

Alnwick Civic Society Newsletter

November 2013

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Notice board

28th November: debate with the Auriga club: a well-established debating society with strong roots in the local community. We look forward to informal discussions ranging across topics that concern members of both societies. 8:00pm at the Rugby Club

1st January: new membership subscriptions: remember to change standing orders and look out for Gift Aid form.



Any questions? Any answers?

It was a pleasure to welcome members and new faces for our Any Questions meeting at Bailiffgate Museum on the 15th October.

Our thanks go to Caroline Stewart (local businesswoman, Chair of Trustees at Northumberland Wildlife Trust), Bill Grisdale (Mayor of Alnwick) and Air Vice-Marshal (retired) David Hurrell (Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland). They led a spirited discussion of topical local issues, with lively audience participation.

Preston Bus Station has recently been Grade-II listed, and we considered 20th century buildings in Alnwick which deserved similar recognition. It seemed premature to nominate our own Bus Station, but the Playhouse, the former TA centre on Lisburn Street, the Police Station and the Alnwick Garden pavilion are worthy of better recognition. By contrast Roxboro Place car park needs attention - though it seems unlikely that much will be achieved in the short term.

Leicester may be relying on Richard III to boost tourism, but with little hope of discovering a famous body under our car parks, we need to look elsewhere for economic stimulus. With the national mood minded to write-off parts of our region, the panel feared that the potential of Alnwick was in danger of being over-

looked. These days we are competing for investment and employment opportunities with well-supported centres nearby. We need to promote the benefits of our transport links, skilled work-force, development potential, and quality of life. We know that newcomers to Alnwick will discover a friendly town, and a variety of opportunities to get involved in the local community: for those who choose.

For once there was little discussion about parking, but there was general support for the idea that the town would benefit if life was made easier for pedestrians. The suggestion was welcomed that shoppers should be given priority over cars on the section of Bondgate Within between Market Street and Fenkle Street, and there were several ideas of how such an initiative might later be extended.

It will be another year before we repeat the Any Questions format, but members can look forward to a different perspective on topical local issues at our debate with the Auriga Club on Nov 28th.



"a spirited discussion of topical local issues" (in earlier times)

St Michael's Church re-opens (150 years ago)

St Michael's church re-opened in Dec. 1863 after work to remove unpopular alterations from 1817-18. The building was returned to a more traditional form, in keeping with the tastes of the age. Newspaper reports of the time give the impression that they were preparing the format for one of today's TV make-over programmes. These extracts are taken from editions of the Alnwick Mercury while work was under way (Jun 1862 - Dec 1863).

There is initial enthusiasm in 1862, as they decide to go ahead with the work:

At the meeting of the select vestry of St. Michael's Church, Alnwick it was intimated that his Grace the Duke of Northumberland was willing to restore this church to its original state, provided the inhabitants were desirous that this should be done; and a memorial had been presented to his Grace assuring him that the parishioners would consider it a great boon if the church were restored, as far as possible to its original condition as to architecture, as it existed previous to the unfortunate alterations in the year 1818.

By June 1862, plans and budget are in place:

It is understood that immediately after the present training of the militia comes to an end the restoration and repairs of the venerable old church will be commenced under the direction of Mr. Salvin, and at the expense of his Grace the Duke of Northumberland. We believe his Grace is prepared to expend a large sum upon the work so that it may be thoroughly and effectually done.

By February 1863 work is under way:

The restoration of the venerable edifice is duly proceeding... the interior presents a very different aspect to that upon which the parishioners gazed after the close of the last service. The galleries, organ, and ponderous heating stove have disappeared, and in their place are planks and scaffolding and timber coverings over sittings, mural monuments and the carved capitals of the chancel columns; and the church looks generally larger, lighter and more airy. The plaster fan tracery-graining of the chancel ceiling is also gone, as well as the ducal-canopied stalls, the hatchments, the banners, armour and tabards of the ducal Percy family...

Almost immediately, problems begin to emerge:

A few weeks ago another memorial was got up, addressed to the Rev. Court Granville, requesting the Duke, who is the patron of the church, and as such owner of the chancel, to reseat the whole of the nave as well as the chancel end. This memorial was very numerously signed by the parishioners, as it was given out that the signing was only a formal matter, the Duke only requiring the sanction of the inhabitants to comply with its prayer. At a meeting of the vestry, however, held in March, it was ascertained that the memorial had been presented and that his Grace altogether declined to comply with its prayer, and expressed



St Michael's Church drawn by F.R. Wilson

the opinion that if the parishioners wished to have such alterations they must contribute their rateable share of the expense....

