

ORKNEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER 1979

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Linklater.
Archaeological Adviser: Dr. R Lamb

"NO URANIUM" CAMPAIGN: At last the Secretary of State has published his findings on the Orkney Islands Structure Plan. The Reporter, Mr W D Campbell's summary and recommendations are also made public. On the evidence of his technical advisers (very little reference is made to the O.I.C. case or to the supporting witnesses) he advises that the clause which prohibits mining for uranium be deleted. However the Secretary of State rejects this advice giving as his reason that he "recognises the widely felt concern in Orkney about the effects which uranium-mining might have on the environment and the agricultural economy of the Islands and the possible hazards to the health and well-being of its people."

Our Campaign can claim credit for this pronouncement. When we organised a Delegation to lobby MPs at Westminster we were able to say that 99% of the population of Orkney supported the O.I.C. As proof 250 organisations and businesses signed a Declaration in support of its policy and had underlined this support with donations amounting to over £2,000.

15,000 signatures have come in from every part of the country. These include 5,000 Orcadians resident in the islands. A Sponsored Walk raised £1400. We've received over £4,400 since the campaign began, and it has cost £3,180.

But suspense remains. While allowing the prohibition on uranium-mining to stay in the Structure Plan it is rendered impotent by the statement: "There is a national interest in the exploitation of uranium in the UK as an indigenous source of energy.....The Secretary of State simply reserves his approval so that any planning application relating to exploration or exploitation of uranium resources which may eventually be submitted may be considered in the light of all the evidence available at the time and the views of the Orkney community." This in effect removes from the Orkney Islands Council its power as Planning Authority.

The initiative now belongs to the O.I.C. to uphold its authority. The Heritage Society will continue to support the Council and, if necessary campaign on its behalf.

VALEDICTION is, perhaps, too high-flown and expression on vacating the Chair. This is more a summing up.

It has been an "action-packed" three years. There was no hint, in September 1976 that the chairman of the Heritage Society would be called upon to lead a campaign to protect the environment and the people from annihilation. Ernest Marwick was alert and thanks to him we were quick off the mark in January 1977. Since then the chair has been a hot seat from time to time.

There have been good things as well. The appointment of Dr Raymond Lamb as Resident Field Archaeologist is a major asset. He took up this post at a crucial moment - on the eve of the Examination in Public. The O.I.C.'s policy has been modified according to some of his suggestions, notably a paragraph referring to access and car-parking at popular archaeological sites.

Land-owners and farmers may glean some comfort from the recommendations which at least take note of the "unacceptable disturbance and financial burdens" which lack of facilities impose on them. There is also reference to the safeguarding of unscheduled ancient monuments and the importance of adequate records.

The reporter's concern for our history and archaeology accords ill with his recommendation of a policy which will obliterate our future. Uranium-ming, should it ever happen, would invalidate the whole Structure Plan.

And there is the "Heritage Journal", to be edited by William P L Thomson who writes about it in this Newsletter. We hope all our members will subscribe.

We are also asking members to take an interest in the Pier Arts Centre. The Heritage Society has looked favourably on this venture from the start. The old warehouse in Stromness, once a coal store, has been beautifully renovated and is now an Art Gallery. The 18th century house on the street has been equally sensitively adapted as part of the Arts Centre. It would be appropriate if members interested in art and, indeed conservation became "Friends".

A PROPOSAL to limit the term of office whereby office-bearers serve as such on the Committee for three years only was agreed earlier this year and was endorsed at the A.G.M. The new rule also applies to two or three members who must stand down after three years as Committee Members.

This means that, besides the Chairman and Treasurer demits office. Philip Skea has served the Society in this arduous office for nine years. The year '78/'79 was particularly harassing what with the covenanted £3,000 from Oxy, the working out of salary, insurance and income-tax rebate, connected with the employment of an archaeologist, not to mention the "No Uranium" Campaign and its Appeal Fund - we have to thank Philip for his meticulous care of the Society's finances.

Mr R Robertson, whose wife Joan was founder member, has nobly undertaken the duties of Treasurer meantime.

R P Fereday retires and so do A H Bevan and I MacInnes, all of them founder members to whom the Society is indebted. Thanks too to J Dewar also retiring from the Committee.

John Hedges was co-opted onto the Committee to advise on archaeological subjects. He set the ball rolling and it was he who made out a case for a resident archaeologist when we first approached Oxy. He will we hope, continue to attend meetings of the Archaeological Sub-Committee.

Laura Grimond has been appointed to the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Minuments in Scotland, a useful link with Edinburgh in the Ardhæological field.

WINTER PROGRAMME: A possible outing in the Christmas/New Year period has still to be confirmed. Look in the "Orcadian" for advertisement.

"Our History in Stone": a talk by Sue Flint with slides in January or February.

