



CITY AND COUNTY

The Journal of the Northumberland & Newcastle Society.

August 2020

THE UNION CHAIN BRIDGE



Construction of the Union Bridge over the Tweed by Alexander Nasmyth

On 26 July 1820 the longest iron suspension bridge in the world opened for traffic. First to cross was Captain Samuel Brown, RN, the bridge's builder. His carriage was followed by twelve heavily loaded carts. With the strength of the bridge having been demonstrated for all to see, the 700 spectators who had gathered for the event then flocked on to the bridge.

The Union Bridge, also known as the Union Suspension Bridge or Union Chain Bridge, spans the River Tweed between Horncliffe, Northumberland, England and Fishwick, Berwickshire, Scotland. In so doing, the chain bridge also spans the border between England and Scotland.

Samuel Brown's bridge was revolutionary. He conceived the idea of suspending the deck from iron rods linked together to form rigid chains. His plans were approved by the eminent engineer John Rennie. When work started on 2 August 1819, building of the Menai Suspension Bridge linking

• *Front cover: Lady's Well, Holystone*

Anglesey to Wales to a design by Thomas Telford was already under way, but the Union Chain Bridge was completed six years earlier and less than a year after work on it had started. The bridge cost a total of £6,449. It has a span between the support towers of 423ft and the wooden deck of the bridge is 360ft long.

The support tower at the Scottish (western) end is free standing and forms a gateway through which traffic passes as it enters the bridge. At the English (eastern) end the support tower is fixed directly to a rockface, and the approach road turns sharply onto the bridge. Until 1882, tolls were charged for crossing the bridge and the toll cottage remained a feature close to the English end of the bridge until it was demolished in 1955.

CONTENTS

2-3	Editorial
4-7	County Committee
8	Recent Event
8-9	Tyneside Committee
10-11	Art for Regeneration
11	Picture Puzzle
12-13	Book Review
14-15	Obituaries
16	Chairman's Message
17	Conservation
18	Letter

Over the years there has been much work required to keep the bridge in good order and currently a major multimillion-pound project to repair the bridge is under way. The heritage aspect of the work is being overseen by architects Spence and Dower. Perhaps we could have an update on their work in a future issue.

Further information about the bridge can be found on Wikipedia and on

<http://www.unionbridgefriends.com>

(see answer to Picture Puzzle page 11)

RURAL DESIGN CENTRE

Annie Lloyd and I attended an online seminar recently, explaining the work of a new organisation, the Rural Design Centre, which is the coming together of a large number of agencies under this banner to investigate, analyse and hopefully

come up with some practical proposals to help meet the many challenges that rural communities and businesses meet in the present environment. In particular they are interested in learning about housing issues and problems faced by people living in rural Northumberland communities and would like help in exploring these further, with a view to finding new solutions which address these challenges, now and into the future.

If you are willing to assist, there is a survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/rural-housing-design-mission>

Further details of the Rural Design Centre can be found at:

www.ruraldesigncentre.com.

Nigel Jenkins EDITOR




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Glanton's Heritage Signpost Restoration Project

Glanton, a small village of about 200 people set in the foothills of the Cheviots, has a thriving heritage action group with a quite remarkable track record of successes behind it. The Glanton Heritage Group was set up by a handful of committed residents in 2010, to identify and restore the features from the past that make Glanton special. To this end, it has already saved and restored the beautiful red telephone box in the village centre, it has published the story of a local doctor's family over a century and is now concerned with restoring the signposts at the four road junctions in the parish.

Glanton is not on a main road but that was not always the case. The stage and mail coaches of the 18th century used to thunder up the hill from Whittingham on the turnpike from



Newcastle to Coldstream. The street through the village is unusually wide, sufficient to turn a coach and four. There were two pubs, 'The Nag's Head' and beside it 'The Old Post House', hinting at the village's role in the past. Austere rather than pretty, it has a distinct but charming character and has grown up as a small artisan community supporting the surrounding area. Beyond the radar of today's commuters, it has largely escaped modern development, and is further protected by its designation as a Conservation Area.

Signposts, once an essential aid to travel, were largely removed by local authorities when the country was under threat of invasion in the 1940s. Two decades later, the 1964 Worboys report gave rise to a further cull, as heritage posts were widely replaced by utility posts conforming with the new 'Traffic Signs Regulations'.

