

November 2025



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For your diary:

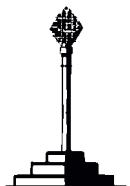
28th October: M. R. G. Conzen's study of Alnwick: the lasting legacy.

With Dr Michael Barke. This is a joint meeting with Alnwick & District Local History Society. It will be held at Alnwick Cricket Club on Weavers Way (NE66 1BX). Start at 7:30 p.m.

19th November: Any Questions?

Each year we are joined by a distinguished panel for a civilised debate of topical local issues. This year our theme will be breathing new life into existing buildings. The transformation of a historic building to serve a new function should help to conserve resources, safeguard heritage, and promote sustainable development. But it can be also be fraught and challenging. In Alnwick we have some well-established and some more recent examples of adaptive re-use. What lessons can we learn?

St. James's Church, 7:00 p.m. for 7:30 start.



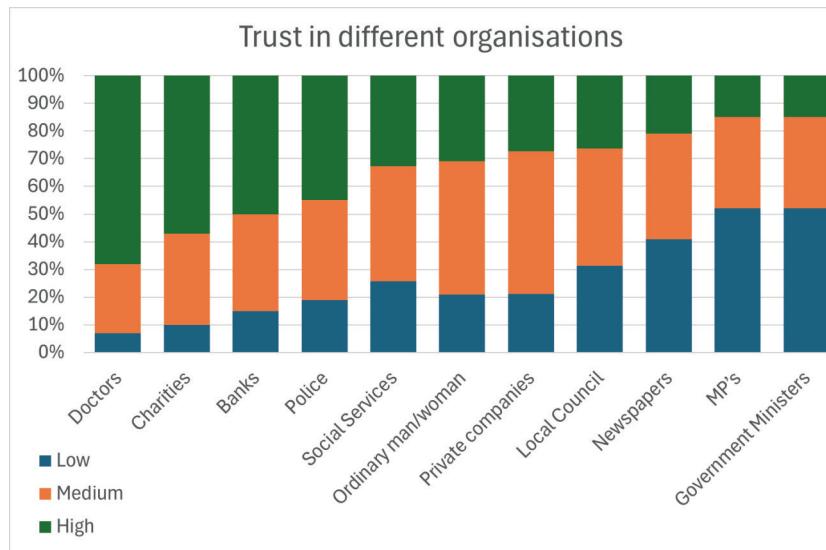
Public trust in charities has never been higher

England and Wales are home to over 170,000 registered charities. Roughly one in nine of the population volunteer for a registered charity and over 900,000 are unpaid trustees. Thanks to their work, public trust in charities has never been higher.

Trust in charities has remained consistently high since 2020 and currently 57% of people say these are bodies in which they have a high level of trust. Charities continue to be more highly ranked than any of the comparative groups. Only doctors outperform them.

To better understand who serves on today's charity boards, the Charity Commission has been working with Pro Bono Economics to survey trustees. Many trustees reported experiencing multiple and profound benefits from their role, and almost all would recommend it to others.

Among the many benefits that trusteeship brings is the opportunity to grow and develop professionally. However, this is not a key motivator for all. Developing new skills and leadership experience are also important.



Support for historic churches

Innovative research by Historic England has revealed strong public support for preserving historic churches, even among those who do not regularly attend services or identify as religious.

The findings offer powerful evidence of the value placed on historic churches. The study adapted an established economic method (known as Discrete Choice Experiments) to isolate the value of a church building itself, as distinct from the activities that typically take place there. As a result researchers were able to quantify, for the first time, how much these buildings are valued by society.

Over 4,500 participants made more than 27,000 choices. They were presented with randomly generated options for potential improvements to a church, each accompanied by a randomised cost, and asked to select their preferred option.

Almost half of the non-users had not visited any church in the previous year. But even they were willing to pay £6.30 for restoration of a historic churches, while regular church users

Most trustees believe they make a positive impact, feel more connected and more fulfilled as a result of their work.

Guidance from the Charity Commission suggests that charities should aim for a minimum of three trustees and most serve on boards of between four and ten members. The survey found a reasonable balance between long-serving trustees and those who are new to their boards. Nearly a quarter of trustees have been a member of their board for more than 10 years, while just over a third of trustees have been a member of their board for two years or less.

When asked how likely they are to recommend being a trustee to others, those from all backgrounds and experiences responded positively. 28% of trustees say they are extremely likely to recommend the role. Only 1% said they are not at all likely to recommend being a trustee.

If you feel you have more to contribute to the society, then this is a good time to speak to a member of the committee. Our next AGM will be in March

For more: see <https://tinyurl.com/3ahtnbuj>

were willing to pay £15.40 for a full restoration. People were also willing to pay for improvements in community use.

The research was conducted in line with HM Treasury guidance, to ensure that results are robust, standardised and suitable for informing policy and investment decisions. It demonstrates that people recognise and value the contribution that churches make to people's lives, for example as warm spaces, for music events and access for quiet reflection and religious services.

At a time when many places of worship face significant financial pressures, the evidence strengthens the case for continued and targeted funding support. The hope is that this could help church communities to strengthen funding applications and provides policymakers with a robust economic case for supporting the preservation of heritage.

For more see: <https://tinyurl.com/297wpvdc>

Baths and wash-houses

The Victorian Society has listed Newcastle's Gibson Street Baths as one of their top ten Endangered Buildings. That gives us an excuse to compare how Alnwick and Newcastle responded to the need for public baths and wash-houses during the 19th century as the town and city expanded.

Edwin Chadwick's "Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain" was published in 1842. It drew a connection between poor living conditions and the spread of disease. In 1844 a Committee for Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Wash-houses for the Labouring Classes was formed in London.

Newcastle's first public baths opened in 1781, on Bath Lane, but had to close in the 1820s after the sinking of a mine shaft disrupted the water supply. Entry would have been by subscription, and too expensive for most people. And a report on Newcastle in 1845 observed that development along the Tyne had curtailed access to the river. Most people were left without suitable places to bathe.

