

Data: Office of National Statistics
Base map: Ordnance Survey.

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How old are the neighbours?

Alnwick Civic Society is 50 years old this year. We thought members might like to see where 50 year-olds live in Alnwick. Each vertical bar represents a 5-year age band from birth to over 85. Those in their 50s are shown in red.

For your diary:

22nd May: The four entrepreneurs: Panel discussing the future of Alnwick High Street. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

18th June: Social Evening. Barter Books, 7:30 P.M.

2nd July: Afternoon visit to Northumberland Archives at Woodhorn: find out more about the archive and learn how to use it. If you would like to attend please email contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk.

17th July: The Northumberland Coastline: speaker from the AONB team. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

6-15th Sept: Heritage Open Days: watch for announcements.

18th Sept: Chris Hunwick. Archivist of Alnwick Castle. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

9th Oct: An evening with John Grundy. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.



Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting was held on 13th March.

Some of the society's achievements in 2023 are highlighted in the text box (right), and the chair's report looked forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2024. With a number of activities planned there will be plenty of opportunities for members to get involved in the work of the society.

The treasurer's financial statement showed that assets at 31st December 2023 amounted to £8,073.08. Expenses for the year had exceeded revenue by £264.82 but there were no grounds for concern as more recent income, in the form of gift aid and map sales, indicated that the society was operating in the black again. £2,500 of the society's assets were ringfenced for heritage awareness projects as a consequence of past donations. Bank accounts had been rationalised during the year to provide improved online banking facilities. Membership of the society was stable. It numbered 106 individuals in total, and provided an annual income of around £700.

The society currently has four trustees who are accountable for the proper running of the organisation. Tim Smith, Gill Parker, Sue Smith and Pete Reed. The constitution required that one of the trustees stand down at the AGM (although they could be re-elected). Gill stood down but was immediately re-elected following a vote. Other trustees and committee members can be co-opted at any appropriate time.

Following the business of the AGM, Peter Hatley, Alnwick Town Clerk, gave a talk on the refresh of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan. This is a planning policy document which guides future development and sets out proposals for improving the area. The first neighbourhood plan had been adopted in 2017. It needed a review to take account of changes to national and county planning policies and local changes such as growth in population and need for a more diverse economic offering. Two school sites had been vacated and climate change had become a more pressing issue.

Housing would be a major topic for the review. A housing needs assessment indicated that there was a shortfall of affordable homes and policies needed to focus more on the needs of local people.

The town council was responsible for the governance of the plan review. A steering group and a number of advisory

Coastal Processes

In recent weeks our attention has been drawn to coastal processes by reports from Alnmouth of sections of the Golf Course falling into the sea and the collapse of a cliff leading to the discovery of some stone-lined structures that may be Prehistoric Cist Graves.

Our coast is valued by locals and visitors alike for its natural beauty, its wildlife habitats, geology and its historical importance. Much of the coast is in its natural state, with man-made defences only at coastal communities.

The Northumberland Shoreline Management Plan provides a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal processes and a policy framework for the coast from the Scottish Border to the River Tyne. This overall



groups had been set up from the Alnwick Partnership. Initial public consultation had taken place in June 2023 and a further event looking at options would take place on 23rd March.

At the end of his presentation, Peter answered a number of questions from the floor covering matters such as the links between the neighbourhood plan and other relevant plans and the need for improvements to services such as health and sewerage.

Some achievements in 2023

- Significant planning applications included conversion of the former Duchess's High School to a hotel, conversion of Northumberland Hall to house Bailiffgate Museum and development of shops in the Market Place. We scrutinised 124, supported 1, objected to 6, and drew attention to matters that needed consideration on 4.
- Actively engaged with refresh of Neighbourhood Plan. Represented on ADNP Steering group.
- Attendance at talks and events grew. A number of different groups enjoyed our guided walks and contributors to the newsletter earned positive feedback from readers.
- A risk reduction plan is now in place for Bondgate Tower, (implementation has been frustratingly slow). Monitoring vulnerable Heritage with the Town Council. Of 70 issues logged in 2023, around 1/3 are on the way to being fixed.
- Re-introduced Civic Society awards and recognized 20 groups and individuals who were nominated by the community for making a difference in the town.
- When the Boundary Commission toyed with changing the name of our Parliamentary Constituency to "Berwick and Morpeth" we argued that "North Northumberland" had precedent dating back the othe Great Reform Act of 1832 and was a more appropriate name for a rural constituency where most of the electorate live outside two towns. We will never know how much weight was given to our submission, but when we vote in the next General Election we will be reminded that the Boundary Commission made the right choice in the end.

plan was developed in 2009, with an expectation that it would be reviewed within ten years. It anticipated some of the effects we are now seeing, and aims to reduce the risks to people and the environment over a 100 year period. The plan can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/23bjxda8>

In brief: it isn't realistic to defend against all erosion so the strategy varies from place to place and the plan is worth studying in detail.

In the areas that will be of most interest locally the priorities are to protect settlements, commercial centres such as Amble and the character and ecology of Alnmouth Bay and the Aln Estuary.

A profusion of Pattersons

Most, if not all readers of this Newsletter will be aware of the graffiti recently found in the lead on the roof of the tower of St Michael's Church in Alnwick. Maybe some have actually seen the pieces of lead and noticed among the many names scratched into them that the name Patterson recurs time and time again. This perhaps isn't surprising because two members of the Patterson family held the post of Parish Clerk of St Michael's Church for a total of 83 years and they, and their families, would have had easy access to the church, including the tower and its roof.

The two Parish Clerks were father and son - both called Thomas Patterson.

Thomas Patterson Snr was born circa 1719 and was appointed Parish Clerk of St Michael's in 1748 on the death of the previous holder of the post.

According to the parish records of St Michael's, Thomas married Mary Errington from Alnwick in 1749. He and Mary had two children, Jane and William. Mary sadly died in 1758. Three years later, in 1761, the marriage of Thomas to Anne Rickaby is recorded, and they had five children - Robert, John, George, Ann and Thomas who was to follow in his father's footsteps as Parish Clerk.

We know from the detail on the birth entries of his children that, as well as being the Parish Clerk, Thomas Patterson Snr was also a weaver and frequent advertisements in the Newcastle Chronicle and Newcastle Courant tell us that he had a shop in Bailiffgate. The advertisements informed the public that among other things Thomas could provide woven damask table linen and napkins onto which he could "weave Gentlemen's Coats of Arms".