But as with milestones and other traditional waymarkers, there is immense affection and an increasing appreciation of these now rare pre-war features. Their fascination is in part the way their design and local construction varied across the country. For example, the ones around Glanton, cast by Alnwick Foundry (the name is cast on the posts), have a white conical finial, whereas those in nearby East Cumbria (Westmorland) are capped with a halo, bearing the name of the parish.

Once widespread in the district around Alnwick in the early 20th century, a few signposts have survived but most have been replaced or are now in a parlous state of repair. However, with skill and local resource, they can be restored so they can guide visitors once more and bring local distinctiveness to their communities.

Sue Rogers, Chair of Glanton Heritage Group, said the group has already received praise from neighbouring communities for the two signs whose restoration has already been completed, and they hope to encourage other communities by example. The funding that the group hopes to raise will go towards engaging professional help from a small company in rural Cumbria who engage with this type of work. The work is highly specialist, costly and needs to be agreed beforehand with all relevant landowners and authorities. But as before, this small band of inspiring and committed members will be doing as much of the work as they can with their own hands.

Further information on heritage milestones, signposts and waymarkers:

www.milestonesociety.co.uk

On the Glanton Heritage Group: glantonheritagegroup@gmail.com

On the project crowdfunder campaign:

<https://communityfund.calor.co.uk/glanton-heritage-signposts>

Annie Lloyd COUNTY COMMITTEE

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Berwick deserves better shop fronts

Despite having some of the best domestic architecture in the county, dramatic and historically interesting Elizabethan ramparts, mediaeval walls, a pier from the end of which you can see Lindisfarne and Bamburgh Castle, an allotment site that must have one of the best views in the country, The Maltings cultural centre and the Granary Gallery, surveys of town centres show that Berwick rates as one of the worst for graffiti, cleanliness, litter, the state of buildings, street furniture and shop frontages. It's the shops that I'll concentrate on here.

In surveys carried out for the *Tweed & Silk*⁽¹⁾ report, members of the public strongly criticise shop-fronts which are garish (often those of famous high street brands), and we all know that the design and materials of many fascias have little regard for the architecture of the host or adjacent buildings. A shop-front design guide exists

for Berwick⁽²⁾, but it seems that, as retailers often move in very quickly and are keen to get their branding in place, they apply for retrospective planning permission and don't therefore engage in discussion as to what is required to complement or enhance Berwick's conservation areas. Nationally, design guides exist to encourage owners and retailers to use a colour palette, materials and proportions sympathetic to building styles. In an increasingly fragile high street economy (on-line shopping reinforced by Covid), this may be an unaffordable luxury, but on the other hand, if town centres are to re-invent themselves, they have to be as attractive as possible.

Some of the worst shop-fronts in Berwick are on the main shopping street, Marygate, and on Golden Square, the entrance to the town centre as you cross the impressive Royal Tweed Bridge with its views of the



Bridge Street shops

early 17th century Berwick Bridge to the right and the Royal Border railway bridge to the left. On Marygate, right next to the neo-classical Town Hall, are ugly featureless mid-20th century buildings, housing some of the worst offenders in garish fascia board territory. Nothing much has changed since the town's shop-front design guide acknowledged that "the prime street, Marygate, has suffered most from poor modern shopfront



Marygate garish fascias

installation, and provides several examples of shopfront design to be avoided”. This isn’t a call for pastiche, hauling back quaint 19th century designs to try to do a 21st century job; contemporary frontages are acceptable as long as shape, proportion and colour are considered in relation to the immediate environment, rather than imposing a standard ‘one style suits all’ design.

The Built Environment Background Paper (2017) of the Berwick Neighbourhood Plan refers to deteriorating buildings, inappropriate infill and shop fronts, and empty units above shops, and includes a recommendation for the “provision and enforcement of shopfront design guidance”, pointing out that the recommendation to update the 1998 design guide hasn’t yet been implemented.


The success story in Berwick is Bridge Street, an increasingly thriving community of specialist shops. Most of the buildings are listed, and shop fronts have been treated sensitively in most cases, using a subtle colour palette and well-proportioned fascias, windows and door cases. Above all, most of the buildings now look cared for; what is so obvious in the central commercial area is the proliferation of destructive

vegetation in gutters and chimneys, peeling paintwork and neglected shop fronts. The Berwick Civic Society website features an excellent Building Study of Bridge Street, with panoramic drawings of the north and south sides acting as the index to descriptions of each property.