In 1845 a letter in the Times argued out that taxing soap did not help. "*when the active exertions of the philanthropic are constructing baths and wash-houses for the poor, surely it is fitting that so important an article in cleanliness as soap should be put within their reach as cheap as possible*". In 1846 the Public Baths and Wash-houses Act empowered (but did not compel) local authorities to build public bathing facilities. The Soap Tax was abolished in 1853. But progress was not as rapid as proponents would have liked. It was often hindered by poor water supply and there was tension between different groups. Some believed that baths and wash-houses were an aspect of sanitary reform that should be operated for public benefit. Others saw them as a service to be provided for profit.

For Alnwick the outbreak of cholera and loss of 139 lives in 1849 was devastating. The subsequent inquiry found that the cause was unclean water and poor sanitation. By 1868 Alnwick had one of the most advanced water supplies in the country, with almost every house connected. Privies were replaced by water closets.



In 1876 public baths and washhouses were combined with the Working Man's Club, which the Duke of Northumberland erected on Clayport. These contained 13 baths on the ground-floor (8 for males and 5 for females); and a swimming bath behind. Behind the building were 30 washing troughs and a drying room.



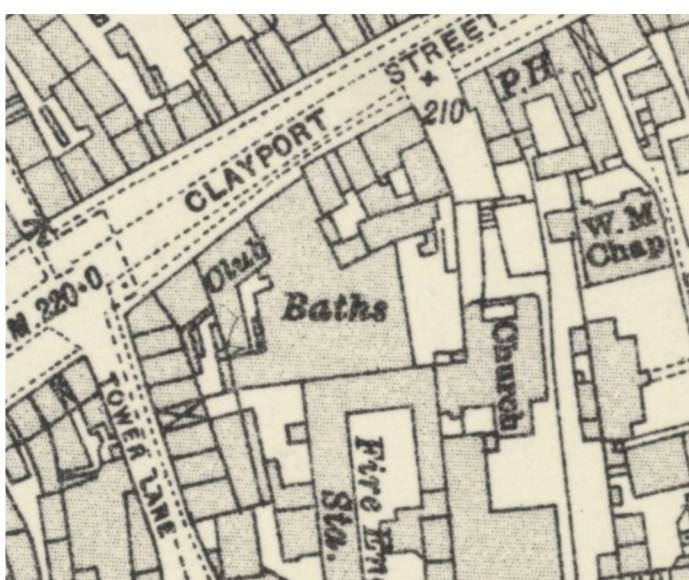
By the time the baths opened Alnwick's piped water supply was already proving inadequate in the face of growing demand. There were complaints from the higher parts of town that the water supply was failing on Sunday mornings when the large plunge pool was being filled ready for use on Monday. There were fears that without a reliable water supply kitchen boilers might explode.

Although the plunge pool was only 10-yards long it was used by the Alnwick Swimming Club for competitions including the egg dive, jockey race, long dive, nearest swimming race, four length race, handicap races and a water polo match. When the pool was unavailable the Swimming Club were obliged to use the "Sump" (a bathing pool in the River Aln).

After the first world war the Council was reluctant to take over responsibility for the baths, so they did not re-open. A new Swimming Pool was proposed in 1938, next to the Duke's School Playing Field, but that wouldn't be built until 1970. In 2003 it was replaced by Willowburn Leisure Centre. By 1845 Newcastle Corporation had started to erect wash-houses for the "humbler" classes and some households were connected to piped water (but only 8%, and the quality of the water was often poor). With growing demand from industry access to adequate supplies of water remained a problem throughout the 19th century.

Newcastle's Gibson Street Baths dates from 1907. This was the fourth such facility in Newcastle, and described as "*the most complete set of baths for their size in England*". Men and women entered through separate doors and the interior contained exquisite tiling. The men's entrance, for example, featured four panels depicting mermaids, a water polo match and a diver in striped swimwear.

The baths closed in 1965 and the swimming pool was boarded over so the hall could be used for badminton. Newcastle City Council has tried, unsuccessfully, to sell the building since 2016, while local residents campaigned to preserve it. Today, the Gibson Street baths are listed as an Asset of Community Value, but the building is empty. The Victorian Society is urging Newcastle City Council to seek a sensitive new use for the building, and recommends collaboration with the community to develop a viable proposal that preserves this valuable part of the city's social and architectural heritage.



"New roads and car parks in Alnwick Town Centre Plan"

The following article appeared in the Northumberland Gazette on 13th September, 1968. More than 50 years ago.

INTERESTING new proposals for the future development of Alnwick are contained in the Alnwick Town Centre Plan, out this week. If implemented, they will bring about much needed changes and benefits without altering the character of the historic town.

The main principles of the plan involve the construction of the Alnwick by-pass, on which work is now under way, the construction of a new distributor road round the town centre to serve through traffic; located car parks with good access from the distributor road and-service roads for the shopping area.

There is a deliberate conservation of the town character involving the preservation and revitalisation of the historic and architectural elements of the town centre. Along with this goes a scheme to separate pedestrians and traffic for safety and convenience.

PROGRESSIVE

The plan is concerned with the principal factors in the redevelopment of the town centre and further work will be necessary on the detailed aspects of the plans.

The report emphasises that the plan must not only serve to preserve the existing townscape qualities of Alnwick but also to create a meaningful new environment wherein the special characteristics of the town are enhanced in an appropriate setting with the existence of a system of traffic management which will afford maximum safety, enjoyment and convenience to all town centre users.

The plan is based on the progressive implementation of a number of proposals which combine to meet these needs.

For example, the opening of the by-pass will enable the first stage of the new Bondgate car park to come into operation and this, together with an interim traffic management scheme, will immediately avoid the need for certain vehicles to enter the town centre.

"In association with a car parking policy for the historic core, including the cobbled areas, this will result in the pedestrian becoming more aware of the character of Alnwick and less conscious of the motor vehicle" states the report.

CAR PARKS

Improvements to the environment will continue with the progressive stages of the distributor road and the provision of more car parks and service roads which will reduce the need for vehicles having to serve shops and business premises from the street.

The report states that the implementation of plans for the various "action areas" will bring about the better use of land and improve the appearance of areas which have become rundown and under-used.