But solutions are quickly found:

To meet this cost it was suggested by Mr Wm. Dickson Esq, that a rate of one shilling in the pound be levied upon the property of the district of St Michaels. The meeting approved this scheme, and the proceedings were forwarded to the Duke... Mr Salvin, architect, having previously examined the present state and condition of the church, reported that it would not be absolutely necessary to take down the south wall, which might be sufficiently strengthened by the application of concrete to the foundations

December 1863 the work meets with approval:

A lofty open and noble wood roof has taken the place of the stucco work... stalls of substantial oak, which rise within ten inches of the screen, surround the sides. They are exquisitely carved and panelled in front... In the north aisle of the chancel, the new organ, also provided by the munificence of his Grace, is placed. It is from the well-known firm of Foster and Andrews, of Hull... There are four pillars whose shafts are richly moulded... the beams that have been somewhat decayed have been strengthened with iron... Three windows in the south facade, next the steeple have been taken out and new ones, identical with the old ones of beautiful stone from Stony Peth Quarry, and finely and sharply executed, have been inserted in their place... A light, airy and elegant new window has been placed in the west end of the church, which has a very fine effect... The whole is comfortably heated with water pipes, on the system of Mr Meiklejohn, of Edinburgh... the tombstones that were falling, or likely to do so, have been placed erect, and the inscriptions on several have been retouched by Mr Daniel McMillan...

It is just about a year since the work of demolition in the old church began; and now that the restoration is completed every one – however much they admired it in its former state; and it was, with all its defects, worthy of admiration – is struck with its present grandeur, greatness and beauty, and feels deeply grateful to the pious munificence of the Duke of Northumberland...

News in Brief

For Heritage Open Day the Society led two walks around the Pants. Participants were few in number, but seemed to enjoy the experience. Northumbrian Water have recently provided funds to develop this initiative - so look forward to more activity in 2014. Readers may notice that we have been tweaking the format of the newsletter. The changes are not just aesthetic. We welcome all feedback, and people who put our newsletter on display have suggested making the name of the society on the front page more prominent. We were also advised that a more readable font will allow us to squeeze more content into the same space.

Gift Aid

The Society has not increased subscriptions for many years. With rising costs, our expenditure has begun to exceed our income. So in 2014 the individual subscription will increase from £5.00 to £8.00; and the joint subscription from £7.50 to £12.00.

We are waiting for approval from HM Revenue and Customs to claim Gift Aid. This will increase the value of contributions, by allowing us to reclaim basic rate tax that has already been paid by members. Basic rate tax is currently 20%, so a 2014 subscription of £8.00 is regarded as having come from income of £10.00, on which tax of £2.00 has already been paid. We can claim the £2.00 back from HMRC.

We can only do this when members have signed a declaration to say that they have paid sufficient tax to be counted against their Gift Aid donations. This might

We remind members that the newsletter is distributed in both printed form, and in digital form. The digital form is cheaper for us to produce, is in full colour, and some members may find it easier to examine fine detail (such as maps) in digital format. Let us know if you would like to receive the newsletter in a different form.

Led by David Lovie, several members of the society have been helping move the Neighbourhood Plan to the next stage by developing policies and proposals around key themes: recognising the importance of urban areas; a visually coherent town (Alnwick) and village (Denwick) in the landscape; main roads as recognisable

include income tax, tax deducted at source from savings interest, tax on pension, investment or rental income, or Capital Gains Tax. (VAT and Council tax do not count).

When we collect 2014 subscription, we will ask members to amend any standing order to the new level of subscription. When Gift Aid approval comes through we will also ask members to sign a Gift Aid declaration. This will include name, address, and signature to confirm the subscription is a Gift Aid donation.

An individual subscription in 2013 was worth £5.00 to the society. In 2014 the new subscription of £8.00, plus reclaimed gift aid of £2.00 will be worth £10.00 to the society. A number of new members have joined us in 2013, so we can be cautiously optimistic that our financial position will look more healthy in future.

gateways; Conservation Area boundaries; historic assets; development in historic areas; erosion of character; street clutter and poor floorscape design; trees in and around the conservation area; enforcement of planning and traffic regulations; the balance between traffic and pedestrians; vital historic spaces; legibility of the town and townscape; enhancement of historic townscapes and landscapes and an overall vision for a coherent, legible, sustainable and promoted townscape. David now has the unenviable task of consolidating these contributions, and aligning them with the rest of the plan.