Whatever one’s views about Poundbury in Dorset, the designers have proved that shops don’t need to shriek their existence via huge plastic signs in primary colours; a quiet palette and discreet signage is adequate and doesn’t detract from the quality of the architecture.

- (1) *Tweed & Silk: a public realm strategy for Berwick-upon-Tweed. NCC, 2010.*
- (2) *Shopfront Design Guide for Conservation Areas in Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough, Supplementary Planning Guidance 1998.*

Suzanne Stanley COUNTY COMMITTEE



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RECENT EVENT

The Little Theatre, Gateshead

A small group of members and guests were supposed to visit this theatre on Wednesday 18th March, but Covid-19 got in the way! Technically, it is not in our area but some of our members are involved in its management, so an exception was made.

The theatre was built on a derelict site opposite Saltwell Park in the early years of World War II, thanks to the generosity of the Dodds family.

The opening performance – of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”- was on October 13th 1943, by the Progressive Players Company (as it happens celebrating their centenary this year, 2020!) and productions of about 10 plays per year have continued since, off-and-on. Over the years, the theatre has been developed in different ways, although, during the 60s and 70s, there was a threat of compulsory purchase and demolition to make way for a road! In 1989 an adjacent house was purchased and this now houses a rehearsal space cum coffee bar cum art gallery on the ground floor, while most of the upper floors are devoted to wardrobe storage and workroom.

In 2013-14, thanks to a generous legacy from a former member, considerable reconstruction and renovation work to the frontage, foyer and bar have been carried out. Further alterations in 2015 have added another dressing room and a small office, as well as providing easier access to the backstage area from the Wardrobe. They are certainly a company that deserves to be supported.

Obviously, during the present crisis, the theatre is closed. However, once it is over, hopefully, please look at their website for details of their programme and how to buy tickets.

Christopher Sayers

(DETAILS EXTRACTED FROM WIKIPEDIA)

TYNESIDE COMMITTEE

The Lord Mayor’s Design Awards 2019 Ceremony

The Mansion House, Thursday, 6th February 2020

The evening ceremony was the culmination of months, years of work for those whose schemes were short listed for the awards. The Lord Mayor’s Design Awards is a biennial awards ceremony which has been running since 1994. The aim is to celebrate and publicise the best in architecture and environmental design, to help improve the built environment for us all. Awards are given to schemes which may make an outstanding contribution to the quality and appearance of the local environment.



THE JUDGING PANEL

Lord Mayor, Councillor David Cook

[Society President]

Neil Barker, Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects *[Society Corporate Member]*

Richard Barnes, Landscape and Ecology Team Manager at Newcastle City Council

Alan Grant, Member of the Northumberland and Newcastle Society

[Tyneside Committee]

John Grundy, Local History and Architecture Specialist

Marie-Louise Milliken, Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute

The panel had visited the sites of the entries to recommend the Winners and Commended Finalists in each section which were: -

New Building:

Winner - Northumbria University

Computer Information Sciences Building

Commended Finalist - The Biosphere

Community Value and Social

Accessibility:

Eagles Community Arena

Star and Shadow

Landscape:

Bigg Market

Armstrong Courtyard

Conservation:

Boiler House

Byzantine House

Refurbishment:

Everyman Cinema

Sustainability:

Star and Shadow

Small Scale:

The Rose Auditorium (Sacred Heart School)

Picton Manor

Lord Mayor's Special Award:

The Eagles Community Arena

The awards participants for each scheme were given an enthusiastic reception. All were absolutely delighted whether the Commended Finalist or Winner with beaming smiles for the photographer and the Lord Mayor, Councillor David Cook, who presented the plaques.

Now the planning begins for the next awards in 2021.

Judith Robinson

TYNESIDE COMMITTEE

NB: See City and County February 2007 for previous report.

