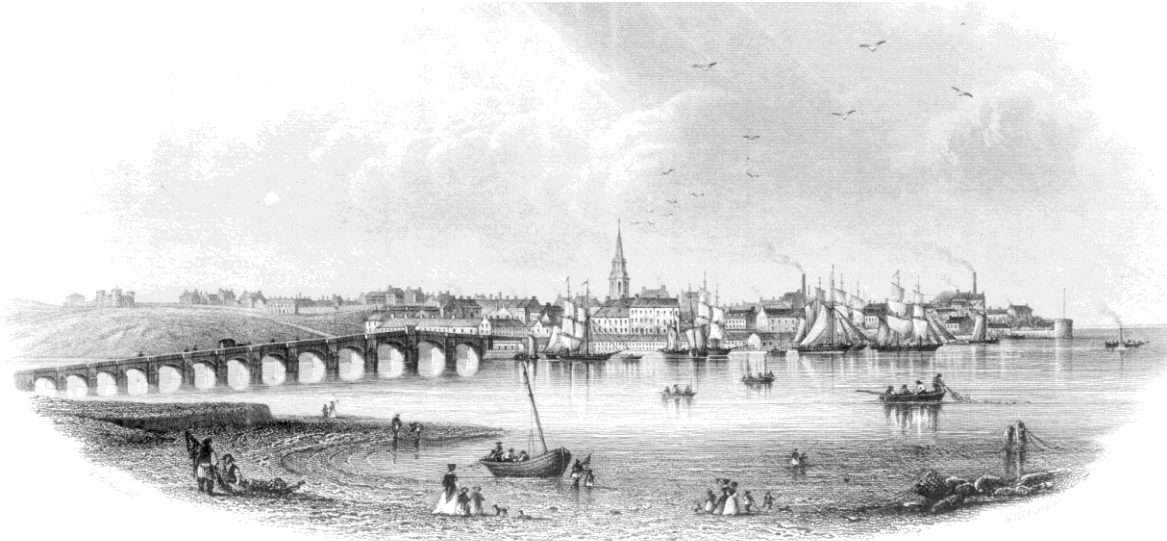


Friends of Berwick & District Museum and Archives Newsletter



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[Selected articles]

1994 November

REPORT TO THE GENERAL BOARD OF HEALTH ON
THE SANITARY CONDITIONS OF
BERWICK, TWEEDMOUTH AND SPITTAL

In 1849 a petition signed by 158 ratepayers was forwarded to the General Board of Health requesting recommendations for the improvement of public health in the Borough of Berwick. The Board appointed Robert Rawlinson, a civil engineer to inspect the area and receive evidence at a public enquiry. His report on the sanitary conditions of the town was published in 1850 and was mainly based on visits made to various parts of the town accompanied by the Mayor, Dr. Kirkwood and the Relieving Officer. In his report Robert Rawlinson was very critical of the conditions in which people were forced to live and recommended immediate action to alleviate the situation.

Among the places visited were the following:

Wallace Green

This area was considered one of the worst in the town. Rawlinson included sketches of some of the properties in his report and said "any drawing or written description can only convey weak description of the actual neglect, filth, wretchedness, and misery palpable to sight and smell; and, as in other places, the price paid for these small, crowded, and ruinous tenements is most excessive". He described the street as unpaved and commented that the ramparts blocked ventilation and made those houses adjoining them very damp. Each room was let out separately at a very high rent and in one small room in Samson's Court (Wallace Green), Rawlinson found 18 people living there, 12 of whom were from the one family. Dr Kirkwood submitted an additional report on his observations where he wrote about Wallace Green. "It is consequently no unusual circumstance to find three, four or five families, men, women, and children, huddled indiscriminately together in one apartment, which even in a most airy locality would be scarcely sufficient for the healthy existence of one.... Where there are beds they touch each other, and generally occupy three-fourths of the room; the space below them serving as coal-cellar, and a depot for every sort of filth". Not surprisingly disease including cholera was commonplace and the only recommendation which could be made was that the houses be demolished.