In 1777 Thomas was forced to spend some time away from his weaving, his shop, and his parish duties when he was sent to gaol for owing thirty-five shillings to a Charles Bedlington for ale! Thirty-five shillings equates to approximately £237 today - quite a bar bill!

Thomas died in 1792 and the duties of the Parish Clerk were taken over by his youngest son, Thomas.

Thomas Jnr, born in 1769, was 25 years old when he married Agnes Bowmaker at St Michael's Church. They had eight children, not all of whom survived to adulthood. Agnes died in 1807 and in 1818 Thomas married widow Eleanor Alderson, with whom he had a further four children.



Thomas Patterson Junior is illustrated in *As They Really Were: The Citizens of Alnwick 1831* by Keith Middlemas

There is another Thomas Patterson!

Jane Patterson, Thomas Snr's eldest child, married Thomas Patterson from Howick! Jane and Thomas are remembered on a headstone outside the west door of St Michael and all Angels Church, Howick and newspapers reporting her death informed that she had lived in The Bathing House - that beautiful cottage perched on the edge of the cliff at Howick.

No proof has been found that Thomas Jnr had a second occupation as his father had done. Freemasonry records exist which show that, in 1799, at the age of 30, Thomas was accepted as a member of The Northumberland Lodge in Alnwick.

It was during the alterations and improvements to St Michael's church in 1818 that Thomas was one of those who discovered two stone figures under the floor of the south aisle. (These can now be seen at the rear of the church.)

December 1832 saw a lot of excitement in St Michael's church, when attempts were made to displace Thomas Jnr. The Newcastle Chronicle reported :

"On Sunday and Christmas Day, an unusual scene was displayed in the parish church of Alnwick, during divine service. This arose from an attempt on the part of the minister to appoint a person to the office of parish clerk, in the place of Mr. Thomas Patterson, the present clerk, between whom and the minister some unpleasant differences have for some time subsisted. The new candidate for the clerkship went through the ceremony under the protection of two police officers, who were seated in the reading desk beside him with their staves, to prevent the entrance of the regular clerk, who took his stand in the aisle in front, and used such means as the time and place, and a sense of propriety would permit, to resist the measures of his opponents, and to vindicate his right to the office. During two interments which took place at the same time on Sunday, there were three clerks in requisition, the present office bearer, and two supernumeraries, engaged by his opponents to defeat his claim to the customary dues. Patterson has been a great number of years in the office. He has a large family, and will be reduced to a state of destitution if displaced. Public sympathy is on this account strongly excited in his favour."

A notice of dismissal, signed by the four churchwardens stated:

To Thomas Patterson

Take Notice that in consequence of your notorious conduct of drunkenness on many occasions but especially during divine service last Sunday we have appointed George Buddle to officiate as Clerk of this Parish in your place and that you are no longer to officiate in that office

Given under our hands this eighteenth day of December one thousand eight hundred and thirty two

It would appear that both father and son had a fondness for ale!

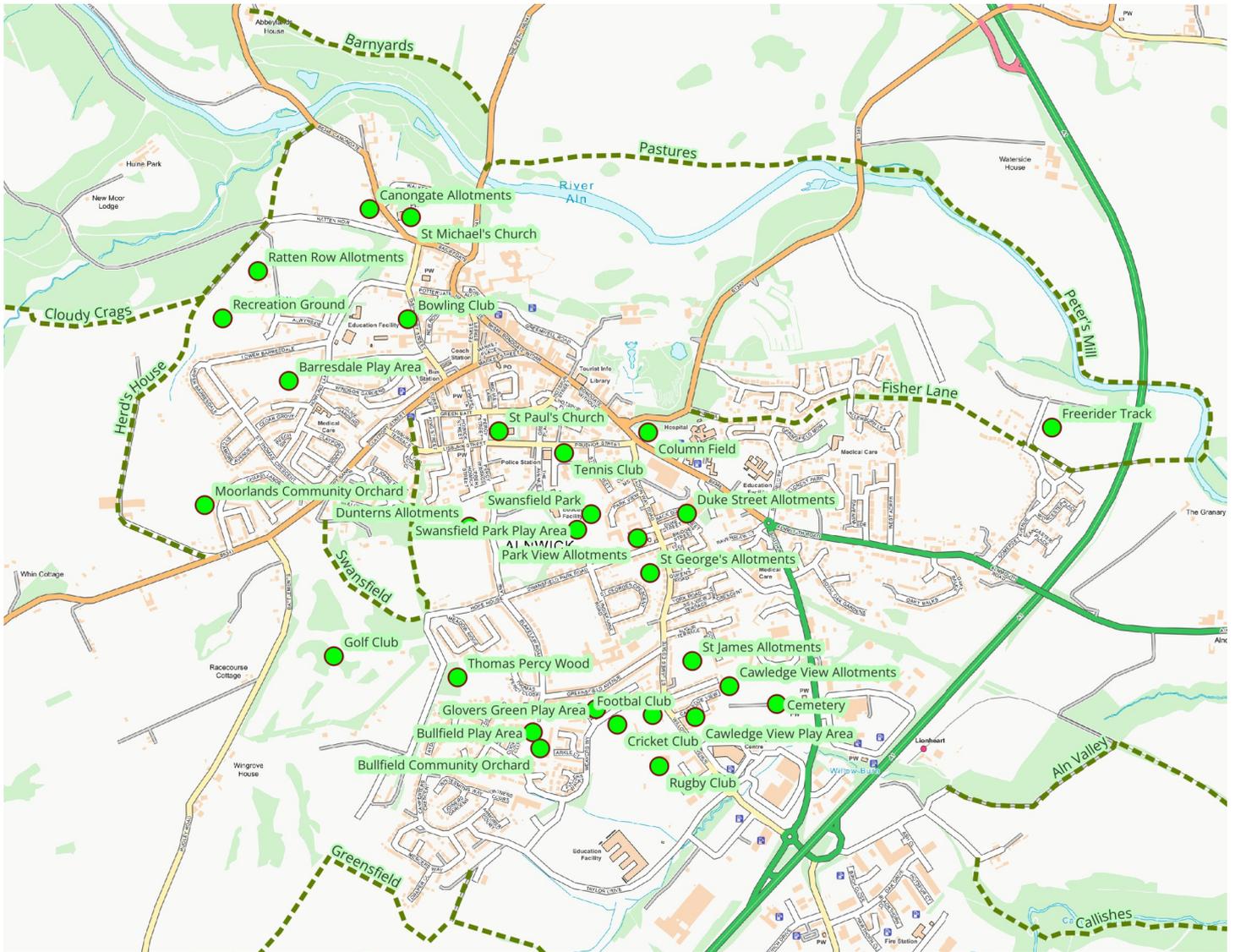
The 1841 census shows Thomas, Eleanor and daughter (also Eleanor) living in Pottergate and, even though Thomas had lost his job over 8 years earlier, he is still shown on the census as Parish Clerk.