ART FOR REGENERATION

Colston Street in Benwell is currently in the news, as Newcastle City Council tries to discover whether it was named after Edward Colston, the slave trader whose statue in Bristol was recently toppled in the Black Lives Matter protest. If that proves to be the case, the name will be changed. Neighbouring streets have much more romantic and rather idealistic road names - Farndale, Strathmore, Ellesmere and Hampstead - given that these are some of the steep densely-packed terraces that for generations housed many of the workers at Vickers Armstrongs and other industries along the Tyne. However, I'd recently come across it for a

different reason: I spotted an illustration of a William Pym sculpture at the junction of Colston Street and Wellfield Road, and as we've already featured his work in City & County (November 2019), I went to investigate. It's an area I know well, having attended Canning Street school (in its original building) until I was 7, but its fortunes have declined along with the traditional industries, and in a regeneration project started in 1996 to enhance the area for residents and pedestrians, some houses were demolished and green spaces created, planters with trees and shrubs were installed, traffic flow was controlled, and many decorative features were added. This





sculpture, The Benwell Bird, was installed in June 1997 and is in many parts. Relief steel sculptures of stylised trees, as simple as a child's drawing, are attached to the blind gable wall of the end Colston Street house, one of them supporting a dramatic forged iron raven. The carefully laid-out enclosed floor area is scattered with bollards carrying homely objects – books, mugs, a fish on a plate, and miniature houses (on the roof of one of which someone has quite neatly and wittily painted H.M.P.). On a raised area close to the house is a decorative steel column supporting a nest and egg. The total effect is playful and engaging, making it very appropriate to its location immediately opposite the school.

Pym at the time was very aware of the landscape changes arising from the decline of industry, and was glad to see that public art was a regular part of regeneration projects. He did wish though that “there

was better public architecture” (a view we can still sympathise with), and thought that most new schools and hospitals lacked style and creativity. He had further sculptures in Hodgkin Park: Paradise, Oasis and Lovers' Gates, Metrolands Arbour, Nine Lives, and Sapling, all of them commissioned and owned by Newcastle City Council. Not having visited, I'm not sure that these are still present, but when they were catalogued in 1999, they were already described as scratched, chipped, faded, and covered in graffiti. Benwell Bird has survived well, though the bollard features are weathered and have chipped paint. Sadly however, the grassy spaces and surrounding back lanes are a sea of litter and overflowing domestic bins, and the planters are receptacles (along with their shrubs) for cans, bottles, boxes and wrappers, leaving the feeling that public art as part of regeneration is both unappreciated and irrelevant to residents' real needs.

Suzanne Stanley

PICTURE PUZZLE

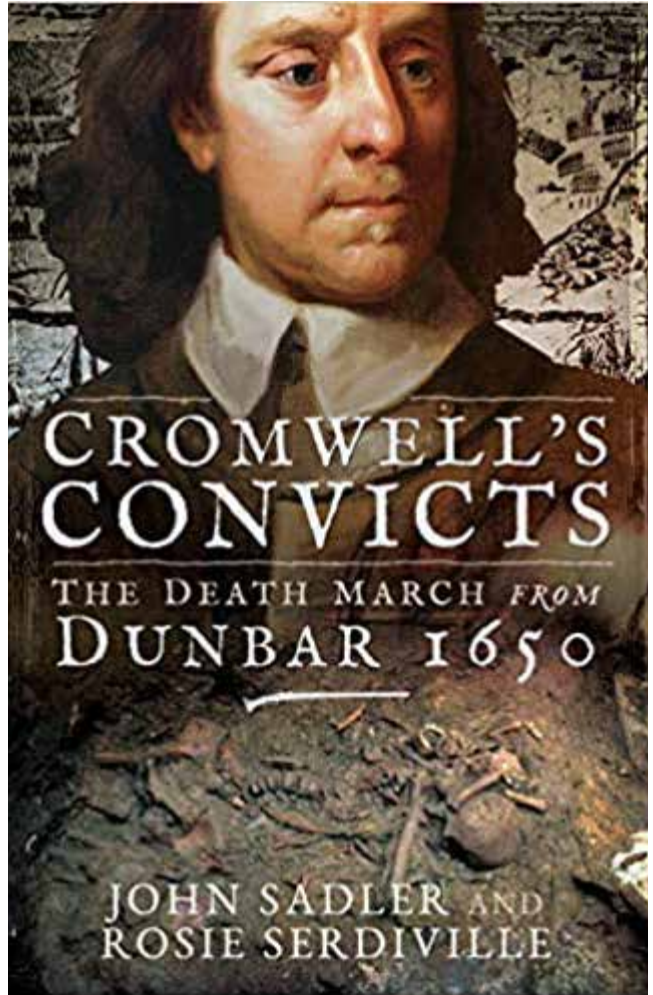


May's Picture Puzzle was correctly identified by Tom Yellowly as the cable restraints on the Union Chain Bridge on the Tweed at Horncliffe.