English Heritage published their 2013 Heritage at Risk Register in September. Although nationally the number of buildings at risk has gone down slightly, locally there is no change, with the Bondgate Tower, General Lambert's House, Camp on Alnwick Moor, and Heiferlaw defended settlement still on the list. There are two new entries in Northumberland (St Cuthbert's Church, Haydon Bridge and The Union Suspension Bridge on the river Tweed).

As we were finishing this newsletter the wall along Bow Alley collapsed. We look forward to seeing the problem fixed and the lane reopened.



Visit by Berwick Civic Society

Members of Berwick Civic Society visited us on 28th September. After refreshments and a social meeting Philip Deakin led a walk around Alnwick with stories behind some familiar, and some less familiar landmarks. In Chapel Lane, Minister Pauline Fellowes kindly introduced us to the interior of the Methodist Church. We lack the space to do full justice to the tour, so simply list some highlights for those who could not join us.

Green Batt:

- The Pinfold
- Library / Duke's School
- Youth Hostel / Correction House
- Chapels in St Michael's Lane
- St Paul's Church

Percy Street

- Mechanics' Institute

Howick Street

- Former workshops
- John Bull

Chapel Lane

- Methodist Church

Clayport

- St Michael's Pant

Dispensary Street

- Maltings
- Former Dispensary
- Pottergate Tower

Bailiffgate

- Former Red Lion
- St Michael's Church
- Gas Works
- Gas Lamp Bracket

Walkergate

- Chantry House

The Peth

- High School
- Castle barbican

Narrowgate

- Dorothy Foster's House
- General Lambert's House
- Pottergate Pant
- Olde Cross
- Shop signs
- Abbey Guest House

Market place

- Market cross

Bondgate

- Fire Insurance Plaques
- Hotspur Tower
- War Memorial
- Tenantry Column



“Let (more than) a thousand flowers bloom”

This year the theme of the Flower Festival was a celebration of the “coming home” of the Lindisfarne Gospels to an exhibition in Durham.

The Civic Society contributed a floral arrangement to add to over thirty others on display in the beautiful surroundings of St Michael’s Church. The Civic Society would like to thank Michelle Duff who created and designed the arrangement entitled “Building on the past, in the present for the future.” The floral display (pictured here) was in pure white and very effectively expressed the aims of the Civic Society.



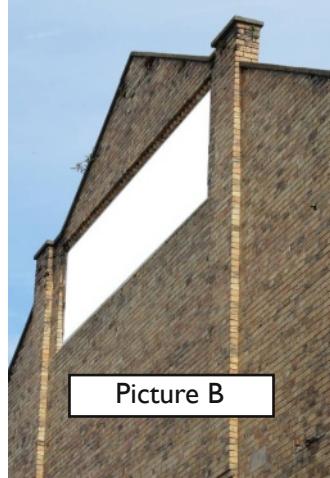
Picture quiz

“The trouble with Alnwick? Too much sandstone.”

So we were told recently. It’s a point of view, but perhaps not one held by many members. Still, at least it suggested the theme for a picture quiz. If this proves too easy for members, then it might appeal to friends, guests, or neighbours.



Picture A



Picture B



Picture C



Picture D



Picture E



Picture F

Congratulations to all involved with Alnwick in Bloom, who may have collected the largest number of gold medals ever awarded by Northumbria in Bloom.

Competing against virtually the whole of the north east, the town won a gold medal and was runner up to Morpeth for towns of this size. In other categories Barndale House Special School, Green Batt Garden, Graham’s Yard, Abbeyfield Extra Care, St Paul’s Church, Alnwick Garden, and St. James’ Allotments all received gold medals. The White Swan Hotel was awarded silver gilt, The Pottergate Centre gained the discretionary award and a trophy, and Alnwick Garden the trophy in its category.

A remarkable achievement all round.

We offer six pictures of notable buildings around Alnwick that are not made of sandstone.

Points can be claimed for each one recognised, and winners are entitled to download a free copy of the Civic Society “Guide to Stonework Repair” from: <http://tinyurl.com/nwuga5k>

Landscape matters

How best can the society engage with issues that affect landscape character, in light of proposed developments to the south and east of the town, and growing public concern over onshore wind farms?

The position on the outstanding landscape immediately north of the town seems straightforward. Alnwick Castle Parks are on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens so the outstanding views of the castle dominating the surrounding parkland could not be better protected.

Views from busy transport routes to the south and east include a mix of development sites and views of a tree-covered town across historic parkland. Conserving the quality of these views and mitigating the impact of development will be a challenge.

The approach from the west presents Alnwick lying between sandstone uplands, the Aln Valley, and rolling farmland to the coast. The quality of this landscape was being compromised long before recent wind farm developments, and it deserves better.

