

## Ancient Rights and a Modern Role

The area may have been inhabited before but, like Milton Keynes and Peterlee, Alnmouth started life as a New Town, although a 12<sup>th</sup> century rather than a 20<sup>th</sup> century one. Strips of land, or burgage plots, were marked out each side of the main street for the burgage holders to cultivate and live on, in addition to which they had certain privileges, one of which was the right to use the town's common land. Today the owners of some properties in Alnmouth still have rights over the Common, but these days it is the right to charge for using it as a car park or a golf course rather than for grazing cows. Likewise, the role of the Burgage Holders has evolved into one of protecting and maintaining the Common for the enjoyment of all the village and our visitors as well as supporting financially a wide range of local activities and organizations. We hope these pages will give you a flavour of some of the things the Burgage Holders are doing these days in Alnmouth.

## The Wetlands

The area of marsh gives a real opportunity to increase the diversity of wildlife habitats on the common, so the Burgage Holders embarked on an ambitious programme of restoration and development, guided by ecological advice from the Northumberland 4Shores Project team. Left to itself the marsh would eventually turn into wet woodland, but reed-fringed open fresh water is not common in this area so the decision was taken to keep it open by excavating the marsh and building islands to provide secure nesting sites for wildfowl. The work was done over two years to minimize disturbance and this year we will see how attractive it will be and how popular with the ducks and swans.



The Restored Marsh

## Tree Planting by the Beach Car Park



In 2010 hundreds of trees and shrubs were planted in the rough grass between the golf course and the car park (see photo, left). Varieties were chosen to suit the conditions, including wild roses and sea buckthorn which already grow by the beach, and they will eventually develop into a sheltering screen and wildlife haven.

The surface of the car park gets leveled out every year or so and the drains maintained, but a major project in 2010 was to widen and resurface the path from the Golf Club to the beach car park, making it more accessible to wheelchair users (photo, right).



# Burgage Holders

## The Shoreline



Erosion by the sea is a constant problem as the sands move around the beach. Not only does the bank have to be occasionally reinforced and rebuilt, but steps down to the beach have to be constructed and maintained (photos, left). A major project was building the wooden ramp down onto the beach from the path, again to improve disabled access, but this winter's storms and high tides washed so much sand away from the end of the ramp that it ended up looking like a small wooden pier! All this had to be put right ready for visitors to our beach (photo, top left).



Last year's high autumn tides coincided with strong winds and washed over the bank by the boathouses, flooding both the road and the Large Boathouse. You will notice that the bank has been built up there, with a paved path over it onto the beach for pushchairs and prams, and hopefully the problem is now solved (photo, top right).

Beach cleaning, jointly with the Parish Council, is done in the summer to remove litter and other rubbish from our beach.

## Bracken Hill

You would not be able to walk on Bracken Hill and look at the view unless the paths were mown and the seats kept accessible and in good repair, but that is not all which goes on up there. Trees have been planted and areas within the bracken and willowherb are kept mown to provide hunting spots for owls and hawks (photo, right). This is all part of the policy of maintaining a diversity of habitats for wildlife. Similarly, the Nightfold Field, which is the only enclosed part of the Common, is now subjected to conservation grazing by Shetland sheep, who are clearing the weeds and scrub which invaded the field following years of horse grazing.



## Looking Ahead

Not only are we very fortunate in this village to have such a major asset as the Common under local control, we have, in the Burgage Holders, a body which has the resources and the determination to protect and maintain it. Other coastal communities are not so fortunate; Seahouses, Bamburgh and Newton by the Sea have large visitor car parks but all the income goes to the County Council and there is little evidence that it directly benefits those communities. Our Common is in a much stronger position to survive the inevitable cuts in NCC services to the rural communities.