Obituaries in local newspapers following Thomas's death in 1849, remarked on the number of years that the position of Parish Clerk had been held by him and his father and com-

mented on the fact that Thomas Jnr's son - Thomas Smith Patterson - had gone to be Parish Clerk at the newly built St Paul's Church.

Three generations of Thomas Pattersons had served the town as Parish Clerks.

Open Space Survey



Northumberland County Council is collecting information on the type of open space and outdoor recreation facilities that people need. They will use the information to plan future provision, and the Society was asked to contribute to their survey. This was our submission.

Parks and recreation grounds

As the town expands there is an expectation that more careful management will be needed of informal recreational access to the surrounding countryside and that there will be an increase in the use of more formal recreation grounds within the town.

Swansfield Park is the only space formally designated as a park. The facilities are more limited than would be expected in a city park, but include open green space, seating and a play space for children. Column Field fulfils a similar purpose with open green space, planting and seating. Counting the two areas together brings the overall area of park into line with the overall provision per resident measured in other Northumberland towns.

There is little formal protection for the historic character of Column Field but association with the Percy Family means that this is unlikely to become problematic.

The extensive landscape parks and pleasure grounds around Alnwick Castle in Hulne Park and on the North Desmesne are protected as Registered Parkland because of their national

importance and special historic interest. Both are seen as popular recreational assets on the edge of town. The general public is permitted access to Hulne Park with some restrictions, and to North Desmesne without restrictions.

There are small and well-maintained communal gardens on Green Batt and at the foot of Pottergate.

The town is well provided with playing fields for mainstream sports (Cricket, Football, Rugby). With the exception of the Freerider Bike Track, Tennis Courts and Bowling Green, the provision locally for other sports (Hockey, Athletics, etc) is limited and alternative facilities are distant.

The former playing fields on the recreation ground to the east of the town are well used as recreational open space but are no longer of a suitable standard to be used as a playing field.

With the reorganisation of education in the town school playing fields at the former Duke's School, Duchess's School and Lindisfarne School have been vacated and there is an expectation in the community that as these school sites are repurposed the open spaces will be retained and the community will benefit from increased access. We understand that there was an intention that the wider community would have some access to playing fields at the new Duchess's Community High School but we are unable to comment on the current situation.

Open Space Survey continued....

Play areas and youth facilities

We estimate that around half of Alnwick's youngest children live within a ten minute walk of one of the existing play spaces at Barresdale, Swansfield Park, Glovers Green, Bullfield, Cawledge View and Allerburn Lea. The play spaces on Swansfield Park and Barresdale have the most extensive range of facilities and appear to be well-used. The more limited facilities on Glovers Green, Cawledge View and Allerburn Lea appear to be less well used. There is a relatively high population of children on new estates to the south of the town. These are some of the most distant from current play spaces. However, as all residents in those areas have gardens and are well served by other open spaces further investigation would be needed before drawing conclusions about the most appropriate places for any additional investment.



Wildlife areas, nature reserves and woodlands

The Local Wildlife and Geological Site at Cawledge Burn is a recreational asset that is valued locally, and at some point may need further protection from expansion of industrial and commercial facilities to the east of the A1 junction.

Alnwick lies at the intersection of areas with very different landscape character. Storm Arwen caused considerable damage to forestry on the Sandstone Hills and many would welcome initiatives that take advantage of this opportunity to restructure commercial forest and increase planting of broadleaf species to soften the landscape impact and increase biodiversity. In the lower Aln valley an emphasis on restoration and improved management of hedgerows and existing woodlands would also be welcomed. Both would be in line with work by the Great Northumberland Forest Landscape Research Project, National Landscape Character Assessment, Northumberland County Landscape Character Assessment, Northumberland Coast AONB Management Plan.

Allotments

Overall provision of allotments is satisfactory in comparison to similar towns, but facilities are patchy. Locations are skewed towards the north-west and centre of town so they are more distant from newer housing at south and east but closer to older housing where gardens are less common.

Ordnance Survey green space mapping shows allotments on Walkergate. These no longer exist, but there are newer community orchards at Bullfield and Moorlands that the Ordnance Survey has not recorded.

Footpaths, Bridleways, Cyclepaths and Rights of Way

Many footpaths within the town are narrow, uneven, and difficult to negotiate with mobility aids. There is considerable scope for improvement of the cycle network within the town, which is fragmented and of poor quality.

There is good access to rural footpaths, bridleways and permissive routes to the north and east and in the Aln Valley.

Construction of the Alnwick bypass in the 1970s interrupted some historic footpaths to the south and east but the recently introduced Aln Valley Greenway along the Aln Valley Railway is well used and has improved the scope for active travel between Alnwick, Alnmouth, the Coast and the National Cycle Network. If it was possible to reinstate other routes to the south and east that would improve walking and cycling links between Alnwick and the coast, and enhance the opportunities for active travel and sustainable tourism.

Recent expansion of the town to the south and east has increased activity on the existing footpath network on that side of Alnwick. Planning conditions ensured that access to the footpath network was protected during and after construction work. However, in practice footpath users experienced considerable disruption during construction work. In future more care may be needed to protect the quality of the footpath network while major construction projects are under way.

Now that the new estates are occupied there is scope to encourage responsible and informed recreational use of the historic Alnwick Moor landscape to the south and east and there is considerable local interest in, and widespread support for development of the Borderline Greenway along the former Cornhill Branch trackbed.

Other

Those who are not familiar with the town report that they have found information on open space fragmented and difficult to access. In part this may be due to the way that responsibility for different facilities is shared across a variety of bodies with different funding arrangements.

Some open spaces within recent developments will be maintained by a Resident Management Company, but will potentially be seen by the wider neighbourhood as a community resource. To date there has been little local experience of how this will be handled.

