



Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum, engaging communities in the conservation of their local heritage

ANNUAL REPORT, April 2022- April 2023

LOWICK PILGRIM INITIATIVE

Linking Lowick to its
medieval past, the creation
of a heritage and
information centre in St
John the Baptist Church



Introduction: At one point over the period under consideration it looked as though the Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum might be disbanded with limited committee members and an end to a number of active heritage projects.

However, the need to develop two long running projects the Lowick Pilgrim Initiative and The Tyne View and Killingworth Waggonways Project have emphasised the importance of TWHF and its aim to engage communities in the conservation of their local heritage. A certain long term commitment to heritage projects seems to be a prerequisite for success where periods of enthusiasm tend to be followed by lean periods when nothing much seems to happen, before another bout of energetic engagement returns.

It becomes important therefore to be in tune with this pendulum, ready to respond to changing circumstances such as the pandemic, a process which seems to reflect the historic nature of the topics under consideration. While funding will always be a central consideration it is also, important to have the commitment of a number of volunteers keen to give their time and energy to the heritage project.

It has never been more important to engage with local conservation projects as many communities lose identity and their sense of place, swamped by new housing developments. It becomes important therefore to reinforce a sense of belonging through the conservation of significant local heritage features. The past may be invisible in many communities and the particular story that gives a place identity, may no longer exist absent. Surviving significant local heritage features: cover a wide range of different elements historic buildings, place names, old routes and pathways and a particular view. And where there are no longer elements from this previous historic or industrial past, a new monument or plaque can be put in place to act as a reminder

TWHF; objectives and purpose:

This is a useful time to consider the stated purpose of TWHF: '*engaging communities in the conservation of their local heritage*'. To drive around the North East today is to be aware of the large scale developments taking place with new housing estates being built throughout the region. Post pandemic, there is a new phase in these new builds with many rural villages being extended to include new housing, to answer an increased demand for country living. While there are many positives from this new housing in terms of more customers and clients for any commercial ventures - such as local shops and pubs and often increased number of children to attend local schools - something of the past history and culture of a community may disappear, drowned out by the scale of new developments.

In this rapidly changing world it becomes important to be able to identify and conserve those significant local heritage features which enhance a sense of place for a community and the work of TWHF has been associated with projects of this kind around the region. The '*HeritageACT! Guide, conserving local heritage features*' is designed to help communities identify and conserve key local heritage features which enhance a sense of place in this rapidly changing world.

The two current projects with which TWHF have begun involvement over this period are both concerned with putting back an element of the past history of communities, the Lowick Pilgrim Project in North Northumberland and the Tyne View, creating the final section of the North Tyneside waggonways working with NTRthe North Tyneside Regeneration Team.

Lowick Pilgrim Initiative

This is about extending and developing a welcoming church, linking the building to its important medieval past as one of four chapels of the monastery on Holy Island, where there was a hostel and guides for pilgrims before their final, dangerous causeway crossing. A TWHF project working with the Parochial Parish Council and Lowick Heritage Group.



There are two parts to this proposal: Developments taking place within the church, creating a heritage centre; providing information on the history of St John the Baptist Church and in particular the important narrative of its fascinating medieval past; placing existing historic artefacts in a prominent position on the back west wall of the church. A final element to make the church more welcoming, would be the replacement of the existing interior wooden door of the church with a glass entrance to the nave.



12th Century Grave cover one of the monuments to be place on the wall at the back of the church.

Linking Lowick to the existing St Cuthbert's Way as an additional route to be taken by pilgrims following the historic path through the village to Holy Island. This has been a key new development over the period with £165 available from targeted church events in order to pay for a brochure setting out the route and information about the trail leading from St John the Baptist Church to Mount Joy, the place where pilgrims would have had their first view of Holy Island after their long and probably difficult journey.

