

Follow the road. 20 An optional extension along the road to the right, known as Gossipgate, passes a large former Congregational Chapel and then becomes a track beside the River Nent to Seven Sisters waterfall, viewed from the fine bridge.

Continuing through the Butts, look for date stones above doors, 21 and now-blocked first floor entries. You come to the clearly-named Salvin School for Girls and Infants, 22 funded by Rev. Hugh Salvin in the 1840s. Further, on the left, is a 'pant' or standpipe; 23 you may have spotted others previously. The five gravity-fed water sources, drawing water from Fairhill dam, were created through money or labour given by town residents.



23

The early 19th century Croft Terrace to the right housed workers in the woollen mill. Another optional detour takes you down steps to Station Road, 24 where you can cross to Tyne Willows, the town's playing field, or turn right to the narrow gauge South Tynedale Railway.

Otherwise, bear left along King's Arms Lane. 25 On the right is a great example of ecumenical co-operation, with Catholic and Methodist Churches sharing premises.

When you reach Front Street, turn right and cross to the Town Hall. 26 The gothic-style building, built in 1857, originally included a Reading Room and a committee room used by

the Alston and Garrigill Board of Guardians, and the Rural Sanitary Board. These became the Rural District Council until 1974, when local government was re-organised.

Below the Town Hall stands the Jacob Walton memorial, 27 dedicated to an influential leadmine owner, its story told on an adjacent plaque. There is a good view of the houses of Townfoot, in the local vernacular style.

Return to Front Street. Just below the church is a house called Church Gates, 28 once a pub and then a solicitor's office. The romantic enclosed external staircase is a 1900 addition to the original 17th century building



28

Go through the gates to St Augustine's Church, 29 the scale and architectural style of which are in marked contrast to the surrounding buildings. Inside, the single-handed 'Derwentwater Clock', presented to the church in 1767 by the commissioners of Greenwich Hospital (then Lords of the Manor of Alston Moor) is worth a look. It came from Dilston Hall, near Corbridge in Northumberland, home of the Earl of Derwentwater, whose estates passed to the Crown after complex, possibly corrupt, dealings, and the death of the under-age heir.

There is a fascinating view of the backs of the three storey terrace of shops, with flats above, that rise from the church to the Market Place. 30 One has a rounded staircase extending to its full height. This is an unusual feature for a small town and indicates a form of tenement during the 17th and 18th centuries. Remains of early mullioned windows and leaded lights can also be seen.

Take a look at the decorative gates of the churchyard, 31 which incorporate the crest of Greenwich Hospital. Walk up Front Street back to the Market Square to complete the walk.



31



REFERENCES

"Old Alston" Peter Wilkinson
 "A History of Alston Moor" Alastair Robertson
 Apps: Alston Explorer, Alston Time Traveller
www.visitalston.com
www.alstonmoorpartnership.co.uk
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TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE

As you walk around you'll see some panels with information about the fascinating history of Alston's shops. A number of these have now received grant aid from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for repair and restoration. Those that have received grants so far are highlighted on the map in yellow.

ALSTON TOWN HERITAGE TRAIL

Alston is the main settlement on Alston Moor, part of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The town stands where the River Nent and the South Tyne meet, their valleys followed by important routes. It is the highest market town in England, with its Market Cross standing at 1000 feet (just over 300 metres).

The geology of the North Pennines – layers of limestones, sandstones and shales – results in many waterfalls where rocks of different hardness meet. It also includes considerable mineral deposits. The Romans had a fort, Epiacum, just outside Alston, and there is evidence that they mined lead here. The first documentation dates from 1130, and mining continued in a relatively small way until the mid-18th century when there was major growth. Great improvements to roads, important for taking lead out and bringing supplies in, followed – and Alston's position at the junction of routes made it a natural 'service centre' and market town.

This walking route shows you some of the most interesting features of the town.

1 The centre of Alston is a Conservation Area, with the Market Place the focal point. The Market Cross was built in 1765 by Sir William Stephenson, born near Alston, who gifted the covered market shelter to his home town after becoming Lord Mayor of London. The structure was rebuilt in 1883 and underwent major rebuilding in 1968 and 1980 after being partially demolished by runaway lorries. The memorial stone is now kept in the parish church.