Public awareness, levels of use, effective allocation of resources and efficient management of the different facilities might all find benefit by encouraging cooperation and coordination between the different responsible bodies.

Sometimes we are urged to concentrate on Alnwick's past. In this case it could also be argued that the society rarely makes collective use of open space and there are other bodies in the town that specialise in these issues and are more qualified to comment. However, when we were invited we took the view that our charitable purpose covers planning standards, the geography and natural history of the area, and the development and improvement of features of public interest. Open space plays an important role in shaping the character of our town and quality of life for our community. In different ways we all make use of Alnwick's open space as individuals. On this occasion we felt we had a distinct contribution to make and were justified in responding.

Do you agree? Would you have responded differently?

We would welcome your comments.

Vittry's Cross: On the boundary of Alnwick Moor, by Allan Mann

Vittry's Cross is mentioned in Tate's History of Alnwick, and it's intriguing, as the term 'Vittry' is not common. The information in Tate is meagre: "Vittry's Cross was on the south-west boundary of Alnwick Moor." "Half a century ago the fairies were supposed to have local habitations in our district. There was a Fairies' Green not far from Vittry's Cross." "Vittry's cross is on the west boundary of Alnwick moor by the side of an ancient drove road." Not much help there with location, but two 1624 maps by Norton show the cross as 'Witterye Crosse' and 'Witterie Crosse'. Norton's drawing may be symbolic, or may reflect its actual appearance, as a large cross on a plinth with two steps.

Norton's maps show the boundary line defined by Townlaw Hill, and various cairns (Karnes) of stones. The position of the cross on both maps is identical, but the roads differ slightly. Most plausibly, the cross lies at the western end of the 'Way from Alnwick to Rothbury', on the boundary of Alnwick parish, and the intersection with 'Bowton Street' running from Bolton, over the moor to Shiel Dykes. The location can be pinpointed on modern maps, as the boundary has not changed much. Note that Norton maps have North at the left: they must be rotated for comparison with a modern map.

Norton shows the presence of Vittry's Cross but in the document 'A Copy of Boundary of the Forrest of Hayden' written in 1647, there is no mention of Vittry's Cross in an otherwise detailed listing of the features of the entire boundary. This might suggest that the Cross had ceased to be visible by 1647, and faded from memory; or that Norton had used older information of a Cross, that had already disappeared by 1624.

Tate's form of the name is Vittry, but the two maps give Witterie and Witterye, both of the form *Witter / Witter* with the suffix -ie or -ey, which often means "with the characteristic of" (i.e. rainy, sunny etc). This is not a common name and it isn't easy to come up with a convincing explanation. There is no obvious reason why this should be a Watery Cross (from *Witter* = a common Northumbrian term for water) and no evidence to suggest a corruption of *wedder* = a castrated ram. A

personal name is another possibility. The name *Witter* is commonly found in northern counties, possibly derived from OE 'Hwit' = white or fair, which may refer to blond, fair hair. Alternatively, *Witter / Whitter* is often interpreted as an occupation, deriving from OE 'Hwit', meaning the 'one who whitens' (a bleacher, or whitewasher). In modern German, Dutch, and Danish 'Witter' can mean 'plasterer / whitewasher / whitener' etc. but such occupations, on the heights of Alnwick Moor, seem unlikely.



On the other hand, white crosses are common across England, often in lonely, moorland settings, as way markers and boundary markers. One example is 'Fat Betty', on Danby Moor, North Yorkshire (pictured here). It's a boundary marker at the junction of three mediaeval parishes, thought to date from the 11th -12th centuries. It stands on a minor road across the moor to Rosedale, so also acts as a way marker, and may mark the boundary of land owned by Guisborough Priory. The cross has been repeatedly white-washed. According to Historic England there are over 350 wayside crosses in England, concentrated in Cornwall and on Dartmoor with a small group on the North York Moors, but few elsewhere.

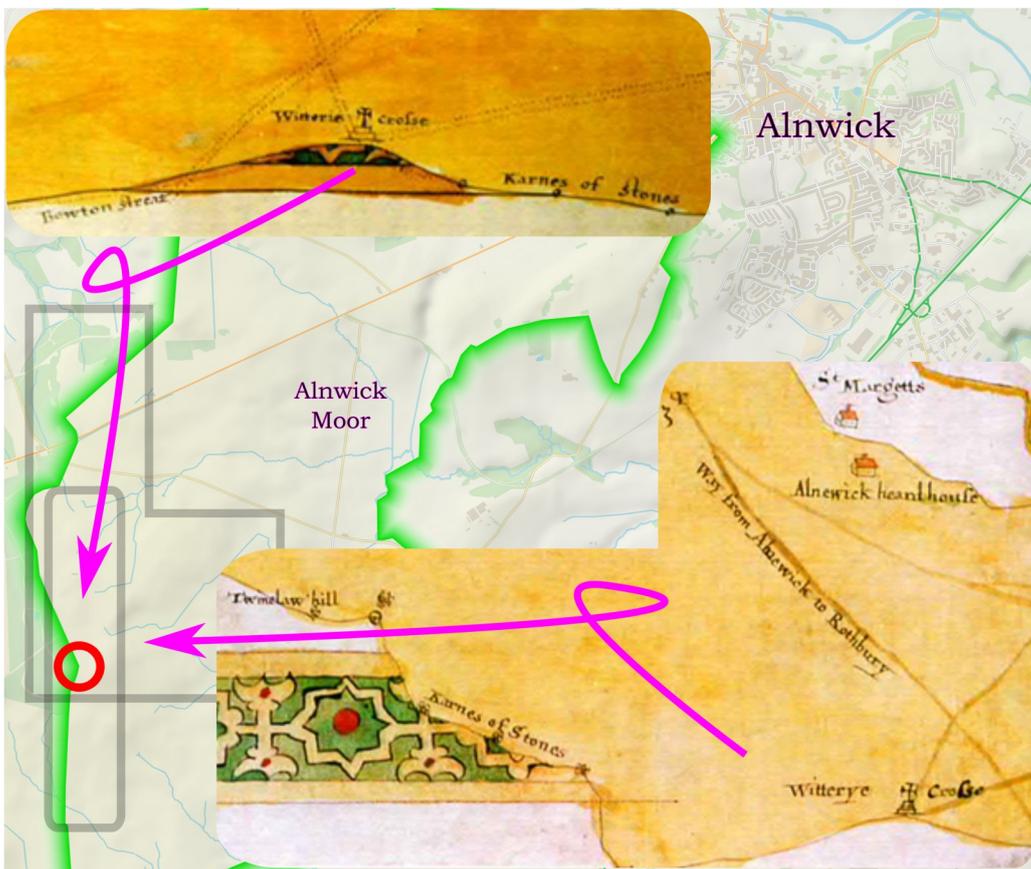
Vittry's Cross would fit this description. A boundary marker on the west edge of Alnwick Parish; a way marker across a bleak and remote moorland, especially in poor weather; marking the position of both the road across the moor, and its intersection with the important Bolton Street; and a possible Christian Cross, promoting the faith for travellers, whilst possibly marking the boundary of Alnwick Abbey lands between 1147-1542A.D.