Chapel Street

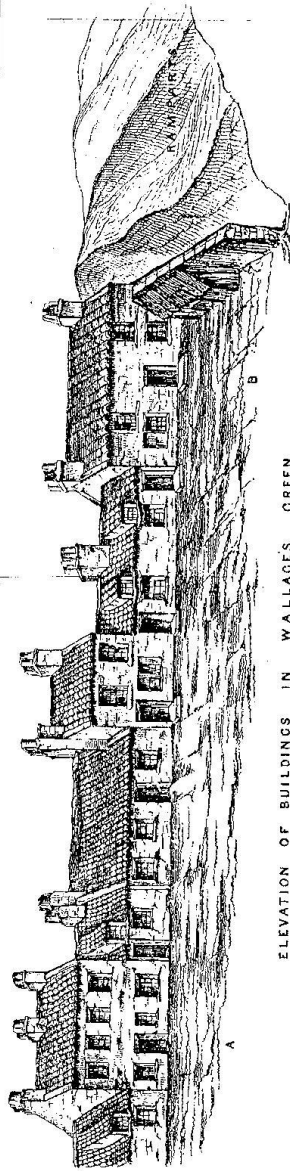
Dr Kirkwood wrote in his additional report "The state of this street is truly deplorable, and a great disgrace to the town". The street was only swept once a week and such was the smell which emanated from it that the inhabitants were forced to keep their windows closed. One man said he had tried to keep birds but they had always died, as he thought, because of the "filthy air". The only source of water was a public tap in the street.

Church Street

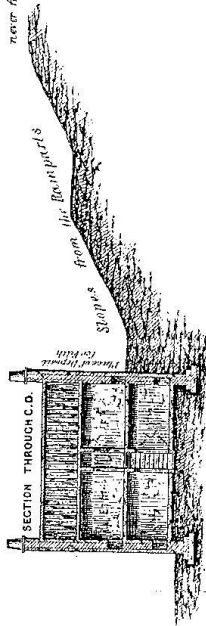
This street was in a better sanitary condition than the others; however, as was the case overall in the town, the lack of proper drainage was a cause for concern.

PLANS OF PROPERTY IN
WALLACE'S GREEN,
 OPPOSITE THE NEW GAOL,
BERWICK UPON TYWED.

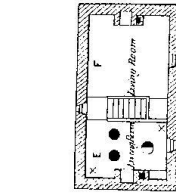
Shewing Rooms, Apartments, &c. Each Room is let off as a separate tenement at an average Rental of 11 per week or £2 12 0 per Annum. This property is described by the Medical and Relieving Officers as never free from Fever.



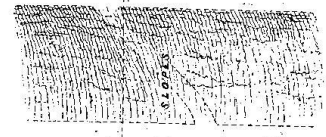
ELEVATION OF BUILDINGS IN WALLACE'S GREEN



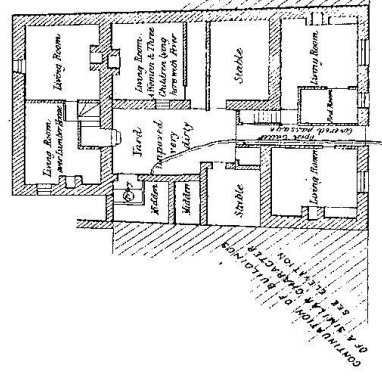
SECTION THROUGH C. D.



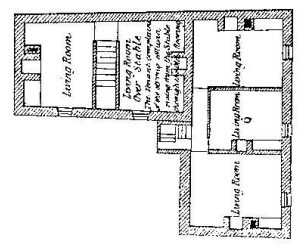
FLOOR OVER B.
 In the corners of Room E marked with crosses (X) there are registers half a ton for bags. The size of these Registers shall be as shown. The size of these Registers shall be as shown.