The distributor road will for the greater part skirt the areas of semi-dereliction and under-used buildings which are immediately behind the shops.

The Alnwick by-pass will have the affect of diverting about 45 per cent of the total traffic at present passing through the town, including most of the heavier type of commercial vehicle. But within five to ten years the volume of traffic in the town centre

NEW ROADS AND CAR PARKS IN ALNWICK TOWN CENTRE PLAN

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An indication of the growth of cars in the town centre can be gained from the fact that at peak times in 1960 the number was 367 but by 1967 this had become 625. It is estimated that the demand for parking spaces will have grown to over 1,400 by 1985.

The visual impact of so many cars on the cobbles in Bondgate, Fenkle Street and Market Place has the most unfortunate effect on the environment.

It has been possible to propose areas which can realistically become car parks having access directly off the distributor road and which are convenient from at

least one of the main roads from the hinterland villages. In addition to the major car parks at the rear of Bondgate these are proposed in Roxburgh Place, Dispensary Street, Pottergate and Dodds Lane areas.

The report goes on to say that there is a positive need for a parking policy and management scheme to be implemented and administered by the Council. In the immediate future this is

....Town Centre Plan (continued)

particularly important in the case of the cobbled area of Bondgate Within where a removal of cars would benefit both the pedestrian and the environment.

The report says that there is no case for an overall expansion in the shopping area. Taking into account the likely increase in the population of Alnwick and surrounding areas there is no need for any widespread allocation of land for additional shopping purposes. Should there be any change in circumstances it is considered that the route chosen for the distributor road is such that room for expansion could be found within the limits set by this road and service spurs.

ESSENTIAL

It is considered that the proposals embodied in the town centre plan are essential to the future of Alnwick. It will be necessary for works to be carried out in stages and it is hoped that the majority of the works involved will be started within the next five years.

They are: 1. Completion of by-pass – estimated 1970-71; 2. Access and first stage of new Bondgate Car Park; 3. Traffic management scheme and parking management scheme; 4. Distributor Road – Dovecote Lane section and realignment of Bus Station,

Dispensary Street Section; 5. Action areas – Roxburgh Place, Pottergate and Bus Station area; 6. Pottergate New Row link road and car park; Dispensary Street and car park; 7. Distributor Road – minor carriageway improvements as necessary

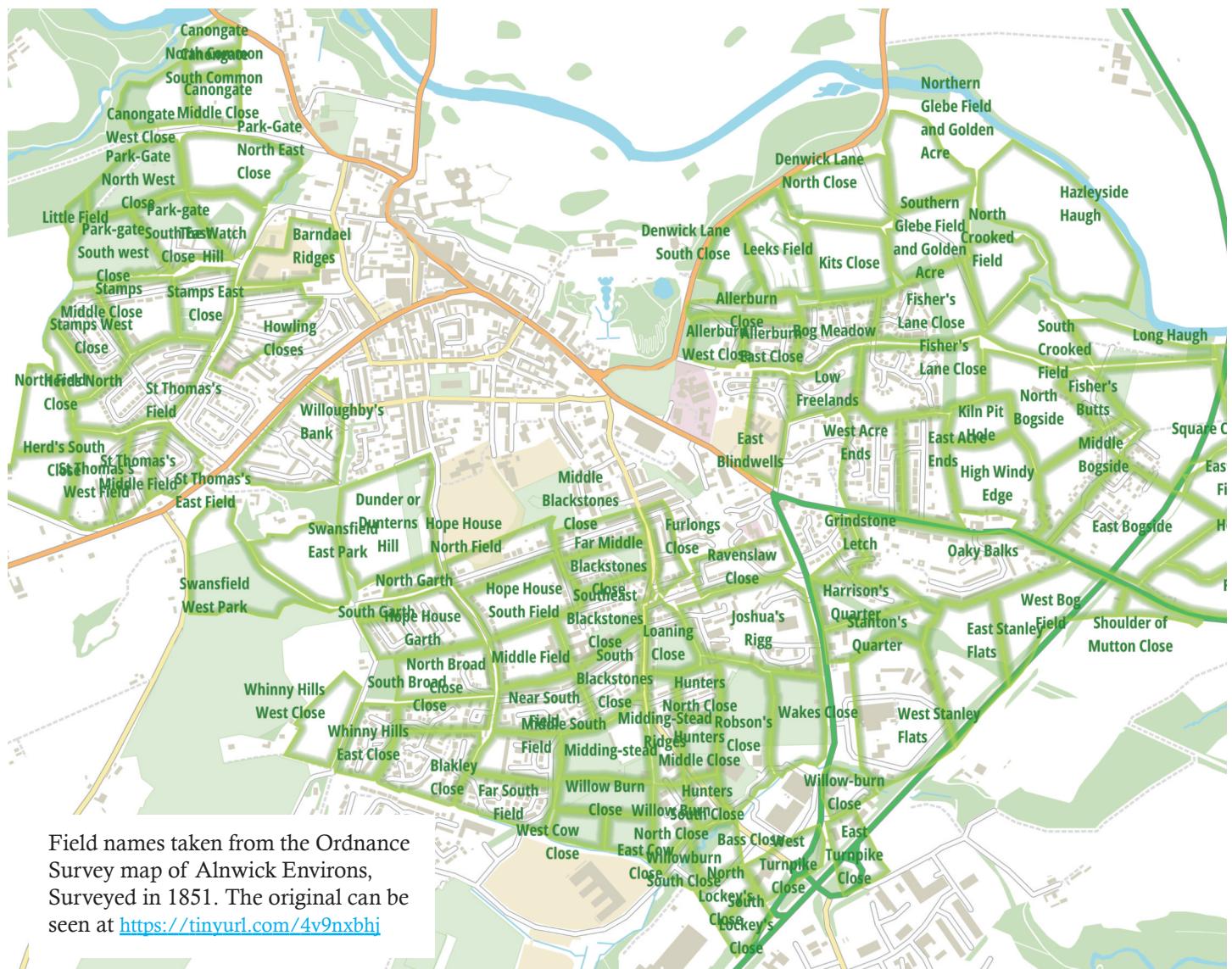
Later developments include: 1. Distributor road Green Batt – Rower Lane improvement. Wagonway and Prudhoe Street junction, completion of distributor road; 2. Subsequent sections of Bondgate car park and service road; 3. Chapel Lane service spur; 4. Action areas: Hotspur Place, back Howick Street – King Street area - Bus Station area – service spur; 5. Narrowgate rear service; 6. Chapel Lane car park.