While these may be the three priorities, there is also a risk that in focussing our attention on them, we overlook other gems: such as the approaches through Canongate and Denwick.

The society has a responsibility to raise awareness, inform debate, and respond to proposals in a considered way. Professionals are trained to use a mix of techniques to assess proposals, but the general public does not always have access to the same tools, or the skills to use them effectively. However, there are a number of possibilities available to us. All can play a role, but all have limitations.

We can identify and raise awareness of important viewpoints. The society's contribution to the Neighbourhood plan emphasises several important views from the main routes into, and past the town.

However, individual viewpoints may not be representative of the wider area. Viewpoints are fixed, but observers move. Emphasising one important viewpoint may simply encourage developers to transfer any adverse impact elsewhere.

Drawings, or images of a proposal superimposed on photographs of the landscape can help us to visualise the impact of a development from different viewpoints, and are widely used to represent an observer's view of a proposed development. Pic-

tures are a very effective way of communicating, but there are also dangers. The use of powerful lenses by opponents of wind-farms is one notorious example of how images can be misused and result in the argument being discredited. No two-dimensional static image can convey the dynamics of changing weather, different seasons, or the experience of an observer moving through a landscape.

Maps are a good starting point. They can show which parts of a landscape will theoretically be affected by a new development. They can help identify issues that need careful consideration: such as particularly sensitive views. But only the most sophisticated mapping tools are able to identify areas that are screened by buildings or woodland. No map can convey how a development will look to an observer in the context of the wider landscape.

Nevertheless, as a first step we have been looking at generating maps to judge the impact of developments on the landscape. First we assessed the extent to which the Middlemoor Wind Farm is visible from different parts of Alnwick. The map opposite represents the areas where existing structures (not some future proposal) should theoretically be visible. Hence members should be able to judge how a theoretical model compares against reality (bearing in mind that this ignores the screening effects of buildings and woodland).

If this looks like a fair representation then we can be confident in using similar techniques for proposed developments, such as new wind farms, or large commercial buildings.

We do not have access to the range of sophisticated tools that are available to professionals, but our needs are different. If we can indicate areas where a proposed development may be visible, which helps identify sensitive viewpoints, which provide the basis for visualising specific impacts, which draws attention to potential problem areas - then such a map will have served a purpose.

We think that examples such as the one opposite could help us to grapple with the issues.

Do members agree?

Should the society consider other aspects of how Alnwick appears in the wider landscape?

Planning matters

After a busy start to the year the number of planning applications in recent months has been below average.

Proposals for the Corn Exchange have been amended, giving us concern over the reduced size of the car park, restrictions on pedestrian access, design of windows, and visibility of air conditioning units.

Changes to the Lloyds Bank Signage application addressed the concerns we had raised, and this application was subsequently approved.

