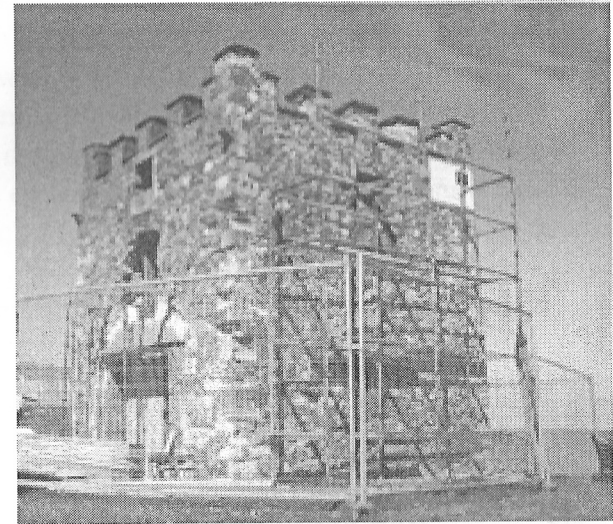

The Berwickshire Civic Society



Nisbet's Tower, Eyemouth
(being converted into holiday accommodation)

Newsletter No. 25

Autumn 2004

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Mrs S Davidson - Chirnside
Mr RG Dodd - Eccles
Mr P Leggate - Greenlaw
Dr I Maitland Hume - Greenlaw
Lady Caroline Douglas-Hume
- Coldstream

Mrs L Mitchell - Gavinton
Lady McEwen - Polwarth
Mr A Swan - Coldingham
Mrs A Totty - Gavinton
Mr G Lauder Frost -
Mordington

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Since the last Annual General Meeting in October, 2003, the Executive Committee has met quarterly, and the main subjects which have been discussed have been as follows:

Hume Castle There is good news and bad news about Hume Castle. The bad news is that the Heritage Lottery Fund turned down our bid for a grant to pay for the necessary repairs to the remaining wall in the middle of the enclosure, as well as repairs to the steps and path, and other repointing work. Apparently our application did not meet all their criteria for a grant, such as disabled access and educational facilities etc. In other words they were unable to tick all the boxes which were required to make us eligible for a grant. We are now talking to Historic Scotland to see how the work can be paid for.

The more cheerful news comes from the Clan Home Association which has expressed a firm interest in taking over the ownership and running of the Castle. Clearly this would be in the best interest of the property for the long term future of the Castle. The Civic Society only came to own it to prevent it being put on the market by the then Department of Agriculture who wanted to get rid of it. To have an owner of the Castle who has a real family and historic interest in it is much preferable. Nothing can be done until the Clan Hume Association is formally set up, and detailed negotiations with the Association, and Historic Scotland etc. will then follow. Dr. Ian Maitland Hume, who is a member of the Executive Committee, is Chairman of the Clan Hume Association, so we are well placed to carry forward the negotiations in due course. An update will be given at the AGM.

The anniversary of the Great Alarm of 1804 was celebrated at Hume in January. (A description of the Alarm is included in later in this letter) The celebration was lead by the Duns Historical Society who lit a bonfire on Hume Crag, which, together with a piper and refreshments made a suitable commemoration. Your Chairman climbed up to the view point indicator with a powerful torch to try to simulate a beacon. As with so many other events this year, the weather spoilt the evening. Low cloud and driving rain made it impossible to see any of the other bonfires lit further down the Borders, or for them to see ours. In any event we tried!

Hume Castle has also featured in the inaugural gathering of the Clan Home Association in June, and the riding out by the Kelso burgh in July.

Polwarth A planning application has been lodged for a limited number of houses to be built on the site of the former village of Polwarth. This application is very much more sympathetic to the area, and is supported by the Society. One house has already been restored, including the original thatched roof, which shows what can be done. It is to be hoped that we can persuade the new owners to take over the management of the Polwarth thorn, which is flourishing, including the repainting of the surrounding railings, which is badly needed.

There has been good news about Polwarth Kirk, which has now been closed as a place of worship. The last service, including a baptism, was held earlier this summer. This is a sad but understandable decision by the Kirk Presbytery. The building will now be put on the market, but being a listed building, with its own long term residents surrounding it, and in the vault below. The expectation is that it will prove to have no commercial value. This will allow it to be looked after by the Redundant Churches Fund which should ensure its long term future as a building albeit

a visible function. It could however still be used for combined weddings and concerts etc. The Society is holding a watching brief to see that nothing untoward happens.

Greenlaw Town Hall The future of Greenlaw Town Hall is very much in the balance. As reported in last year's Newsletter, the Heritage Lottery Fund approved a project planning grant. This allowed the Greenlaw Town Hall Project Group to prepare the detailed application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the full sum (some £4 million) to restore the building and to turn it into a performance venue. An immense amount of work has gone into the preparation of the submission to the HLF, and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Peter Leggate and his team which included representatives of the Greenlaw Town Hall Trust and STOPS (The Scottish Theatre Organ Preservation Society). The detailed work involved in the production of the vast amount of paperwork has been coordinated by Laura Norris of the Cockburn Society of Edinburgh, who deserves a special vote of thanks. We can only hope for a happy outcome, and it is hoped that an update will be given at the AGM.