But another origin seems even more plausible. Under the many uses of 'Witter' Joseph Wright's 'English Dialect Dictionary' lists 'Witter / Whitter / Wutter. A token, a sign, a warning. Hence Witter Stone – a stone

placed as a mark'. The Scottish National Dictionary gives references back to 1513, and a further spelling of *Wyt-tir*: 'Something that serves for identification, an identifying mark or token. Also attrib. with stane, a march stone, and hollis.' (i.e. witter stones and witter holes, small deep holes chiselled into stones, on marches = boundary markers.). Both dictionaries give a derivation of the word from Norse / Old Norse *Vitra* – to warn, to inform.

There are Witter Stanes / Holes on the boundaries of Aberdeen, and Pitlessie Fife. The Norse influence on the language of mediaeval Scotland is considerable, and given the Scandinavian influence in early Northumbria, it seems likely that such terms as Witter Stone / Hole / Cross, may be found here too. The Vittry Cross occupies the perfect position for a boundary marker, and way marker, on a remote section of exposed, upland moor.

This may be the most likely interpretation. But no other Witter features have come to light in northern England. At least, not yet.



News in Brief

Forest Research (in conjunction with Scottish Forestry, the Forestry Commission and the Confederation of Forest Industries) have used satellite imagery and machine learning to identify areas of woodland that suffered damage from Storm Arwen in 2021. Not all of their analysis has been confirmed by human eye so the data is provisional, and will contain some errors. However, two and a half years later, the impact of Arwen is still felt around Alnwick, and their map provides a powerful illustration of its scale. See : <http://tinyurl.com/yckdrphz>

Things could look bleak in the 1970's and Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook are on fine form in their four-part series on 1974. "undoubtedly one of the darkest and most dramatic years in British political history...". But that was also the year that Alnwick Civic Society was founded. So there was at least one small step in the right direction.



<http://tinyurl.com/a93h2t5x>

Congratulations to Bailiffgate Museum & Gallery, for securing a grant of £374,395 to fund a five year project working with the community and partners to deliver activities, projects and exhibitions of national significance, and create opportunities for volunteering, employment, innovative work placements and skills development in heritage and in other sectors.

Furthermore, Bailiffgate Museum & Gallery has been awarded £192,697 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund for the development stage of their project to move to Northumberland Hall. This will support the museum to bring in additional expertise and capacity to deliver specific pieces of specialist work including designs, fundraising, energy audits, activity and interpretation plans and also see the recruitment of new members of staff to support the transition to larger, more accessible premises. This comes at a critical point in the museum's development and a successful move should benefit the community and the local economy.

Most members will be aware that Narrogate House (a.k.a. General Lam-

bert's House) has been identified as heritage at risk by English Heritage since at least 2008. Plans were approved in 2015 for construction of three houses in the grounds, and conversion of the main building to five apartments with a business in the cellar.

However, since then, there has been growing concern over the apparent lack of progress, the apparent deterioration in the condition of the building, and the effect this has on the appearance of the surrounding area. Speculation has been rife about the intentions of the owners and the condition of this nationally significant heritage.

We met with the owners in March to discuss whether there was anything the Society could do to reassure members and the wider Alnwick community about their intentions, and the condition of the building. They assured us that the delays have not been not of their making and while there are still issues that need to be resolved, they are confident of making progress with the development later this year.



We understand that their intentions are still broadly in line with the approved plans. Having completed extensive work on the structure itself and on the roof they assured us that building is sound and secure.

We know that there is considerable interest among our members and across the wider town in the future of this building. We hope that we can help to discourage ill-informed speculation and enlist public support for a positive outcome. To that end we are exploring the possibility of helping the owners arrange public viewing of the interior and a display of their plans later this year.

Historic England has recently published new research which shows that living

near to historic places benefits quality of life for residents. The implication is that it is important to conserve and protect our heritage because of the wider benefits it provides to people. The report suggests that, just as green spaces have a positive impact on wellbeing, a well-maintained historic environment also stimulates positive psychological outcomes including reduced feelings of stress, anxiety, fatigue, and increasing feelings of safety, amongst others.



Residents do not have to participate in heritage activities to reap the benefits of living in such a "Restorative Environment". But we hope these findings will still encourage involvement in Civic Society activities. The full report is called *Cultural Heritage Capital and Wellbeing: Examining the relationship between heritage density and life satisfaction*. It can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/5n7rnacc>

We have waited a long time to see a 20 m.p.h limit in Alnwick, along with improved signage that is designed to reduce the risk of collisions with Bondgate Tower.

We recognise that not everyone will welcome a 20 m.p.h. limit. However, most will. Where they have been introduced there is considerable evidence that they improve safety and deliver health and environmental benefits by encouraging walking and cycling.

It will no doubt take us all time to adjust to the change. The level of compliance will depend on the degree to which the behaviour of responsible drivers has influence over others.

Fortunately, Civic Society members can be relied on to set a good example.



Alnmouth Road

Before the Normans built Alnwick Castle and long before the Great North Road connected Newcastle and Edinburgh a trackway joined ecclesiastical sites at Lesbury with agricultural settlements inland.

By the time that track was mapped in 1622 (below) it was a well-established route between Alnwick and the coast. When it was turnpiked in the 1750s it would become known as the "Corn Road" and carried produce from Hexham to the port at Alnmouth.



Alnmouth Road follows the same route to this day: linking Alnwick with the coast and the East Coast Mainline.

