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ORKNEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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This is the first of what we hope will be a series which will have the aim of keeping members informed of the activities of the Society during the year. We also will include occasional articles from outside sources should we think that they will be of interest to the members, and as an example of this we include in this present letter a contribution from Mr. James S. Curl on the very important subject of Conservation Areas. We hope that you will find this Newsletter series both interesting and informative.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND PLANNING

by James Stevens Curl, F.A.A., Dipl. Arch.,  
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Architectural Adviser to European Heritage  
Year 1975 in Scotland.

Moves to protect the nation's architectural heritage have been to say the least cautious in the past. In 1967 the Civic Amenities Act became law, and this act introduced Conservation Areas. Control of demolition within Conservation Areas at that time was not particularly in favour, but the entire shift of opinion since then has been dramatic. Under the Town and Country Planning Amenities Act 1974, no unlisted building in a Conservation Area may now be demolished without specific consent granted by the Local Authority, or, if the Local Authority is the applicant, by the Secretary of State. Designation of an area is no longer regarded as enough. The Act imposes on Planning Authorities a duty to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and to submit the proposals to a public meeting.

There is thus considerable new scope for the protection and improvement of Conservation Areas. It is an unfortunate fact that many suitable areas have not yet been designated. Where Local Authorities fail to designate, the Act gives the Secretary of State the power to designate Conservation Areas.

By not designating Conservation Areas, Local Planning Authorities are virtually depriving the ratepayers of the possibilities of receiving grants. Under Section 10 of the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act the Secretary of State is empowered to give grants for the enhancement of such Areas on the advice of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland. The Historic Buildings Council needs to decide whether or not certain Conservation Areas, once designated, can be regarded as Outstanding for the purposes of a grant under Section 10. As well as this, the Grants Panel for European Architectural Heritage Year has a small amount of money available for the enhancement of the fabric of Non-Outstanding Conservation Areas.

The scope of enhancement schemes might be very wide, and would include not only the restoration of buildings themselves, but the creation of more appropriate street furniture, street lighting, the removal of overhead eyesores such as power-lines and wirescapes, and the encouragement of co-ordinated schemes for enhancement.

There is no doubt in the minds of many informed professionals that both Stromness and Kirkwall would qualify for the status of "Outstanding", and thereby qualifying for grants under Section 10 of the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act 1972. Certainly in the case of Stromness a considerable amount of capital is needed in order to restore the fabric which in many cases is in a somewhat parlous state.

It is in the interests of everyone to take conservation seriously. The pace of change is now so great and the cost of building so astronomical that it makes real sense to conserve and enhance the best of our past. Old buildings and our fine old towns represent part of the nation's real capital. We destroy that capital at our peril.

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TOWN AND COUNTRY AMENITIES ACT 1974.

The following points on the working of the Act are made in a Scottish Development Department Circular, dated November 1974.

Enhancement Schemes

Section 262B places a duty on planning authorities at such times as the Secretary of State may from time to time direct, to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their Conservation Areas, and to submit them for consideration to a local public meeting.

The Secretary of State takes the view that public interest and participation are essential for success in conservation. Planning authorities are asked when preparing schemes of preservation and enhancement to seek advice and views of local residents and amenity groups.

Planning authorities are asked to ensure not only that the public in general are aware of any meeting called to consider proposals for the enhancement of any conservation area, but also to consider inviting in particular the participation of interested bodies such as amenity groups and residents associations to obtain comment and advice.

Archaeological Sub-Committee.

The work of this group has fallen into three phases: Firstly, we are checking all sites which may be affected by oil-related developments to ensure that no archaeological sites are destroyed. Flotta and South Ronaldsay are over and done with, and the next on the list are Fara, Rysa Little and the east coast of Hoy. So far no sites have been damaged or threatened.

Secondly we are acting as the central group to enable grants from the Department of the Environment to be used. These are available for rescue excavations of sites threatened by any type of action, natural or otherwise. At the moment John Hedges of Southampton University is excavating Beaquoy burnt mound in Dounby for the second season, and there is also the continuing excavation of the same type of site at Liddel in South Ronaldsay. This site we had "inherited" from Prof. C. Renfrew who cannot continue here in Orkney. We are in contact with the Department of the Environment in Edinburgh with the intention of increasing this number of rescue excavations. We are co-operating with the Planning Officer on an informal basis in order to earmark sites. Any information and/or hints from Society members concerning sites would be most welcome.

Thirdly we are attempting to interest the same body in financing a research worker to undertake a complete survey of all archaeological sites in Orkney, especially those threatened by sea action, agriculture and general development. There are precedents in southern counties, but there is no definite news as yet.

Basically we are trying to cover all aspects of archaeology in Orkney which is a huge task and should really be carried out by the new Islands Authority on a full-time and well-staffed basis. The Museums Officer is a start but we need more than that.

J.G.P.E.