Gunsgreen House Anyone visiting Eyemouth recently will have seen that the former Coach House (wrongly thought of as a doo'cot) has been surrounded by scaffolding. This is the latest phase of development which will convert the building into holiday accommodation in its new guise as "Nisbet's Tower". This phase is fully funded and will produce an income stream for the Gunsgreen House Trust. At the same time, taking a lead from Greenlaw Town Hall, the Trust has submitted an application for a project planning grant to the Heritage Lottery Fund to allow a detailed bid for work on the mansion house itself to be submitted. The Trust hope to hear the outcome of their preliminary bid within the next few weeks. Although the sum required for Gunsgreen House is very much less than for Greenlaw Town Hall (only some £750,000) the supporting

paperwork required is just as detailed and complex, and experience has shown that it is unlikely to be successful unless compiled by those expert and experienced in this field. The Gunsgreen Trust hopes to be in a position to submit the main bid early next year, with a view to starting work early in 2006.

In the meantime good use is being made of the building in its present state, with offices in the basement and ground floors, arts workshops, a piano nobile, and even as we go to press a film is being made for Channel 4 using the house for costume storage, and as a background to a Chinese location!

Keep Berwickshire Tidy The Campaign was again held in April, in order to clear litter before the main tourist season began. As announced earlier, the results were:

- 1st Foulden, Mordington and Lamberton
- 2nd Cockburnspath
- 3rd Gavinton, Fogo and Polwarth

The presentations will be made at the AGM on 18th October at Netherbyres.

The team of inspectors were pleasantly surprised at the high standard, and lack of litter, throughout the County. There was much less litter on the verges of the main roads, thanks to the staff of Scottish Borders Council, who made a real effort to clear up the mess made by those who insist on throwing their fish and chip and burger wrappings out of the car windows. Only four cases of fly dumping were found, which have been reported to the Council. Thanks are due to all those who made an effort to clean up their community areas, and to the team of volunteer inspectors.

Other Matters Other matters is a rather dismissive title for the volume of routine work which is carried out by the Society, most of it passing through the hands of Robin Kent, whose report follows. For example, we have supported the new footbridge at Fogo, and we have put in an objection to the proposed new Village Hall at Hutton, which would have ruined the setting of the Church and village. Happily the community has decided to build a new hall on the old site, which is supported by the Society.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Society will be held at Netherbyres, Eyemouth by kind permission of Perennial (Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society) on Monday, 18th October at 7.00 pm for 7.30.

Simon Furness will give a short talk on the history of Netherbyres titled: "On the Front Doorstep". A glass of wine will be served and the Keep Berwickshire Tidy presentations will be made.

All are welcome, please take this as your invitation to the meeting.

Subscriptions

If you have been a member of the Berwickshire Civic Society for a long time, paying your subscriptions by annual direct debit, please would you check that you are paying the up to date subscription rate, which is now £5.00.

For those who would like to become members, there is an application form on the back page of this Newsletter.

ARCHITECTURAL ADVISER'S REPORT

Over the course of the year the Society has been consulted by Scottish Borders Council on 149 applications for listed building consent and planning permission in conservation areas, a 20% rise over the same period last year. The vast majority did not provoke comments and we offered praise for 4 applications of high quality. We are considering whether we could provide further encouragement to quality by offering awards to recognize sensitive design that enhances the character and appearance of our built heritage: comments will be welcomed from members on this.

At least 10 of the applications we were consulted about did not contain sufficient information to enable comment, despite being accepted and registered by the Council. Of the 54 applications we objected to or commented on, 26 were for unsuitable replacement windows or doors, usually of the clumsy PVCu variety, which continue to erode the quality of our towns and villages. More of this happens 'overnight' or at the weekend, and the Council usually seems to ignore it for lack of evidence. We are considering compiling a digital photographic record of street frontages in our conservation areas, which could be used to demonstrate the 'before' situation and provide leverage on the Council to use the powers it has to prevent such loss of character and appearance. Again, anyone who would like to help with this project would be welcome to contact us.

Over the year we have been approached by several local people about unsuitable developments in their areas and have been glad to advise and, where possible, to write to the Council in support of their objections. For example, we wrote to the Council to object

to the siting and design of the proposed new village hall at Hutton and this was subsequently modified. We also lodged objections to the design of the proposed new Co-op in Duns, which was similarly improved, although permission was granted without sufficient consideration of the effects on the wider townscape, especially traffic and parking aspects, which we had also raised.

The Council has doubled the number of staff in the Duns office to cope with a wave of new planning applications, mainly for new dwellings in the countryside, reflecting the disparity in housing prices between Berwickshire and some other parts of Britain, and improved transport. The Society is not usually consulted about these, so members should be alert to possible unneighbourly applications and are encouraged to bring them to our notice as soon as possible. There is no better motivation for caring about your local environment than living in it, so do not let anyone call you a 'NIMBY'. If we do not care, who will?

Robin Kent
4 September 2004