines to distinguish no parking, no loading and permitted areas, and another piece of clutter in the form of a ticket machine. The 11 parking spaces will be for 30 minutes only, but since they cannot be seen from Market Street they will attract a constant stream of hopefuls, causing further hazards for motorists and pedestrians.

I have some sympathy for our local county councillor, who has come under considerable pressure to agree to the change from traders and others, but this ignores the weight of comments made during the consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan which wanted to remove vehicles, not regularise their presence. This does not augur well for the future of the plan, into which many local volunteers have put a huge amount of effort. My sympathy for our councillor stems partly from the fact that ever since the Market Place was pedestrianised he has toiled to find uses for it. Ironically the extra parking space that the Market Place would offer is most needed at the very time that it is in use for markets or special events.

One trader said recently that what was needed were short term spaces close to the majority of businesses, on the outer sides of the town centre triangle. I do not see current users of the Market as short term parkers: sometimes the Market Place is fully parked despite numerous vacant spaces on the cobbles and the streets. Could it be that they simply do not want to pay?

Can we not just accept the market place as a quiet, traffic free open space where young families, the elderly and disabled feel safe and secure, and provide additional seating and vegetation to “soften” the surroundings?

No, we have not progressed. While other towns come to terms with the car, Alnwick is going back into the last century. There is much that could be done, even in these cash-strapped times, to redress the balance in favour of people, not vehicles

Peter Ennor, Chairman, Alnwick Civic Society but here expressing a strictly personal view!

Diary dates

Civic Society...

Annual General Meeting of the Society is at 7:30pm on 19th March at Barter Books. After the formal meeting there will be informal activities themed around the Pants of Alnwick.

...and more

An informal drop-in on The Northumberland Core Strategy Preferred Options Consultation is at Alnwick on 20th Feb in St James Centre, Pottergate. Registration is required for a themed session dedicated to the Natural and Historic Environment at Choppington on 15th March.

Cragside: Captured on Camera: Snapshots of Family Life (a new photographic exhibition containing unseen images from a recently discovered family album) from March 2nd.

Cragside: Victorian Baking Days (volunteer cooks recreating authentic Victorian recipes) from March 6th

Bailiffgate Museum: Oswald - Northumbrian King & Saint. A current exhibition about King Oswald's life and times with photographs of some of the many memorials to Oswald in the North of England.



Quiz answers

- A) Roberston's Pant / Fountain
- B) Pottergate Pant
- C) St Michael's Pant
- D) Clayport Low Pant
- E) Jimmy's Dribble
- F) Church Pant

About Alnwick Civic Society

Alnwick Civic Society was formed in 1974, following the defeat of proposals to re-develop the town centre with a modern shopping area. Since then it has sought to influence development proposals, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure they protect and enhance our heritage.

The society has been involved in a number of successful high profile campaigns. It continues to pursue its objectives by providing a voice for members; through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals, and like-minded organisations; by offering advice, scrutinising and commenting on development proposals; and by recognising excellence, organising public meetings, developing guided trails, and a variety of other activities.

In response to recent changes to the planning system the society is heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and works with local partners to influence policy at a county level. It seeks to influence national policy in co-operation with other bodies within the civic movement, and was a founding member of Civic Voice.

All who share our aims can support the work of the society: by joining as an individual, family or business member; by participating in activities, sharing ideas, raising areas of concern and pointing out examples of good practice. Or simply by demonstrating pride in our town, and spreading the word about the value of our work.



Founding member

Who's who?

President: Philip Deakin

Chair: Peter Ennor (peter.ennor@btinternet.com)

Treasurer and Membership: Gill Parker

Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith

Chair of planning sub-committee: Michael Apted

Other Executive Committee members:

Elizabeth Jones

Brian Lamb

David Lovie (davidlovie307@btinternet.com)

Peter Reed / Newsletter (peter.reed@aligre.co.uk)

William Stafford

Caroline Stewart

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Twitter: [@AlnwickCivicSoc](https://twitter.com/AlnwickCivicSoc)

Facebook: [AlnwickCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AlnwickCivicSociety)