The purpose of the report is to provide yardstick and a method of approach by which all development proposals in the town centre can be assessed and through which a satisfactory balance of aesthetic and other planning objectives can be achieved.

“This approach will certainly make the historic town of Alnwick an even better place in which to live, trade work or visit” the report concludes.

Northumberland Gazette, September 13, 1968

Which field do you live in?



Field names taken from the Ordnance Survey map of Alnwick Environs, Surveyed in 1851. The original can be seen at <https://tinyurl.com/4v9nxphj>

Bailiffgate, 1862

This description of Bailiffgate in 1862 is taken from an article on the sanitary condition of Alnwick, published in the trade magazine, "The Builder", Feb 8th 1862.

Emerging into the town by the stern and cunningly contrived barbican, and crossing the now filled-in moat and paved way in place of the drawbridge, we face a wide, roomy street called Bailiffgate.

The whole of this street has been recently lowered several feet, and the sunny side of the street paved handsomely with York flags, the less fortunate shadowy side being provided with but a narrow footway of a porous, indigenous sandstone. The execution of this scheme has entailed the drawback of the erection of a flight of steps up to the doors of the houses, and, as these are guarded with iron railings, they are likely to be dangerously in the way in the

dark, unless the gas lamps which we see newly placed prove an efficient remedy.

With the exception of Sundays, when the parishioners wend their way to the church at the end of the street, half a dozen persons are rarely to be seen at a time in Bailiffgate. There are many localities where there is more traffic that stand in need of similar improvement.

The first house in the street, called the Commissioner's, is of a square form and colossal proportions, which, unfortunately, overwhelm and overshadow the picturesque barbican of the castle to which it is adjacent.

The rest of the same side of the street is composed of neatly-fronted houses with small paned windows - the residences of the duke's bailiff, the duke's solicitor, the duke's clerk of works - a passageway lead-

ing to tenements, or "rooms to let" where a large ash-pit serves many families, a neatly-fronted Roman Catholic chapel and schools, set back from the line of houses, the residence of Dr. Hedley, with a peep of a beautiful country through the open carriage entrance, a shop or two, the Red Lion Inn, where horses are lodged in the rear, who walk up a flight of steps and pass through the main passage of the house, a house or two more, another passage with a small farm-yard in the rear, haystack, stabling, and piggeries; and, at a right angle, a row of small houses overlooking the east end of the old parish church.

At the end nearest the castle of the opposite side of the street there is a ruined building, supported by massive buttresses, inclosed in a space boasting a few trees, and next to it the entrance to a small square of ruinous buildings, partly tenantless, yet where there are occupants of rooms over stables and under ruined granaries, and where there is a vast ash-pit on one side adjacent to a tenantless building - a forlorn and dejected-looking place - and next to this again some neatly-fronted solicitors' offices, with the objectionable flights of new external steps to the doors projecting on to the pavement as before-mentioned, then Hubbick's veterinary surgery and forge, and small house or two and a shop.



Ordnance Survey Town Plan of Alnwick, Surveyed 1864

Heritage Open Days, 2025

"La Journée Portes Ouvertes" began in France, in 1984. It was taken up by the Council of Europe in 1985 and the European Union became involved in 1999. England has celebrated Heritage Open Days since 1994, with Berwick taking part in the initial pilot. There are similar events in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Across Europe around fifty countries take part.

In England, the festival was originally run by the Civic Trust, but since 2009 by the National Trust, with funding from Postcode Lottery. However, almost all the work is done at a local level. Each year there are about 5,000 local events. This year in Alnwick, the public were able to access a dozen heritage sites, a number of guided walks and special exhibitions.

The Civic Society has been involved in helping to organise the Alnwick festival for the last five years. Larger bodies such as Bailiffgate Museum, the Playhouse and churches are self-sufficient, but a core team coordinates publicity, helps to raise funds and support smaller venues. Special thanks this year go to Northumberland Archives who have been highly supportive.

Our total budget this year was around £3,000. This was funded through grants from the Town Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Jane Robertson Fund, participating organisations, and members of Alnwick Civic Society.

The reasons the Civic Society want Heritage Open Days to succeed are closely aligned with the original aims of the Council of Europe. We want to raise awareness of Alnwick's heritage, both locally and in the wider area because we think that wider appreciation of our built heritage will help to ensure that it is valued and protected for future generations.

Regionally, we are competing for attention with a well-established festival in Berwick, and significant resources on Tyneside. Nevertheless, we estimate that this year's festival brought about 750 people into the town. That's at least as many as last year, despite disappointing weather.

The National Organisers put the economic impact of each visitor at £10.00. (a bit more than the cost of a coffee and a scone). However, Visit Northumberland believe that each day visitor to our county spends almost £40.00. So the economic benefit of Alnwick's Heritage Open Day was somewhere between £7,500 and £30,000. More importantly, we recall that forty years ago, one of the original aims of the Council of Europe was: "*to bring citizens together in harmony even though there are differences in cultures and languages*". If Heritage Open Days have helped to bring harmony across our community then it has been well worth the effort.

Thanks to the dozens of volunteers who helped make this happen.

News in Brief

Belated congratulations to Ad Gefrin Anglo-Saxon Museum and Whisky Distillery in Wooler, on winning the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) North East Award for Building of the Year, Client of the Year, Regional Award of the Year, Project Architect of the Year and Sustainability Award of the Year in May 2025.