Until the middle of the 19th century the road passed through open countryside but then a ribbon of prestigious residences began to develop along both sides. This began where Alnmouth Road joins South Road with large houses at Belvedere Terrace (1827-40), Freelands (1817, extended 1837), and Alnbank (1840). Ravenslaw on South Road (1870) and Ravensmede (1870) further west came just before a wave of development along the north side of Alnmouth Road. The sale, in 1872, of land from Windy Edge Farm led to construction of Oaklands (1872), West Acres (1873), Summerhill (by 1876), and Crag View (1881). Thornhill dates from about 1880. Hillcrest was built in 1902 and extended in 1912. By then development had spread to the south side of Alnmouth Road. By the 1920s Aldersyde (1897), Ravensmount (1912) and Thornbrae (before 1914) were all in place, interspersed by large semi-detached houses (see map below).

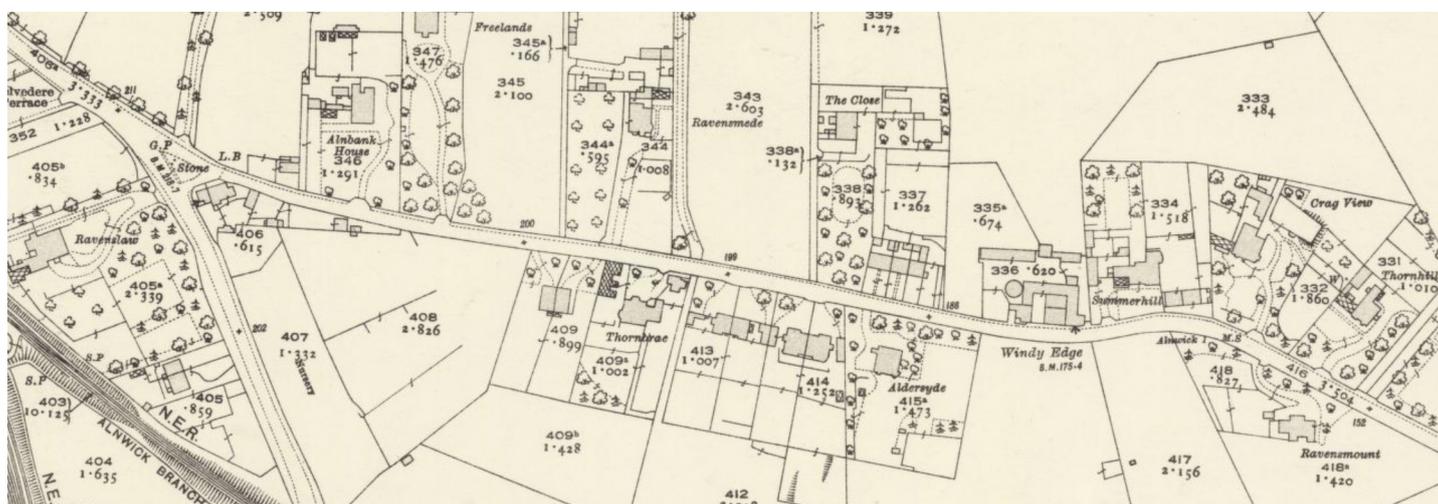
At the time large houses for the aspiring middle classes tended to be individually commissioned, and eclectic in style, but they set a pattern for the more orthodox suburban developments that would follow. Here, only Alnbank and Freelands have been identified as heritage of national significance. If a case was made that others have local significance then it would probably be based on association with prominent local figures, rather than architectural merit or historic importance. William

Hardy lived at Ravenslaw. F. R. Wilson was the architect for Ravensmede. Brothers Charles and William Percy built Hillcrest and Ravensmount. Aldersyde was built for solicitor Robert Archer, Oaklands for draper James Landells.

Between the wars low interest rates enabled a dramatic increase in home ownership and social changes meant that the families of even the most successful entrepreneurs, doctors and lawyers found large Victorian and Edwardian houses cumbersome and uneconomic. There was a shift towards development of more affordable family homes and the character of Alnmouth Road began to change.

- The development of mainly semi-detached houses at West Acres Park dates from 1939.
- During and immediately after WW-2 most of the large detached houses were adapted to institutional purposes (housing for evacuees, care homes, student accommodation, etc). More recently these have been reverting to residential use.
- A mix of flats and semi-detached houses was developed by the district council at Ravensmede in 1948.
- Oaky Balks dates from 1969.
- The two phases of Hillcrest Park date from 1975 and 1981.
- Ravenslaw Court was a mixed development by Nomad Housing in 1983 of a care home, flats and social housing.
- The former nurseries at Royal Oak were replaced in 1986 by a residential development of detached houses.
- The Windy Edge / Peter's Mill development was approved in 2017.

Alnmouth Road has been an important link between Alnwick and the coast for a thousand years, but it has become an attractive, tree-lined approach into town, and a lasting record of how domestic life for some in Alnwick has changed over two centuries.



FixMyStreet: one year on

In May 2023 Northumberland County Council introduced a new service for reporting problems in the public realm. FixMyStreet is designed to help deal with issues such as fly tipping, graffiti, highway defects, abandoned vehicles, etc. We wondered how things are going.

The council gave four reasons for wanting to streamline the way that issues with the public realm were reported:

- The public expects to be provided with tools that are user-friendly, map-based and that provide timely feed-back.
- The County Council needs to show that they respond to issues and that they take action.
- Internal efficiency benefits when reporting system can be integrated with back-office case management systems.
- A well-integrated system provides a platform that can be used for continuous improvement.

Implementation started in January 2023 and the new system was first made available in April 2023. It has now been running for a year. The team anticipated that the new system would generate an increase in the number of reports, and they were right. In the early months they received more than twice the usual volume. Since then, the flow of reports has settled back, a bit. But with 47,000 reports in less than a year and positive feedback it is evident that the public is finding the system easy to use. A review six months ago found that 55% of the reported issues had been closed, mostly because they had been resolved.

NCC have identified the early benefits as being:

- Improved process for the public to report issues.
- Reports are automatically integrated with back office systems.
- The person reporting an issue receives feedback.
- Showing issues that are have already been reported helps to reduce duplication.

Tracking heritage at risk: one year on

The Town Council are keen to help secure a long future for our historic buildings. So they have been monitoring examples of Alnwick's heritage that appear to be at risk. Progress has been tracked on 70 examples of buildings in Alnwick that have been giving cause for concern. Over half are listed by Historic England and more than 80% lie within Alnwick Conservation Area.