GROUND PLAN B.



GROUND PLAN A.



UPPER FLOOR OF PLAN A.

NOTE.—The Rooms & Units more than 10 feet square, occupied by Men, are marked with a cross (X) in the plan.

Scale for Plans, 1/4" = 10 feet.

Tweedmouth

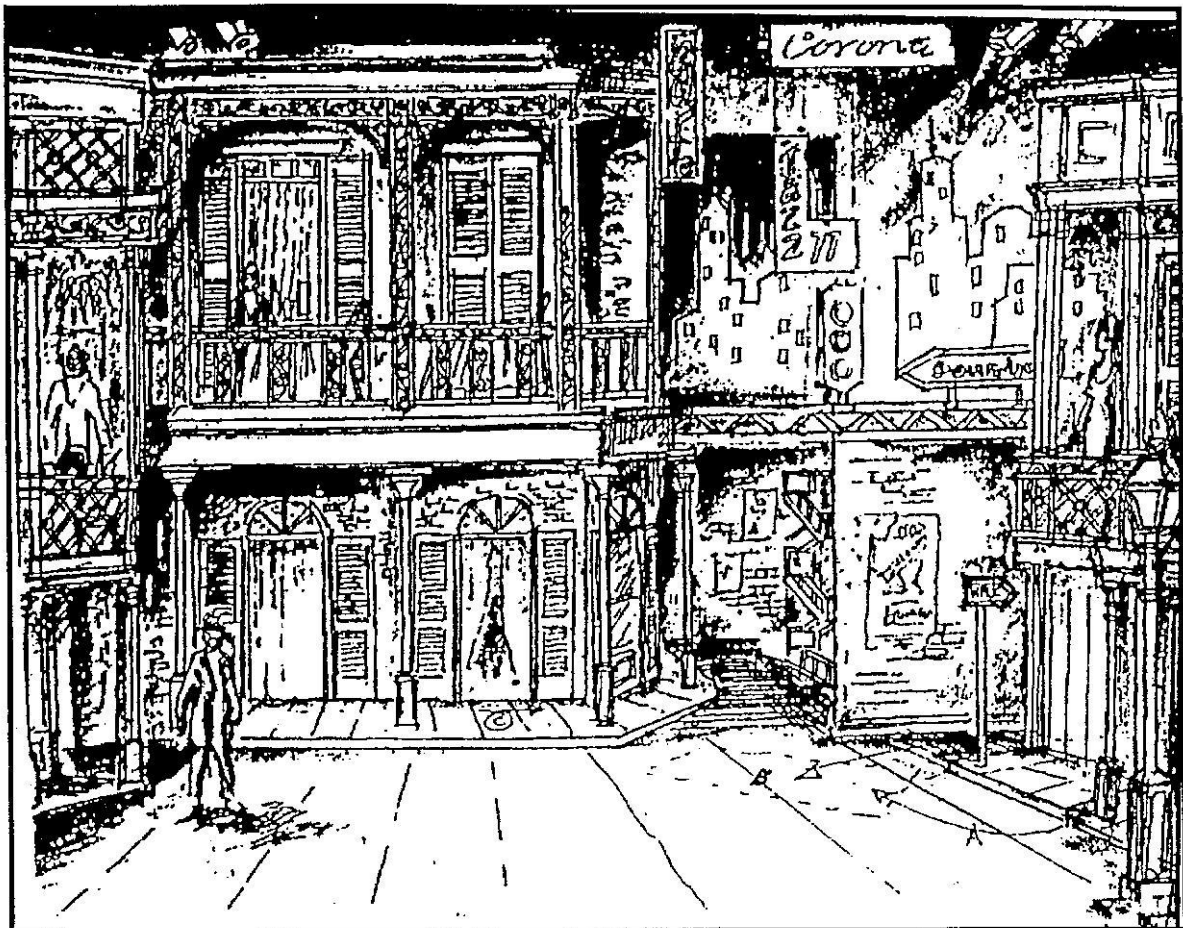
"The present condition of this portion of the borough is very bad, new streets remain unformed and unpaved, and they are in consequence in a dirty condition: some are almost impassable."