Congratulations to Bailiffgate Museum & Gallery on securing over £4m in National Lottery Heritage Funding and up to £1.7m in Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal funding. This is a major achievement by the trustees and volunteers involved. Transforming the Museum & Gallery and refurbishing Northumberland Hall are important elements in the regeneration of Alnwick and will add life to the town centre. This investment in our heritage and our community is good news for the town. The project is expected to get underway this winter

Last year we had concerns about the condition of several historic buildings in Alnwick for which Northumberland County Council are responsible. The initial response to our Freedom of Information request suggested that NCC were unable to identify the listed buildings for which they were responsible. More recently NCC have been able to provide the information we requested. Now that there is more clarity on developments in Northumberland Hall (see above) and Barndale House School (see page 10) we are reassured.

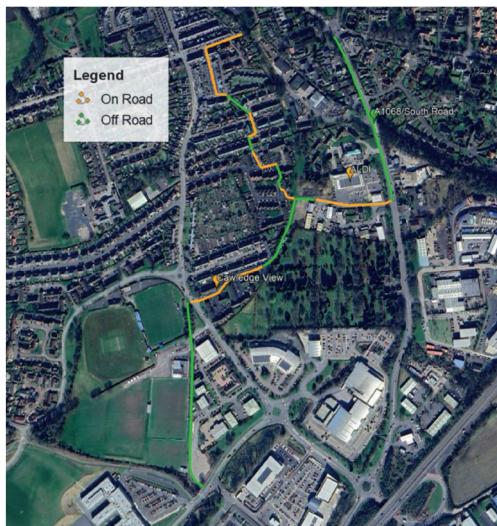
“Strong high streets are pivoting away from retail and swapping redundant shops for cafés and restaurants” • “Centres with high vacancy rates must tackle the over-supply of retail space” • “Investment is needed to remake centres” • “Beware the limits to potential growth in the visitor economy” • “Build homes in the centre, rather than on the edge of town” • “Where centres are attractive to residents visitor appeal will follow” • “A struggling high street is a symptom of a struggling economy, not the other way round”

These are among the conclusions in a new report from the Centre for Cities. They looked at a variety of cities and towns to examine the ways that spend leaks to rival centres. The report (*Checking out: The varying performance of high streets across the country*) found different reasons why some high streets thrive and

others don't. It questions the value of popular prescriptions. These conclusions are thought-provoking, and could easily be applied to Alnwick.

The full report can be downloaded here: <https://tinyurl.com/uyhnnftp>

Climate action, the local economy, public health and quality of life for residents all depend on the authorities addressing a number of traffic issues, several of which could be alleviated by a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists between the south of Alnwick and the centre. This would particularly benefit students commuting to and from DCHS.



Alnwick Town Council have commissioned Cundall (an independent consultancy) to assess the viability of an active travel “Greenway” route following (as far as possible) the line of the former Alnwick to Cornhill railway. Cundall evaluated the options, identified opportunities for access from neighbouring residential areas and provided cost estimates.

An alternative route along Willowburn Avenue, Wagonway Road and Victoria Terrace presents so many challenges that the option was discounted.

The existing bridleway between The Duchess's Community High School and Cawledge View means that active travel users can already be segregated from motor traffic on this section.

As expected, the Cundall team found significant barriers in the vicinity of Bridge Street. However, they also identified a cost-effective route through quiet residential streets to the west of the trackbed and a more ambitious option along South Road to the east. Both of

these would contribute to an overall north-south route.

Pressure for investment in sustainable travel infrastructure will only increase. We have waited a long time for this study and we would have liked to see a more ambitious recommendation. However, we have to accept that such developments are likely proceed step-by-step. In that context this report is heading in the right direction.

The new gravel path next to the Cawledge View allotments has already

improved this corridor. It could be easily be extended along the former trackbed at low cost. Such incremental improvements will help to demonstrate a latent demand for more safe active travel routes. So despite some disappointment, we hope this report will be supported. It's a step in the right direction. The proposed route can easily be improved, and will help to lay the groundwork for something more ambitious in future.

We don't complain about scaffolding on historic buildings. It's indispensable for those who work at height, and a sign that essential work is under way. But scaffold can also cause damage through carelessness or inappropriate design. It can also facilitate access by intruders.

Historic England has published new guidance about best practice for Scaffolding on Historic Buildings. This is a subject where few of us will claim expertise. However, this is worth a look, and it's surprisingly interesting. If you want to impress others by pointing out the difference between a transom and a ledger then you should take a look at: <https://tinyurl.com/4nzc42tk>.



Thanks to all who took the time to review and comment on the refresh of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan. The team is now considering your feedback and working on the response.

Listed Building Consents

We have been exploring the history of planning applications on the Northumberland County Council Public Access Planning Register. What kind of work has been carried out on Alnwick's historic buildings? Has the type of project changed? Does history tell us anything about how decisions on investment in built heritage are influenced?

Since 1975 more than 1,000 applications for Listed Building Consent (LBC) have been submitted for properties in Alnwick. There have been 622 in the last 25 years. National figures show a fall of 16% in the volume of LBC applications between 2000 and 2023. In the North-East the decline was much smaller, but the fall of 17% in Alnwick was very close to the national trend. Alnwick's peak year was in 2007, when a total of 48 LBC applications were submitted. This was a few years later than the national peak, but the subsequent downward trend was not unusual. Twenty years ago, in Alnwick, the number of LBC applications was about 30 a year. More recently the average number of LBC applications in Alnwick has been around 20 a year. The lowest volume since 1985 was in 2018, when there were only 12 LBC applications.

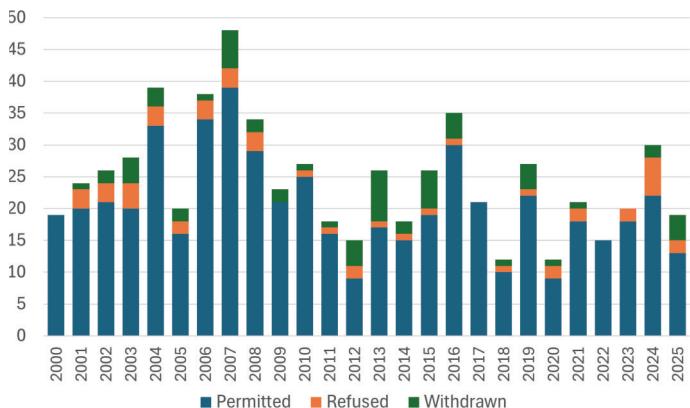
On our relatively small volumes the proportion of applications that are refused tends to fluctuate from year-to-year, but over longer periods it has remained fairly steady. In recent years around 84% of LBC applications in Alnwick have been approved, 8% refused, and 8% withdrawn. Nationally 92% are granted. For comparison, 86% of all planning applications are approved.