The Town Council's Planning Committee took a lead in this, with help from County Councillors, officers of the Town Council and County Council, and members of Alnwick Civic Society. After one year, a third of the reports were on the way to being resolved. One in ten has been removed from the log completely because there is no longer any reason for concern and another 20% have a credible plan but progress will continue to be tracked until they can be removed from the log as well.

The underlying cause for concern is often lack of basic maintenance. In a small number of cases this is already resulting in serious damage to the building, but in most an obvious problem can be fixed relatively easily. The usual aim is to see a minor concern dealt with before the situation deteriorates. The next most common reason for a concern is where work is left unfinished because a project has stalled. Here the underlying reasons are varied: Covid, family or health problems, business difficulties, planning issues, inflation and uncertainty in the construction industry have all caused project delays. The best outcomes are where it has been possible to contact the owner, make them aware that concerns have been raised, discuss their intentions, and explore whether there is anything the council can do to help. Examples where this

- Council staff can see current status of any reported issue.
- Data collected provides a basis for analysis of issues.

We have welcomed the new system and we encourage members and others to use it. We are finding it easier to report issues and the feedback is a big improvement. Although we haven't been able to obtain hard data to prove this, some issues seem to be resolved more quickly. When an issue is brought to our attention it is useful to know whether or not the council is already aware. And a number of long-standing problems have been resolved since the new system was introduced.

Having said that, the system doesn't always work smoothly. So far the main focus has been on County Highway issues. That's where FixMyStreet is most closely integrated with the back-office and seems to be the area where it is most effective. We are told that work is already under way to improve the quality of responses and that there are plans to integrate other services more closely. Behind the scenes we understand that managers are now using data from FixMyStreet to deploy their resources more effectively. There is already some exchange of information between NCC and other authorities, but navigating their different areas of responsibility still tends to rely on a high level of user understanding, and some manual intervention.

The people of Alnwick have been among the most active users of the new system and it sounds as though we can look forward to further improvements. Meanwhile, County is benefiting from efficiency improvements. Perhaps elected members will be able to spend less time dealing with persistent issues. These are all worthy goals. But the outcome we really want to see is a palpable improvement in the condition of our public realm.

kind of supportive intervention has led to a positive outcome include:

- Concerns that were brought to the attention of an absentee owner who was simply unaware of the situation, and is now addressing it.
- A neighbour who carried out basic maintenance work on broken rain-water goods, so that their friend did not have to deal with more serious consequences.
- An intervention by councillors, who were able to unblock a delay in the planning process.

On a small number of complex situations no straightforward solution is evident in the short-term but, by maintaining contact and keeping communication channels open a way forward will be identified in the future. There have also been a few cases where enforcement action was required – either because there appeared to be a breach of planning law, or because of concerns over public safety.

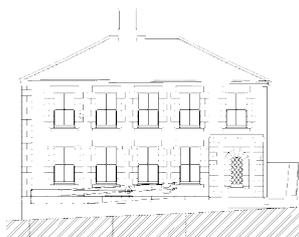
Over the last year the initiative has overcome some challenges with tracing owners, and obtaining responses. The support network has been strengthened, with some helpful contacts in Northumberland County Council. Lessons have also been learned about the underlying causes of concern, and where a timely intervention by the Council can make a difference.

Owners are not obliged to properly maintain their historic properties, but it is in their interests to do so. With heightened public awareness and some fresh thinking we look forward, over the coming months, to further improvement in the condition of Alnwick's built heritage, and a shorter list of vulnerable examples.

Planning Matters

We objected to the Poundstretcher application for advertising consent. The colours and materials used in the fascia do not reflect the character of the Conservation Area. They are overly large and excessive in a period townscape. They do not accord with the basis for sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework, Northumberland Local Plan Policy on Conservation Areas, or Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan Policy on Design in the Historic Centre. Regrettably, the application was approved.

We decided not to comment on an application for change of use at the former Gazette offices at 32 Bondgate



Without. Alterations to adapt the building to accommodate for visiting artists will involve a new window on the east and new external door and window on the rear, replacing single-glazed timber-framed windows with matching double glazed windows and new wheelchair access with removal of a section of boundary wall to widen access into site. The building is within the Conservation Area, but is not listed. We felt that like-for-like window replacement was acceptable. The Town Council did not object, but suggested that the Conservation Team should be asked for comments. They also had concerns about the proposed hard paving and suggested a more permeable surface.

There has been an interesting application at 2 Market Street (above Baileys) to test whether a change of use from retail to holiday apartments could be regarded as a permitted development under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order of 2015. The answer was that Holiday Apartments are not dwellings, so this was not a permitted development and should be refused. Which suggests that owners considering conversion of a similar property might benefit if they plan for permanent occupancy.

We considered the discharge of conditions for work in the Market Place on Units A, B, C and D Market Place and Flats 1 And 2 Market Cross. We welcomed the original plans, which stated that *“All the windows to the listed building will be repaired and repainted in a suitable breathable white paint”*. Due to the condition of the first floor windows they will now be replaced with new single glazed timber

sliding sash windows. Although disappointing, this seems reasonable, so we chose not to comment.

Our submission on to an application at Armstrong Place was among a number that objected to the scale of the extension and the choice of materials. The applicant later submitted an amended design that was approved.

The Conservation Officer objected to a retrospective application for signage on the former Willcox jewellers on the corner the the market place. They found the proposal harmful to the special interest of the listed building and the setting of nearby designated heritage. It would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Alnwick conservation Area. The Town Council submitted a comprehensive objection quoting policies on historic character and significance, setting, design, sense of place, materials, detailing and finishes, as well as expressing disappointment that the work to a listed building had been carried out without permission. Our own objection described the fascia sign as overly deep and disproportionate, damaging to the historic character of the listed building and the Market Place and contrary to a number of planning policies including ADNP Policy HD7 (Design in the Historic Centre).



Subsequently the applicant submitted a revised proposal (illustrated), the Conservation Officer withdrew their objection and the application has been approved. This does not compel the applicant to reverse the unauthorised work so further action may still be required.

Developments that enhance the viability and vitality of the Market Place are in line with Policy TCR4 (Market Place) of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan when they respect and enhance its character and significance. We judged that proposals for a new micropub and wine bar in the former Computerware shop conform to the intended primary uses of the Market Place and we expect them to be welcomed.

There is an application for a substantial dwelling at the former sawmill in Hulne Park. Members may interested in the details, which includes a comprehensive heritage statement.

However, while the buildings are of historical interest they are not listed, and we felt we had nothing useful to add, so did not comment.