2 Most of the buildings around the Market Place date from the late 17th and 18th centuries. Their stone slate roofs and local grey stone, sometimes rendered, give the town centre its distinctive character. As you look around, you will see several external staircases. Rurally, such stairs indicated a cow below, warming the house above, but in town these enabled different families to live on each floor, particularly as the population expanded.

The joinery work in the shopfronts is worth noting. Almost all is of 19th century origin, with pilasters (columns) having decorated heads, and arched window heads, and doors with fanlights above.



Go slightly uphill towards the car park on the left. You will see, over the road, a shop with bay windows. 3 This was originally a chemist's, as indicated by the pestle and mortar etched into the small first floor window, along with the initials JR and date 1900. Curiously, no chemists with those initials are recorded in Alston at that time. Beside this shop is Kate's Lane, one of many back-courts in the town typical of closely-packed settlements.

4 The car park was the site of buildings, demolished in the 1950s, including the Sun Temperance Hotel, a Youth Hostel, draper's and solicitor's office. Further up the hill on the left, past the Post Office, look out for a mounting block, with tethering ring and hook. 5 This was a common feature everywhere at a time of horse-drawn transport, but this is the only one left in Alston.

Across the road is the Victoria Inn, 6 built in 1901 to replace the Black Bull which had been reported as being in a dangerous condition. To its left, the arched opening led to stabling and accommodation for carts and carriages. The Victoria Inn was initially another temperance hotel, perhaps a necessary counter-balance to the then 24 public houses in the town!

Cross over and continue up the street to what was once the Carlisle and Cumberland Bank, 7 as the stained glass fanlight tells us. This building, and its Victorian architectural details, used red sandstone from the Eden Valley. The 1890 datestone to the right includes a reproduction of the 1729 datestone from the earlier building on the site, with initials I, D and F.

N ← As this map is drawn pictorially, it is not possible to show a scale.

Further up, on the same side, is the 18th century Society of Friends (Quaker) Meeting House. 8 It is one of the earliest buildings in the town and faces uphill rather than onto the street. Small as it is, it was once even smaller, but enlarged later. It retains its women's 'gallery'.

Across the road is the Fire Station, 9 serviced by retained firefighters, and one of the smallest in the country. The building was once a grammar (secondary) school. The original was rebuilt in 1828, according to the date stone.

riverside walk, approx 20 mins round trip

Higher up on the right is the huge former St Pauls' Methodist Church, 10 again featuring red Eden Valley sandstone. John Wesley visited the area in 1768, and Methodism became extremely popular among the leadminers of Alston Moor, as the size of this building – one of many Methodist chapels locally – attests.



In the angle where the roads to Nenthead and Garrigill meet stands the former Police Station. 11 Built in 1850, it housed three cells and was, until 1994, also home to the highest magistrate's court in the land!

A short distance up the Nenthead road, on the police station side, you come to Fairhill Recreation Ground. 12 Here, an information board explains the still-visible dam and how a mill race from here powered many businesses in Alston.