Cromwell's Convicts – The death March from Dunbar, 1650

John Sadler and Rosie Serdiville

In November 2013 just off Palace Green in Durham and dwarfed by the great cathedral, archaeologists uncovered the sites of two mass graves containing the jumbled bones of up to 28 individuals. Of these the remains of only 17 could be viably reassembled. They were all male and between the ages of 13 and 25 and none appeared to have died violently. Death had occurred from natural causes. Many were malnourished and thereby likely to be conscripts, dragged from their fields or benches. Isotopic analysis of strontium oxygen and lead from tooth enamel samples revealed that six were clearly of Scottish origin, another four northern English or Scots. Oxygen isotopic data suggested that three were immigrants from further east, possibly Dutch or German. Radio carbon dating was tricky, but a second set of readings gave the approximate time from 1625 to 1660 .



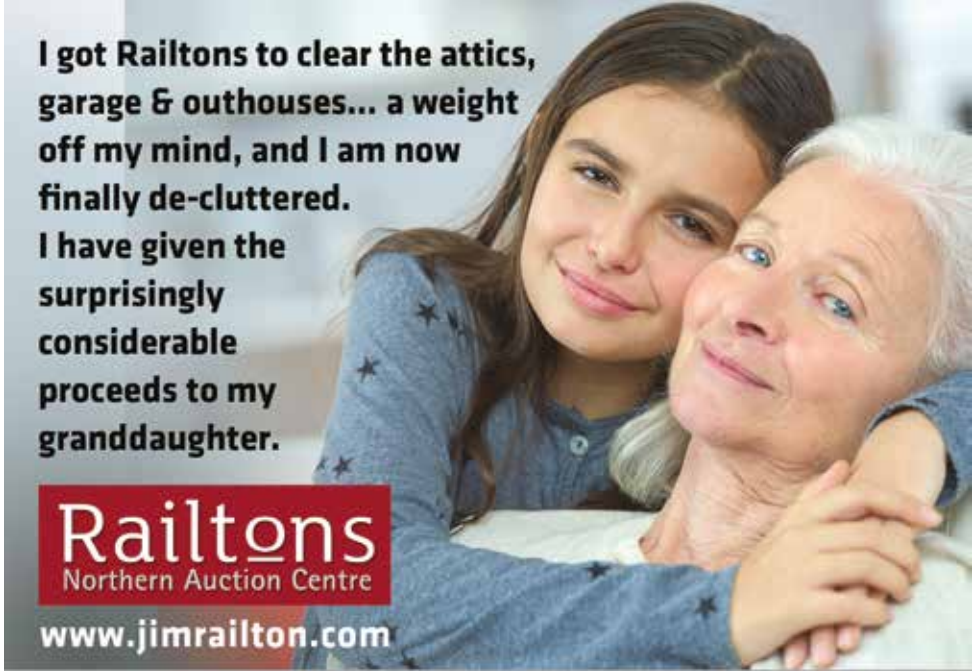
The Battle of Dunbar is told in some detail and within the context of the War of the Three Kingdoms (England, Scotland, Ireland). This was a time of ever-changing sides with social, political and religious dimensions. After the battle of Dunbar the

Parliamentarians marched some 5000 half starved prisoners 100 miles and more down to Durham, where the Puritans, having no need of the magnificent cathedral as a place of worship, used it as a gaol. One may perhaps hope that the Scots prisoners found some solace in the beauty of their gaol.

To be a prisoner of war in any era is a miserable, and often cruel, experience, but the details of this death march equal those of more recent memory. The authors make comparisons with similar Twentieth Century marches, maybe in an attempt to help the reader to relate to the tale.