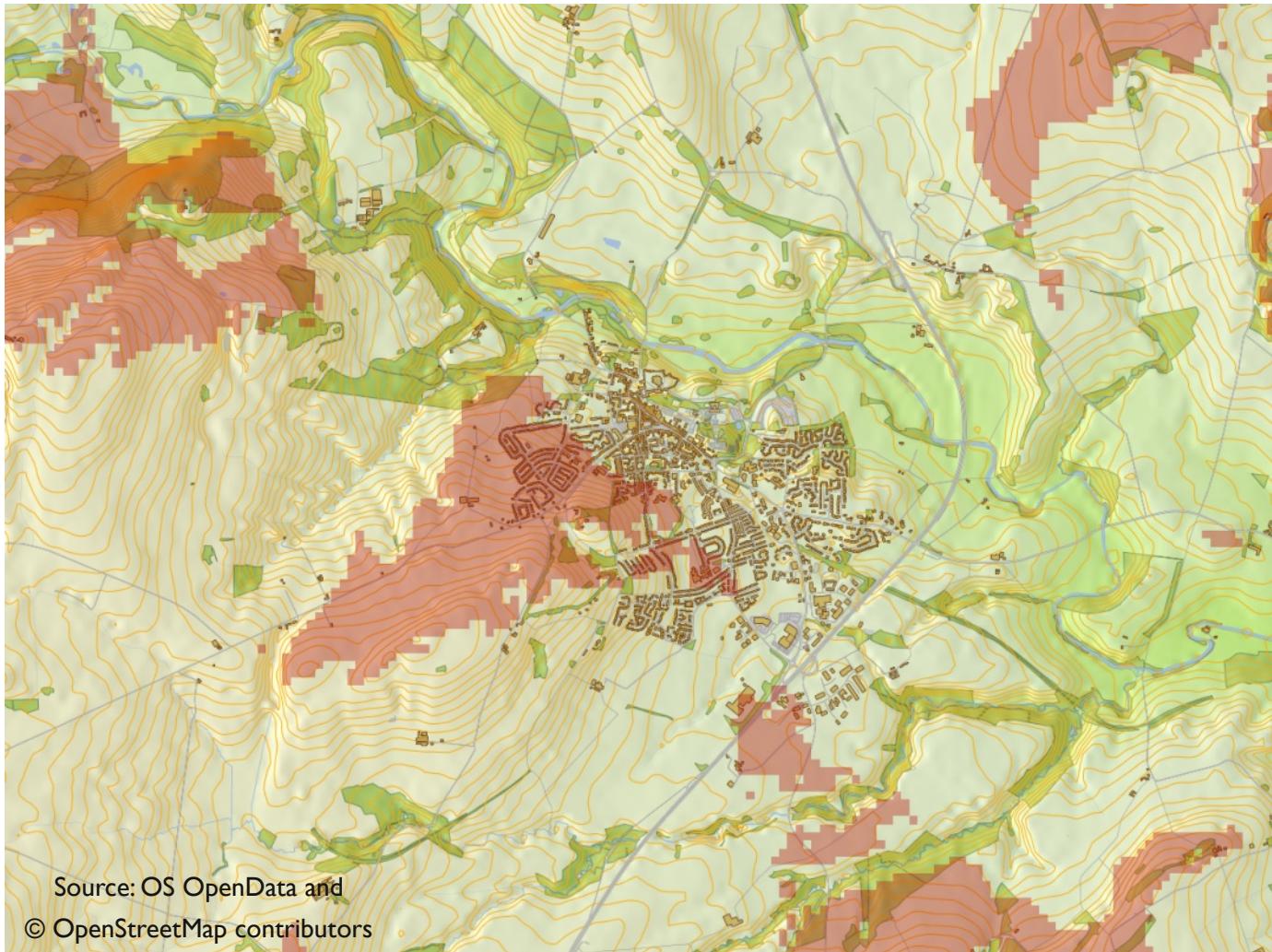
Recently the society has objected to proposed changes in the development on Willoughby's Bank, on the basis of lack of detail, and objected to the construction of a large shed east of Belvedere Terrace on the basis that it will have a negative impact on the setting of these grade II listed properties.

We see no issue of principle with the application for

retail units on the former Willis site on South Road, but the proposals do little to enhance the quality of this important entrance to Alnwick.

The society is increasingly concerned at the gradual erosion of the quality of the conservation area, and lack of enforcement action by council officers. There are numerous examples, illustrated by a recent retrospective application for rendering in Dovecote Terrace. We would like to see the authority make a stand against such applications in order to maintain the integrity of the Conservation Area. We feel they should also take up powers to restrict permitted development rights in order to prevent inappropriate small changes, and nominate a dedicated conservation officer who could deal quickly with infringements. For property owners we would also like to see more guides on typical Late Georgian and Victorian features - along the lines of the existing (and influential) Civic Society guides to stonework repair and shop front design.

Middlemoor Zones of Theoretical Visibility



Diary dates

Civic Society...

28th November, Debate with the Auriga Club, a well established debating society with strong roots in the local community. We look forward to an informal discussion across a range of topics that concern members of both societies: 8:00pm, at the Rugby Club

...and more

The refurbished Bailiffgate Museum will reopen in February with an exhibition about the town centre. They are inviting submissions of photographs that reflect a cross section of the town for this exhibition.

26th November the History Society has a talk on searching for aircraft accidents in Northumberland and the people involved; and on 28th January a talk on Alnwick Cemetery: The Early Years. Both are in Bailiffgate Museum, starting at 7:30. There is a small entrance charge for non-members.



Quiz answers

- a) 69-75, Bondgate Within, dating from early 18th century
- b) Playhouse, built as a cinema in 1926
- c) Territorial Army Centre, of 1983, Lisburn Street
- d) Duke's Memorial Cottages, Pottergate, from 1948
- e) Dorothy Foster's House, 35 Narrowgate, dating from early 18th century
- f) Police Station / Magistrate's Court, 1935

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@gmail.com)

Treasurer and Membership: Gill Parker

Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith

Other Executive Committee members:

Michael Apted

Elizabeth Jones

Trish Jones

Brian Lamb

David Lovie (davidlovie307@btinternet.com)

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

Caroline Stewart

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