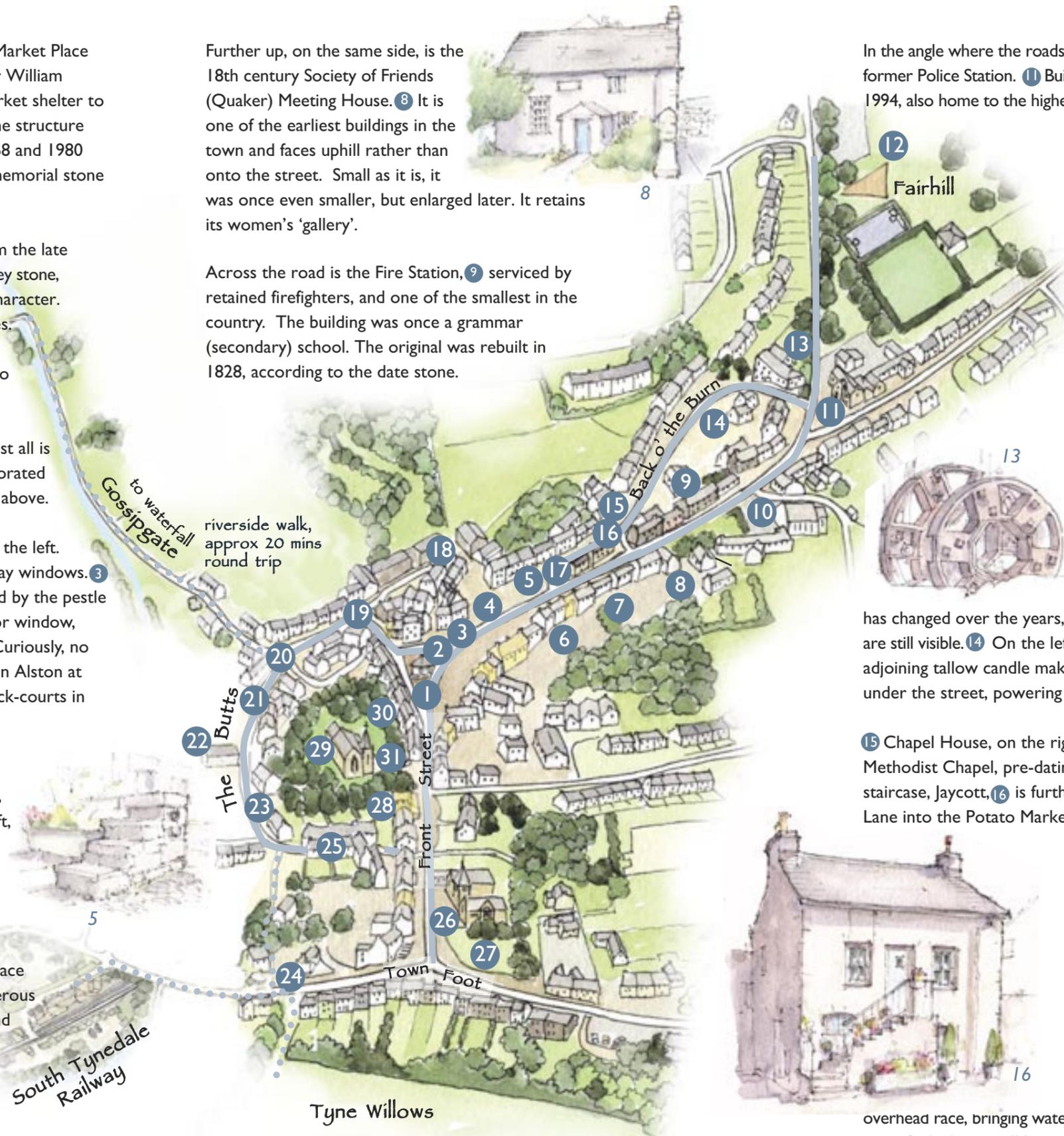
Cross over and turn back towards the junction. Just before a lane to the right is Forge Cottage, 13 an old smithy run by generations of the Little family. At the corner of the building beside the road, you can still make out the wheel pit where a wheel, turned by the mill race, powered a trip or tilt hammer.

Go down the lane in front of Forge Cottage, reaching Back o' the Burn. The street surface has changed over the years, but the original flagstones outside the cottages are still visible. 14 On the left stands the former slaughterhouse, with an adjoining tallow candle makers, appropriately. The mill race continues under the street, powering at least three further mills lower down.

15 Chapel House, on the right, shows traces of its original purpose as a Methodist Chapel, pre-dating St Paul's. An attractive house with outside staircase, Jaycott, 16 is further along. Continue through narrow Pigeon Lane into the Potato Market. 17

From here, the variety of roof lines and roofing materials is visible. Carry on down Front Street to the car park. Behind the Co-op and the car park stands High Mill, 18 a former corn mill, where the Lancaster family were millers for generations, carrying on an Alston Moor milling tradition going back to 1315. The large mill wheel, built in 1767 by John Smeaton (one of the first modern civil engineers) was powered by an overhead race, bringing water through leats on brackets along the buildings, one of which can still be seen behind the Co-op.

Carry on down, passing through the narrow passage beyond the Turks' Head Inn and the Cane Workshop. 19 The area through which you now walk is known as the Butts, where local men practised archery, before the houses were built. These are among the oldest in Alston, some dating back to the 1680s.



16 Jaycott, a house with an external staircase.

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