Tyne View Project

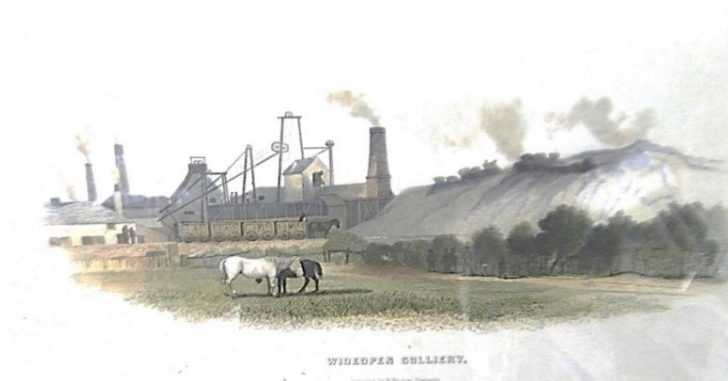
TWHF has been working with Wideopen History group and North Tyneside Regeneration Team to put in place information boards on the history of the waggonway in this area over a number of years with the support of Wideopen Library where meetings have been held. It proved possible through the contacts of Tony Gilchrist to talk to Port of Tyne to inform them of our ambitions and aims.

It is sad to report that two key members of the Wideopen Waggonway group of which TWHF were closely involved have died: John Harbottle and recently Tony Gilchrist whose contribution to the project in organising the placement of noticeboards in the new Bellway housing estate and the considerable research that went into finding the maps and photographs to illustrate a Wideopen mining history which is no longer visible. Further tribute should be given to former Councillor Muriel Green of the Weetslade ward (now retired) who has been instrumental in setting up meetings and engaging the North Tyneside Regeneration Team in this project.

It is because of the commitment of these members of the Wideopen Waggonway Group that it is essential that the work they achieved should not be forgotten but take the waggonway beyond the current walking and

cycling facility to become a symbol of the industrial revolution in the North East.

The work of NTRT in initially saving the waggonways in the past and now working on improving the stretch of waggonway from Wideopen to Camperdown has been essential for the survival of this internationally important industrial heritage site which includes Killingworth colliery where Robert Stephenson first developed the steam locomotive to transport coal and the North Tyneside Railway Museum with working locomotives. The sketch below from the 1840s shows how horses were originally pulling the coal wagons.



Thomas Hair's sketches (1840s) of Wideopen Colliery with horse drawn coal wagons

The Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum has been looking over this period at how the final section of the waggonways can be restored and given the prominence it deserves. This has considerable importance from the view it provides looking down from a height onto the Tyne where the coal was loaded through the use of special equipment onto the waiting colliers for transport to London. James Cook at one time skipper of a Whitby collier working out of the Tyne, later a navigator and explorer associated with the discovery of Australia is an important figure associated with this site.



and showing how the wagons delivered coal through special machinery to waiting colliers for transport to London..

Alan White, TWHF member and architectural designer has produced illustrations to suggest what a specially constructed view-point could look like and where it might be placed. This would provide the finale for a waggonway visit, a key site to demonstrate the importance of the industrial revolution and the contribution of Tyneside to this innovative time.

A new series of meetings have been arranged with North Tyneside Regeneration Team and their new director Vicky Cuthbertson

Conclusion: There has been change in the workings of TWHF since the pandemic. Our role seen more as a consultative body of experts available to help out on community heritage and history projects. There are unlikely to be the same regular meetings as before but zoom sessions when required, to discuss current and future business. However, as can be seen from the two major projects reported here the forum can act as a catalyst to bring to fruition heritage projects which sometimes take a good deal of time to implement.

We thank all our colleagues and supporters and look forward to continue working with you in the future.

Dr John Daniels

Chairman TWHF

March 2024

TWHF Financial Report 2022-2023

There have been no major costs or outlays, eg conferences or staffing expenses, and despite a good deal of activity going on behind the scenes, all contributions have been made on a voluntary basis therefore we also have not needed to apply for any grants or fundraise this year in spite of providing a valuable service to the community/communities