An application for listed building consent at 4 Lisburn Street seeks to repair / replace stonework and replace single-glazed windows with a mix of double glazed timber sash and uPVC windows. We objected that uPVC windows are contrary to policy and guidance. The Conservation Officer took a similar position, but also quoted emerging guidance from historic England on dealing with unsympathetic earlier replacements, and replacement of historic panes. Both have been areas of concern for owners. This emerging guidance appears to go some way to addressing those concerns. We look forward to learning more: in the hope that a more flexible policy may lead to higher levels of compliance.

At 5, Lisburn Street there has been a retrospective application for listed building consent to replace the rear extension and repair / replace the gable and chimney stack. The work on the gable and chimney stack is welcome but the materials and design of the extension do not comply with planning policies (ADNP Policy HD7: Design in the Historic Centre and Local Plan Policy ENV 9: Conservation Areas). We suggested that officers may want to explore when approvals were granted for some other uPVC windows that appear recent, and suggested that the attention of the applicants should be drawn to the potential consequences Under Section 9 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 of carrying out work on a listed building without consent.

There is an application to demolish a garage building next to the Shepherd's Rest and erect two holiday chalets. We do not object to the principle of development on this previously developed site but we are concerned about the quality of the design and respect for the moorland landscape setting. The application contains little information about how the chalets will fit into the landscape or how they will look from different viewpoints, particularly the north and north west. So we questioned whether the proposals meet design policies in the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan. If the council is minded to approve the application we suggested that conditions require significant landscaping and screening.

Quiz: Our quintastic heritage?

Many of us were born within 50 years of Alnwick's Edwardian heritage and more of us within 50 years of Alnwick's wartime heritage. So it seems appropriate to look back at what was being built in Alnwick around the time that the Civic Society was formed, fifty years ago.

We make no claims that these are outstanding examples of architectural or historical significance. They are more like an excuse to visit aspects of Alnwick's past that wouldn't

normally feature here. All were the subject of planning applications within a year of our inaugural meeting. Some members might remember the specific reason why each is included. Others will recognise the locations, but turn to the back page for the story.

quintastic: *Collins Dictionary, a new word suggestion. Aged fifty or more, and still attractive and successful.*



Diary dates

22nd May: The four entrepreneurs: Panel discussing the future of Alnwick High Street. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

18th June: Social Evening. Barter Books, 7:30 P.M.

2nd July: Afternoon visit to the Archives at Woodhorn: a chance to learn how to use the archive and find out more about it. If you would like to attend please email contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk.

17th July: The Northumberland Coastline: speaker from the AONB team. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

6-15th Sept: Heritage Open Days: watch for announcements.

18th Sept: Chris Hunwick. Archivist of Alnwick Castle. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

7th Oct: Anniversary of Alnwick Civic Society inaugural meeting in 1972

9th Oct: An evening with John Grundy. St James Church, Pottergate at 7:30 p.m.

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 and amid growing concerns about the future of our town. Since then we have sought to influence developments, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure that proposals protect and enhance our heritage.

The Society pursues its objectives through a variety of activities. We provide a voice for members through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals and like-minded organisations. We offer advice, scrutinise and comment on development proposals; recognise excellence; and organise public meetings. Members were heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and we work with local partners to influence policy at a county level. We seek to influence national policy by co-operating with other bodies in the civic movement, and the Society 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, student, 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.



Who's Who?

President: Peter Ennor

Trustees: Chair: Peter Reed; Membership: Gill Parker; Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith; Treasurer: Tim Smith.

Committee members: Colin Watson.

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk **Email:**

contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk **Twitter:** [@AlnwickCivicSoc](https://twitter.com/AlnwickCivicSoc)

Facebook: [AlnwickCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AlnwickCivicSociety) **Instagram:** [alnwickcivicsociety](https://www.instagram.com/alnwickcivicsociety)

Substack: alnwickcivicsociety.substack.com

Charity registration number: 1197235

Heritage at risk: report your concerns here:

<https://alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk/heritage-at-risk/>



Did you know?

Tuvalu is an island country in the Pacific Ocean, lying between Hawaii and

Australia. In 1984 it issued a stamp depicting Henry IV and Alnwick Castle. Tuvalu has a land area 20% bigger than Alnwick and a population 40% bigger.

Quiz Answers

A) In 1974 Help the Aged was granted permission for 36 flatlets at the former St. Paul's Vicarage site, behind the Tennis Courts in Prudhoe Street. In 1975 Anchor Trust was granted permission for a sheltered housing development in Church Lane with 17 one person flats, and 4 two person flats. Percy Court, Abbeyfield, Ravensmount and Summerhill all date from the 1980s.

B) The development of 13 houses and 52 flats that would become Cawledge View was granted permission in 1975. The first phase of Hillcrest Park also dates from 1975. A series of developments along Weavers Way would follow in subsequent years.

C) Situated at the foot of Wagonway Road, the Kingdom Hall was used by the Alnwick Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Permission was granted in 1974 for a new entrance, ante room and entrance hall, on condition that the adjacent trees were protected. The building is now used by Mind and Soul.

D) By 1975 new developments were under way across the town and more were expected. Northumbrian Water Authority was given permission to extend the sewage treatment works, including construction of two new settlement tanks, an administration building with mess, showers, equipment storage, etc. and improvements to the access road

E) Our Lady's Convent High School moved to new buildings on South Road with 290 pupils in 1962. It is now St Paul's Catholic Primary School. In 1974 the school was granted permission to add a new wing with two classrooms, a cloakroom and toilet.

F) Arable Farm Supplies were granted permission in 1974 for a warehouse and office accommodation at Sawmill Industrial Estate (now Fragrance House, used by Notes of Northumberland). Fifty years ago Hardy's were also expanding their factory on South Road.

G) In 1972 Vaux Breweries, of Sunderland, brought all of their hotels together under a new Swallow Hotels Division. In 1974 they announced a major expansion at the White Swan, to cater for growing visitor numbers. Permission was granted for additional accommodation designed by Reavell and Cahill.

H) Alnwick District Council was formed on 1 April 1974 by merging the urban districts of Alnwick and Amble and the rural districts of Alnwick and Rothbury. It acquired Allerton House from the Health Authority for £55,000 and was granted permission to add external fire escapes, a car park, and various extensions and alterations. The district was abolished on 1 April 2009. Conversion of Allerton House back to residential use will shortly be completed.