According to Historic England, decisions on LBCs tend to lag behind other planning decisions. 77% are decided on time, compared to 86% of all planning decisions. However, planning authorities in the North-East perform slightly better than average with 80% of LBC applications decided on time.

LBC applications often cover a variety of different types of work and some projects are difficult to classify. However, we have managed to uncover some recurring themes and these account for around half of all LBC applications in Alnwick. In recent years windows have been the most common subject. This category accounts for around a third of LBC applications. Twenty-five years ago windows accounted for about 15% of LBC applications, but the proportion has been rising fairly steadily.

Work on the roof is the second most common type of project covered by an LBC application in Alnwick. Currently around 20% of LBC applications involve work on the roof. Apart

Applications for listed building consent (Alnwick)



from a peak of activity in 2008, there were rarely more than two or three such applications a year until 2019. Now we expect at least four each year.

Maintenance of stonework is the other recurring theme. Stonework alone accounts for about 12% of LBC applications in Alnwick. If work on Chimneys is included then around 15% of applications fall into this category.

Extreme weather in March 2008, February 2018 and November 2021 aligns well with spikes in activity on roofs. However, we can only speculate about the reasons behind some of the other fluctuations.

Owners have some choice about when they carry out work on a listed building, and how they approach each project. Until 2012 work on Listed Buildings was zero-rated for VAT. However it's difficult to tell whether removal of tax relief had a measurable effect on activity levels immediately before or after the change.

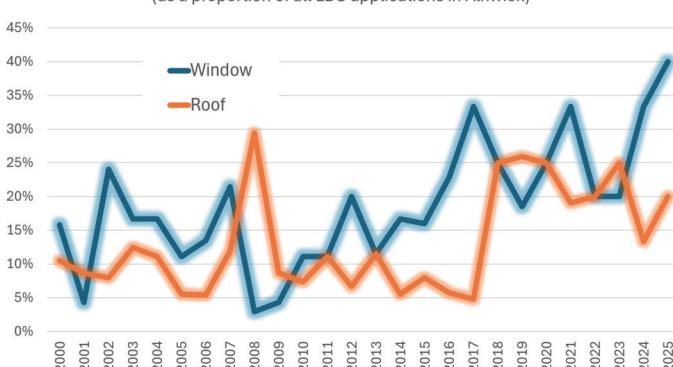
Between 2010 and 2017 the number of Local Authority Conservation Officers in England fell by about 25%. Anecdotally we know that this hit confidence in the ability of Local Authorities to deal with casework. It's possible that expectations about receiving a timely decision had an influence on the behaviour of some owners. But it's difficult to see a measurable effect.

It seems likely that growing pressure for climate action and rising concern over energy costs are both contributing to the upward trend in applications related to windows. By contrast, the volume of activity on stonework is relatively steady. In a sandstone area maintenance of stonework is ongoing. It's plausible that the only significant factor affecting stonework is just deterioration over time.

Fluctuations in the property market will inevitably have an effect on investment in heritage assets. Some recent developments are no doubt due to the aftermath of Covid and the impact that had on the local property market. Changes in taxation and regulation of holiday accommodation will no doubt influence behaviour in future.

We don't yet have complete data for 2025. However, it seems that the overall volume of activity is returning to levels that we would have expected to see about ten years ago. But not to the levels seen twenty years ago. The Civic Society can expect to be scrutinising several applications for Listed Building Consent each month. Sometimes more, sometimes fewer.

Listed Building Consents (Window or Roof)
(as a proportion of all LBC applications in Alnwick)



James Wightman Douglas DSO, LRIBA, FSI (1873 - 1937)



James was born on 5th November 1873; he was the sixth of seven children born to William and Mary Ann Douglas (née Wightman). His father was a master tailor and the family lived in Fenkle Street, Alnwick, moving to Spring Gardens by 1911.

James was educated at The Duke's School in Green Bat from 1880 until 1890 when he left to take up employment in the Estate Office of The Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle. It was here, under the Clerk of Works, that he received his early experience of surveying and architecture. His education continued at Newcastle College, this led to him eventually having architect's practices at 1 St Nicholas Buildings, Newcastle upon Tyne and at Bondgate Without, Alnwick.

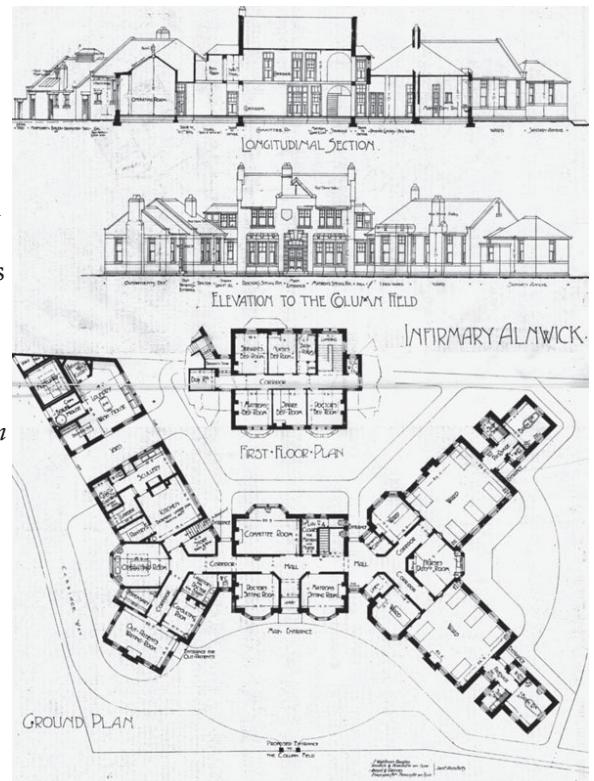
At the outbreak of World War 1 James, who was an officer in the Territorial Army, enlisted as a Captain in the Royal Engineers, very soon rising to the rank of Major.