Whatever the horrors of this book it is readable and gripping. The book itself is beautifully produced and both easy and a pleasure to hold and read – an unexpected and rare accolade in these days of cheap production and Kindle. Yet there is more to a book than the story within its pages, be it the print, the spacing or just the weight and feel of it: and this book does not disappoint. Electronic versions are wonderful for holiday reading and easy packing, but for most of us they can never replace a well presented book. www.pen-and-sword.co.uk
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OBITUARIES

Cyril Winskell MBE, FRIBA, FRSA



Cyril Winskell was born in North Shields in August 1932, over a pub where his father was the publican. He was educated and practised as an architect on Tyneside throughout his working life. He was posted to Christmas Island during his National Service. He was baptised in Christ Church, North Shields and was married there, to Patricia, and they had 5 children: Cy, Scott, Patricia and twins Dave and Mark. During his career he also sketched and painted the places he visited and recorded his ideas in a multitude of diagrams, as he called them. Always self-effacing but shrewd, he was generous with his time and involved himself with many organisations, charitable bodies and professional activities. Awarded the MBE in 1983, he was a Fellow of the RIBA and Royal Society of Arts.

In a long career, he worked for several local practices including Nappers, Couves, Barnett Winskell, Greenall Winskell Kish, he launched his own practice, Cyril Winskell, in 1971 before finally transferring his business interests and current project portfolio in 2014 to xsite architecture. His career developed into an interest and concern for the conservation of buildings and he was involved in major restoration projects in Newcastle and Liverpool, which cemented his reputation as a Conservation Architect. He was a member of the Urban Design Panel of the Grainger Town City Centre Partnership until it ended in 2003. As an Accredited Conservation architect, he lectured on what part the past and present use of historic buildings plays in their conservation.

From an early age he produced a stream of sketches, capturing the place he was visiting, including painting abstracts in the style of Ben Nicholson. A special record of his art and architecture was assembled for an exhibition of his work in aid of St Oswald's Hospice, at St George's Church Hall in 2016, which celebrated his 50-year career.



Professionally, his extra curricular activities covered a range of appointments and activities: Chairman of RIBA North (1980-82), President of Northern Architecture Association (1990-93), leading a working group developing Cityscape ideas in conjunction with Newcastle City Council – many of which have been fulfilled with big improvements to the



city as a consequence. Also, he was a Committee Member of Europa Nostra. In addition, he found time to devote much energy, and a massive contribution as Vice Chairman, to the Newcastle Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). His involvement included the restoration of the grave of Bishop Lloyd at St James, Benwell, ambitious building projects at St Chad's College, Durham and volunteering at his local church St George's, Jesmond where

after refreshments following a confirmation service Cyril was to be found in the kitchen, tea towel in hand, doing the washing up. The last person to leave. No task too great or small for him ...” A fitting epitaph for Cyril.

Geoffrey Purves

‘This is an edited version of the original and more detailed obituary, which can be found on the Society’s website, along with the details of the 2016 exhibition - Editor’

Len Netts

It is with sadness that we learned that Len Netts, a long-serving member of the Tyneside Committee, passed away on the 26th June, aged 93 years.

An architect by profession, Len’s contribution to the Committee’s deliberations was invaluable and his expertise and knowledge will be missed greatly.

In 1957, Len and Arnold Waring formed the Waring and Netts Partnership, setting up their office in Gosforth and, as District Council Architects, they designed local libraries, a swimming pool, the Civic Hall and much needed social housing. These buildings remain part of the local community and include City landmarks including Montagu Court, which overlooks the Town Moor.

Award-winning housing helped Waring and Netts build a reputation and by the 1970s the practice was also specialising in education and healthcare. Commercial developments such as Trinity Gardens and Baltic Place followed in the 1990s and the practice grew across the UK.

Alan Grant

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The first e-edition of City and County was well received, and my heartfelt thanks goes to Nigel and his editorial team for all their hard work in putting together a great magazine. Three months later we find ourselves in a very strange world with many things still off limits to many who may be shielding themselves or family members. Things are gradually getting back to some sort of “normality”, but it is going to take time for people to regain total confidence to meet and socialise. This is particularly poignant for our members as we are such a gregarious bunch; I certainly miss our regular meetings and outings. Hopefully, it will not be too long before we can once again meet up whilst observing socially distancing protocol.

Our committees continue to be active during this lockdown period and planning applications are still being monitored. With the Government's commitment to “streamline” planning procedures by “getting rid of red tape” at a National and local level, we need to be especially vigilant. We are aware that decisions are being made by all three Councils with little opportunity for public scrutiny and we must ensure that transparency prevails and challenge when appropriate.