THE STRYND HOUSE

At the Annual General Meeting the necessity for urgent repairs to counter-act increasing dilapidation was mentioned. These have been completed by Mr. John Kirkness, Builder, at a cost of £4,600, and the building is now in far better shape for conversion to whatever its ultimate function may be. Gifts of £1,000 each from Kirkwall Town Council and the Pilgrim Trust, and of £500 from the Dalrymple Archaeological Fund, as well as a £500 interest-free loan from one of our members, have helped greatly towards this expense, but the cupboard is now almost bare, and much more money will be needed for the next - and, we hope, final - phase. This will consist mainly of interior work, and its nature will depend on what use is to be made of the Strynd House in the future. No final decision has been taken yet on what that use is to be, but your committee favours multiple usage, combining perhaps a Tourist Office, an Archaeological Room (to replace the Tankerness House room, which will not be available much longer), and possibly a quiet club-room for senior/

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senior citizens. These are functions which should combine well under one roof, but any further suggestions would be most welcome. The Strynd House is an essential part of Kirkwall and of the Cathedral precincts, and should be preserved as a living entity. Over the last three years we have deliberately refrained from inviting donations from the public towards its preservation, in deference to the more urgent needs of St. Magnus Cathedral, but we feel that it is now time to make an appeal for funds to save the Strynd House, and we shall be approaching such bodies as the Historic Buildings Council and the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, as well as the local Orkney Authority and the general public.

As reported at the A.G.M., Allied Suppliers are making a gift to the Heritage Society of the rearmost, single-storey portion of the former Lipton's premises, adjoining the westerly end of the Strynd House. There has been a delay in the conveyance of the property, but the formalities should soon be completed.

H.M.S.

#### CALENDER OF EVENTS, SUMMER 1975.

Friday, 9th. May. 8p.m. Illustrated talk in the Arts Theatre, Kirkwall, by Mr. Maurice Sargent, Planning Officer for Orkney, on Conservation Areas and suggestions for Enhancement Schemes during European Architectural Heritage Year 1975.

Wednesday, 18th. June. 8p.m. Illustrated talk in Kirkwall Grammar School Hall by Mr. James Stevens Curl, E.A.H.Y. 1975 adviser, on the general philosophy of European Architectural Heritage Year 1975; what conservation areas are about; what he suggests could be done in Kirkwall and Stromness as Conservation Areas; and what is happening throughout Scotland in relation to Conservation Areas.

Saturday, 21st. June. 2p.m. Guided tour of the Hall of Tankerness and of Greenwall, Holm, by kind permission of Mr. Róbert Dain and Mr. John Swanson. En route from the Hall of Tankerness to Greenwall, a call will be made at Fysick, where Mr. Paterson has kindly agreed to show members his collection of old implements and machinery. Cars to assemble at the Phoenix Car Park, Kirkwall at 2p.m. for departure by 2.10p.m.

September. The Annual General Meeting will be held in September, the date and venue to be announced in the 'Orkadian' later.

#### Listed Buildings

Since 1st. October, 1974, our comments have been invited by the County Architect on applications for permission to make alterations to the following listed buildings:

Warehouse, 8 Victoria Street, Stromness - conversion to Ferry Terminal Building.

7 Bridge Street, Kirkwall - conversion to boarding-house.

87 Victoria Street, Kirkwall - alterations to dwelling-house.

In none of these cases did we have any serious objection to make.

#### ORKNEY'S STRUCTURE PLAN

The Plan is being prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972. It will be a framework for development of Orkney over a long period. Together with the subsequent local plans it will replace the existing Development Plan approved in 1964.

It takes the form of a written statement of the planning authority's main proposals for change on a large scale over about 20 years. It must show all the significant intentions and explain the amount of land needed, with reasons for choice. Its policy decisions will commit the authority irrevocably to certain kinds of development to which objection at a later date would be futile.

The/

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The Plan was made available to the public on 30th. January 1975, and public-ly explained by County Officials and the Planning Consultant at meetings on 10th. and 11th. of February. The last date for objections or representations, in writing, was 14th. March.

Forty-four submissions have been made on a variety of points; many relating to the stringency of the house-siting policy, others to the proposal to zone 4,400 acres for oil-related development, and to the proposal to permit mining of uranium.

The next stage is reconsideration by the authority, with possible amendment to the Plan, which will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for Scotland, to whom any further objections can be made within a prescribed period. He may then either approve or reject the Plan, or cause a local inquiry to be held before reaching his decision. The procedure will probably be complicated by the simultaneous reorganisation of local government.

S.S.

We record with deep regret the death of Mr. Cecil Walls, a former member of the Society, and a committee member of long standing and great value. During all the time he was a member of this society he was always willing, and pleased, to give any advice required, whether based on his extensive legal knowledge or his equally extensive local knowledge. We will greatly miss his ever-available counsel and his presence at our gatherings.

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