At the end of his report Rawlinson made several suggestions for the improvement of conditions of the town. These included the provision of a proper water supply, a system of drains and sewers and the paving of streets and courts. The Corporation obviously took notice of his reports because under the auspices of the Local Board of health a major sewerage scheme was begun in 1853 and a major water scheme in 1854.

Linda Bankier

EXHIBIT OF THE MONTH

Set Model for the musical **BOURBON STREET** by Mike Myers, 1994



This month's object is our latest acquisition, the set model for **BOURBON STREET**, the musical by Jonathan Stone and Julian Tucker given its world premiere in The Maltins on 10th November 1994. The musical is set in New Orleans in 1947 and designer Mike Myers did a splendid job of converting the theatre into the essence of 'The Big Easy', its early 19th century architecture

decorated with characteristic florid iron-work. The model also shows the ingenuity of the designer in catering for the three distinct locales required for the plot: nightclub, street and Mayor's office all on the same set as well as practical details such as where to put the band. The acquisition of this model, along with some working drawings, a script and other items is an important part of the Museum's continuing endeavour to record aspects of contemporary life in Berwick.

Jim Walker was also on hand to make an artistic photographic record and interpretation of the production and these images, together with a compact disc of the music will be deposited in the Record Office. A sophisticated musical being written and premiered in a town of this size is a quite remarkable achievement and will have to be accounted a high place in future cultural histories of the area. It may be of course that either Jonathan or Julian, or both, will achieve national or international standing in their fields in the future; the museum and archives will then have items relating to their early careers and these will be of great interest to future scholars and exhibition organisers.

Chris Green
Curator

MARITIME DATA

A main source of maritime history in the 19th century is the Custom House Registers and the Berwick Record Office is fortunate in possessing several of these covering the period 1824 to 1910. Of these registers the first three volumes cover the details of all vessels, other than fishing boats, and give the following information in addition to the number and date of the Registration.

Type; Dimensions of vessel and number of masts, decks etc

Where and when built and builder, if known.

The name of the Master, although this practice was discontinued around about 1855.

The Owner(s) of the vessel.

The fate of the vessel; whether lost and where, or transferred to ownership at another port.

Additional information relating to Berwick registered vessels from 1910 to 1987 has also been obtained from the current registers held by the Newcastle Custom House which now controls registrations for a large area of the north east coastline.

Two further Registers give details of registration year, tonnage, vessels names and owners of all fishing and sailing boats, operating from ports or havens from St Abb's to Craster and having the 'BK' prefix to the number, between 1869 and 1916, upwards of 900 boats of various types and rigs et., cobbles, keel boats decks/half decked.

A list of all known Berwick built vessels by Gowan and others in the 19th century and by Weatherhead and Fairmile in the 20th century, other than fishing boats and numbering several hundred vessels, is also held by the Record Office.

A fourth register gives details of ownership transactions of around 40 Berwick registered and owned ships 1855 - 1885.

A final 'Register of Declarations' contains some 300 declarations to the Public Notary, by Masters of vessels in-bound to Berwick in which, for liability claims, they give details of weather and conditions encountered en-voyage which may have damaged their cargoes etc.

A limited number of 'Crew Lists', around 340, are also held at the Record Office. These give details of voyages of Berwick owned and registered vessels and give particulars of crew names, ages, origins, ports of call and destinations between 1863 and 1913. These lists also give information on engagement periods, wages, scale of provisions, and various other details relevant to crews' well being, conduct, punishments or fines, when and where signed-on or discharged etc. The nature and duration of the intended voyage is also given.

Dennis Nicholson