As someone who enjoyed a lifelong career in the building business, I can see that once more the construction industry is being used to stimulate the economy and in a post-Covid world I believe there may have to be unwelcome compromises. For example, I am not a fan of pavement cafes, especially in Grey Street, however by the number of applications from bars and restaurants received by the City Council, these are going to be the norm for the time being. Planning approval is not going to be required for conversion of commercial buildings and for the demolition of empty properties to provide residential accommodation. That could potentially put some precious buildings at risk in Newcastle; the Cooperage and the Keelmans Hospital are currently on Heritage England's At-Risk Register and have been empty for some time. Although listed, we know from experience that even Grade II listings can be overturned by determined developers.

On a more positive note brown-field sites are to be targeted and we look forward to seeing some long-term improvements made as blighted areas are reinvigorated and eyesores disappear in coming months. This will include major housing schemes on the Forth Banks Goods Depot site in Newcastle and the Walker Hospital site in North Tyneside. We will no doubt be commenting on proposals as they appear.

At the AGM I suggested a Northumberland and Newcastle Society Centenary Book and Jackie did make a start on gathering information early in the year; this is still on our agenda. During this lockdown period I, like many others I imagine, have been busy decluttering and our past Chairman, Geoffrey Purves has been doing a similar exercise and had unearthed some gems. He came across four Annual Reports for the N & N Society from 1967, 1973, 1974 and 1975 and they make remarkably interesting reading complete with financial accounts, personalities as well as a summary of the issues of the time.

I would therefore encourage all members to have a look around in attics and backs of cupboards to see what N & N Society memorabilia you can find and send it into the office for use as archival material.

Jean Batty recently celebrated her 90th birthday and the Society has presented her with a lifetime membership certificate for her invaluable contribution as a longstanding member of the Tyneside Committee. It was Jean a former Newcastle City Councillor, who last year coined the expression “**Empathy Architecture**” which has been used by the Society in several articles and reproduced in national publications.

John Matthews CHAIRMAN

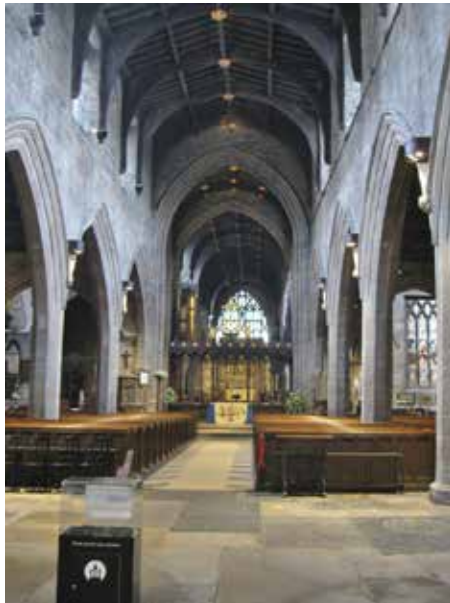
Yet another development for St. Nicholas' Cathedral

Ever since its inception in the 11th century, this building has been added to and altered at various times. The initial wooden building was replaced with a stone one towards the end of the 12th century and dedicated to St. Nicholas in 1194.

It was twice damaged by fire in the first half of the 13thC but repaired and extended in the following years. Towards the end of the 14thC, in order to get more light into the church, the walls were heightened and a clerestory inserted. Patrons of this work included Nicholas Sabram, Roger Thornton and Robert Rhodes, all three great benefactors of Newcastle churches. By the end of the 15thC, with the addition of the splendid stone tower and crown, the church was in very much the same form as we know it today. In 1736 a larger vestry and library were built against the south wall.

In 1880 the spiritual needs of the increasing industrial population of Newcastle meant that it was imperative to create a new diocese, from that of Durham, for which a new cathedral was required. Several churches in Newcastle, and Hexham Abbey, wanted the honour but it seemed imperative that it should be in the parish church, which St Nicholas was, so quite a lot of money was spent internally to make it look like a medieval cathedral, the wood carving work being done by local artist, Ralph Hedley and his workshop.

The present development, helped by a large Lottery grant, will be to make the building more versatile and available for events other than worship. This has meant disposing of the pews, lifting the Nave floor, inserting under floor heating and replacing the floor, including many of the old ledger (grave) stones. In future seating will be provided by individual



seats which can be moved about as required. At the same time, new toilets will be inserted under the Refectory floor and the electrical equipment will be brought up to date. Also, the surrounding areas of the building will be made more amenable for public use.