After serving in France, James was drafted to Salonica where his inventive genius and courage earned him the respect of all his men. He was brought into prominence in rapid bridge building at dangerous points. In recognition of this he was awarded the DSO. The citation reads – *"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He supervised the wiring of the whole line under heavy fire. He set a splendid example of courage and determination throughout."*

He was also awarded The Order of White Eagle of Serbia.

After the armistice he was appointed to the staff of the Ministry of Health and was a Housing Commissioner in London. He played a major role in national housing developments, carrying out inspections for the Government in England and Wales and reporting on housing conditions. James returned to Alnwick in 1925 and resumed his practice as an architect and surveyor.

As well as being responsible for the Alnwick Rural District Council New Housing Scheme, Alnwick Urban District Council Town Improvement Scheme, Alnwick's Water Supply Scheme, he was joint author of design for Alnwick Infirmary and architect for several buildings in the locality. James was school architect for the Diocesan Society, architect and valuer for all schools purchased or rented by Northumberland County Council and was consulting architect to His Grace the Duke of Northumberland, who, in 1901, commissioned him



Alnwick Infirmary (1908)

to design the new Duke's School. His remarkable talent as an architect of school buildings, led him to carry out commissions in nearly every county in England and Wales.

A fearless critic on a variety of subjects, both local and national, James was a very public-spirited person. Among other things, he was Vice President of Percy Rovers Football Club, Committee Member of Alnwick Mechanics' Institute and a County Councillor.

James married Gertrude Pace in 1930. They were both in their 50s. Gertrude was the daughter of a former Newcastle City Treasurer.

James Wightman Douglas of Greycroft, Alnwick died on 26th January 1937. The well attended, semi-military, funeral service was held in St Paul's Church and was conducted by Canon Mangin, Archdeacon of Lindisfarne. The obituary in the Newcastle Journal read:

Major James Wightman Douglas
Outstanding career in Peace and War
DESIGNER OF
ALNWICK DUKE'S SCHOOL

Of all his designs, perhaps the one he will be best remembered for will be The Duke's School.



Duke's School (1904)

Planning Matters

At the former Barclays Bank, 20 Bondgate Within, advertisement consent has been granted for signage for the new café/bar. The Shopfront Design Guide indicates that illuminated signage is acceptable in certain circumstances, including businesses open into the evening, such as pubs and restaurants. Officers considered the colours appropriate in a historic town centre and approved trough lighting after the applicant made changes to the design.

We had a positive influence on the design of the new Banking hub at 10 Paikes Street. We initially objected, on the basis that the proposed signage and illumination was not appropriate for a listed building at a prominent location in the Alnwick Conservation Area. The Town Council raised similar concerns. So planners requested amendments. The changes included a reduction in the number of vinyl window displays, removing illumination and changing the signage from acrylic lettering to paint. The Built Heritage and Design Team considered that these amendments addressed our concerns, that the revised signage would not have an adverse impact on the conservation area or the listed building and would be in line with the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide. This Grade II listed building has been sitting empty, disused and in poor condition since 2018. All three applications for its development have now been approved. The services provided by the banking hub will be welcome, and it will be good to see the building back in use.

At Barndale House School, on Howling Lane, plans were amended to remove proposed uPVC and aluminium framed windows and doors in favour of timber. This followed comments from Built Heritage and Design. We welcomed the revised plans, which have now been approved.

We questioned the use of acrylic lettering for new signage at T. G. Jones (formerly W. H. Smith). Alnwick Town Council objected. However, officers considered that the lettering would comply with guidance, and Conservation Officers raised no objection to the proposals. The new signage was approved.

At 3, Northumberland Street proposals were submitted for demolition of an existing rear extension and construction of a new rear extension. We felt that there was insufficient information to assess whether the details and materials would be appropriate for a listed building in the conservation area. We are also concerned that the proposals sought to over-develop a small backyard area. Built Heritage and Design have fundamental concerns about the proposals, which they felt would adversely impact both the historic fabric and built form, and lead to over-development of the site.

We objected to previous proposals for window replacement at 24 Upper Howick Street on the basis that the case had not been made for replacement. Revised proposals have now been submitted, following an intervention by Conservation Officers. We welcome the way this is now being approached. The issues appear to be well understood and a resolution is in hand so we saw no need for the society to respond.

At 3 Howick Street there is a proposal for replacement of five windows in the West elevation and two windows in the East Elevation. Given the extent of the proposed works, we felt that

the views of the Built Heritage & Design team should be sought on whether the design of the proposed new double glazed units respects the historic character of the building, particularly the width of the window frames. Officers subsequently responded that insufficient evidence had been submitted to enable this application to be determined, and advised that the applicant should discuss options with the case officer prior to any further submissions being made.



Also on Howick Street, at Grove House a number of changes are proposed to earlier plans for window replacement. We felt that the approach appeared comprehensive, and we saw no specific reason for concern. However, this is an important heritage asset, and so we commented expressing the hope that the views of Built Heritage and Design will be sought before any decision is taken.

At 1, Croft Place consent is sought for a number of changes, including renovating the whole roof, repointing the front stone gutter, replacing cast iron gutter and downpipe at the front of the property, and rendering the bottom 2 feet of the front facade. Because the proposed works will help to secure the long term future of a listed building we felt they deserve support. Built Heritage and Design expressed support and commented that "*The proposals respect the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building, and will preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings, and the character and appearance of the Alnwick Conservation Area*".

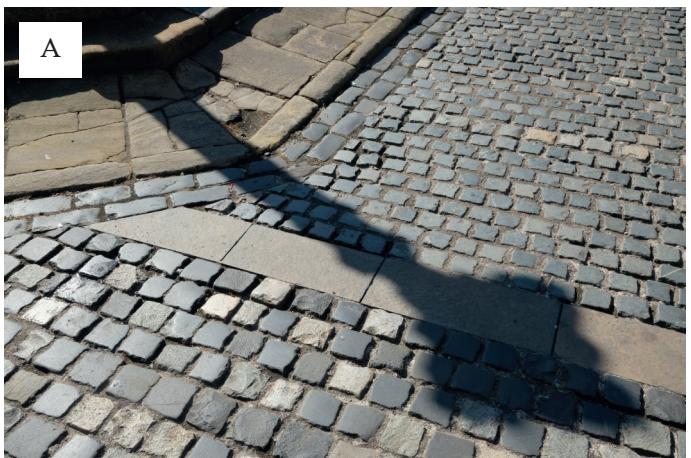
At 3, Lisburn Street there is an application for change of use from a private long-term rental to a holiday let. We don't normally see these, but we know that balancing the mix of accommodation for visitors and permanent residents is one of the concerns that the refresh of the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address. There is a growing concentration of holiday lets in parts of Alnwick and we took the view that a more proactive approach is now needed in order to maintain an appropriate balance. We recognise that this will not easily be achieved, but we support efforts in the refresh of the Neighbourhood Plan to better manage the mix of short-term lets and more permanent accommodation. Progress towards a balanced approach is welcome, but needs to be transparent. Where there is a material change of use then there is an opportunity to consider the impact of a new short-term let on neighbouring residents and other consequence such as loss of permanent accommodation in the town. To be effective, any such approach will need to be clearly understood by applicants and by the wider community. We would therefore like to see this approached in a transparent way, with open discussion, leading to clear guidelines on situations which will be considered as a material change of use, and the areas of Alnwick where this will apply.

We commented to the effect that, when determining the application for a short term let, the council should consider the impact on the local community by way of disturbance to permanent residents and the loss of permanent housing accommodation.

Quiz: history casts a long shadow

Kenneth Yukun Liu, an American author, said that "History is the long shadow cast by the past upon the future". But we say: "*Hurihia to kanohi ki te ra, kia taka te atarangi ki muri i a koe*".

How many of these shadows do you recognise? All but one are in the Alnwick Conservation Area. All but one have been cast by a historic structure that is listed by Historic England as being of national importance. The answers are on the back page.



For your diary

28th October: M. R. G. Conzen's study of Alnwick: the lasting legacy.

With Dr Michael Barke. This is a joint meeting with Alnwick & District Local History Society. It will be held at Alnwick Cricket Club on Weavers Way (NE66 1BX) starting at 7:30 p.m.

19th November: Any Questions

Each year we are joined by a distinguished panel for a civilised debate of topical local issues. This year's theme is based on breathing new life into existing buildings. St. James's Church. 7:00 p.m. for 7:30 start.

And more

21st November: Christmas Lights Switch On

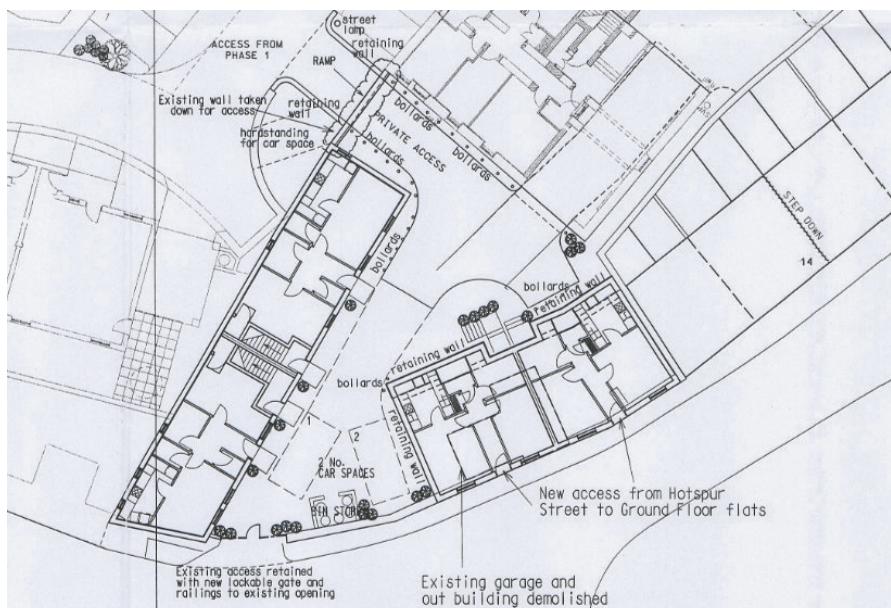


Twenty-five years ago

In January 2001 plans were submitted by Johnnie Johnson Housing for development of eight flats in Beals Yard, to the south of the former Militia Barracks on Hotspur Street. Approval had been granted six months earlier for conversion of the former Militia Barracks into six flats.

The main building on the site dates from 1810 and was built as the parish workhouse. In 1840 a new Union Workhouse was constructed on Wagonway Road and this became a Militia Depot. The lower building was added in 1870 and extended in 1877. After the militia was disbanded the site had a variety of uses including a County Council Highways Depot, and a builder's yard. During the first World War it was used to hold German seamen who had been detained in Amble when war was declared.

The site was originally bounded by the medieval town wall and in 2002 archaeologists dug three trenches across the site to investigate further. They found a variety of medieval pottery, and evidence of a street running through the site, but no direct evidence of a town wall. However, their findings were consistent with other evidence that the town wall originally ran along the boundary with Hotspur Street.



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.

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Email: contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Bluesky: [@alnwickcivicsoc.bsky.social](https://alnwickcivicsoc.bsky.social)

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/>

Quiz Answers

- A) Market Cross
- B) Harry Hotspur statue
- C) War memorial
- D) Percy Tenantry Column
- E) Northumberland Hall
- F) St Michael's Pant
- G) Lion Bridge

The Moari Proverb means “Turn your face to the sun and let the shadows fall behind you”

The Harry Hotspur statue is not listed by Historic England as being of national significance. The Lion Bridge is outside the Alnwick Conservation Area.