It is hoped that the work will be completed in 2021 although, with our present difficulties, it might take a bit longer.

In the meantime, the east end of the Cathedral is still usable although, during the lockdown, it has been closed to everyone, except that some of the work has been able to continue while observing social distancing and using the materials already delivered before the lockdown.

Christopher Sayers

LETTER

To Daljit Lally, Chief Executive , Northumberland County Council

1 June 2020

Dear Ms Lally,

We refer to the letter dated 20th May 2020 from Karon Hadfield of Northumberland County Council addressed to Members of the Council, in which changes to the operation of planning procedures was set out as follows:

A decision has been taken by the Chief Executive under her residual powers contained in the Constitution to suspend the powers of the LACs to deal with planning applications and enforcement matters, and to transfer these to the Strategic Planning Committee for a period of six months which will enable this important statutory function to be maintained under the limitations of the current pandemic. The public speaking protocol has also been amended to suspend for six months the ability of third parties to make verbal representations in person to Planning Committees, and has been replaced with an alternative additional written representations process.

The decision also extends the Chief Planning Officer's ability to determine planning applications which might otherwise be determined by Committee, where they do not raise issues of strategic, wider community or significant County Council interest. This provision will not apply to decisions which would, in the opinion of the Chief Planning Officer, represent fundamental departures from the Local Plan, or fundamental departures from made Neighbourhood Plans or statutory consultee advice.

Recent legislation allows English local authorities to hold public meetings virtually, by phone or video link, during the pandemic. So that decisions continue to be made, guidance has urged local planning authorities to take advantage of the powers rather than deferring committee dates. However, it also suggests that "Urgency powers" giving senior officers delegated authority to make decisions should be considered.

The letter lists a number of committees which will carry out their normal work remotely. So clearly, available technology is being used to allow the Council's committee meetings to continue. There should be no reason why LAC meetings be suspended and in fact two recently published documents, Procedure for Virtual Planning Committee and Public Speaking Protocol appear to acknowledge this. Parish and Town Councils in the County are operating remote meetings, and this suggests there should be no obstacles to LACs emulating them.

We believe that, by centralising decision making, either by using the Strategic Planning Committee or using delegated powers for possibly controversial issues, the County is denying its citizens access to Members local knowledge and experience and the right to expect accountability and transparency in the operation of your planning responsibilities.

We would urge you to reconsider your decision, for whilst we recognise the need for the County Council to adopt revised protocols in order to facilitate the planning process in these extraordinary times, we feel that it is important to adhere to the current committee structure to maintain public confidence and democratic oversight in planning decision making.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Jenkins CHAIR OF THE COUNTY COMMITTEE - N&N SOCIETY

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NEXT COPY DEADLINE

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NORTHUMBERLAND & NEWCASTLE SOCIETY

**PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR LANDSCAPE, CULTURE AND BUILT
ENVIRONMENT FOR FUTURE HERITAGE**

- Established in 1924, we are one of the oldest civic societies in England.
- We currently have over 500 members.
- Our work is carried out by three committees of volunteers:
 - The Tyneside Committee works with other bodies to protect the historical built environment and to encourage high quality design and character in new developments in the City of Newcastle, its suburbs and North Tyneside for future generations to enjoy.
 - The County Committee helps protect the cherished environment of the County of Northumberland - its landscape, towns and villages, while remaining aware of the need for sensitive development.
 - The Northumberland Environmental Policy Group works with Northumberland County Council on Policy, Local Plans and wind energy development in Northumberland.
- We run a varied programme of subsidised social events throughout the year, organised by our Events Committee. We invite quality speakers to talk on a broad range of topics. These include lectures, talks, tours and visits to places not usually open to the public.
- We are a registered charity.

JOIN US

What our Members say:

‘The N&N is a wonderful Society! It is both trying to address the task of preserving the best in Northumberland and Tyneside, but enjoying itself as well, with great talks and visits about our great North-East heritage.’

‘We are new to the area and this is a great way to meet people and find out more about where we live.’

‘Like-minded people – A Society I recommend to anyone interested in local history and current events alike.’

Find out more and join online at www.nandnsociety.org.uk

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