Archæology: Report with slides by Dr. R Lamb in March.

SUMMER OUTING: It has been suggested that the 1980 outing might be to Flotta

What is happening to our lanes? Where have all our closes gone?

Before the war, most of the Shore Street closes, the oldest part of the town, disappeared, to be replaced by the ungainly contours of the oil tanks. The Kent exhibition has recently been yet another painful reminder of what we have lost there.

No 1 Bridge Street, Corsie's Close, the lane behind Kikrwall Hotel, is still there, more or less intact, but it now overlooks a car park instead of a courtyard. It is however, gratifying to see the restoration of the old coach house, and a few modernised houses which yet retain something of their character. All the other closes on that side of Bridge Street were, in the late 1960's, abruptly truncated by the car park. Let us visualize these tenements, backed by their gardens, and once bounded only by the sands and the Oyce. In Hossack's day one of the arches still spanned the entrance to the close which, in 1968, had separated the fiery minister of the Episcopal kirk from his neighbour, Halcro (of Crook). Here and there, towards Bridge Street, in windows and arched insertions, there is still a pattern suggestive of dwellings befitting such burgesses as Traill (eg "Traill's Folly"), Craigie, Halcro, Pottinger, Baikie, etc.

On the other side of Bridge Street, most Kirkwallians will be conversant with the significance of St Olaf's Wynd or Poor House Close: in many ways the cradle of the burgh. Here, since the erection of Rognvald Brusison's church of St Olaf, (perhaps on the still earlier location of a Culdee chapel), "we have a site with a definite and continuous history for eight and a half centuries" (Hossack, 1900). While grateful for the precious relic of St Olaf's doorway, transferred to its present position, we are left lamenting the total disappearance of much of this Wynd, which now peters out, pathetically, at another car park and a new office block. Both are comparatively new intrusions.

"The bastards have been here too", was the remark made by a tourist hoping to show "The Burn" to his friends. This too - the lane perhaps most beloved by our older generations - has, in the last decade, been sacrificed for the Bridge Street car park. As a child surveying its tortuous dykes, one found little difficulty in picturing the stream below, winding its way to the sea (under present Albert Hotel, and behind Ayre Hotel). Could not some semblance of the wall yet be rebuilt, even if only for enough to mark its junction with Dunnet's Close? Or is a car-park corner already more sacrosanct? Failing this, what of studs in pavement or tarmac to accommodate both Orcadians and visitors vexed by 'official' vandalism? These could also indicate the crossings of the burn at the bridge, and at the Lang Stane (probably where Langstone Close, South of Leonard's, joins Bridge Street Wynd). Though some houses are in need of repair, Bridge Street Wynd is still intact.

Dunnet's Close has recently been relaid with flagstones, but, without the high dyke of the Burn, has lost its character and become a wind tunnel. Gone are garden and gate, once enhancing the meeting of the ways.

Mounthoolie has been much the same for years. It is of interest because it is the lower part of the course once followed by the Long Gutter, described by Hossack as "an open ditch running from the brae till it reached the Hempow" (part of the burn). The unsavoury name, he explains, was justified, for in 1703 the council, finding the runlet "bagd up with gutter and other filthiness" charged the "haile inhabitants to cleanse and digt the said Long Gutter". Hossack maintains that the name "Mounthoolie" was originally that of David Traill's house on its south east corner. This may be in doubt.

The Orkney Herald Lane (for lack of a better name) still has its garden though it now comes to a sudden end at a cement block wall. Some still remember the annual locking of the gate near the western exit, to signify and retain the private ownership of the lane. The delightful glimpse of the garden serves to vex us when we proceed to the next passage emerging at the Big Tree only to find its remnant of greenery left naked in the car park. One hopes that this entrance, leading us under Laing's house, will be rescued from its present state of decay. The only indication of the western exit, Barnarvie House, is itself a derelict stump in an alien land. Likewise, the bits and pieces of Castle Wynd are redolent of the days when trees and bushes peeped over from neighbouring gardens.

To the east, the Strynd, with its Norwegian name, is probably the most famous of the Wynds. It was the birthplace of an editor of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica", and was visited by a royal sailor prince, later William IV. The Stewarts' town house is gone; the botanical gardens almost forgotten. But the remaining Strynd houses are being cherished by careful renovation.

At the Broad Street end of St Magnus Lane the owner is fortunately having his property repaired. Hopefully the Orkney Islands Council, sensitive to name and precincts of the lane, will not replace an old eyesore, the Gas house site, with a modern one.

In Tankerness Lane (School Wynd until the 19th Century) the new extension to the Royal Bank is now clear on the skyline, but the garden on the other side is secure as part of Tankerness House Museum. From the top of the lane the view of Wideford Hill and the Peerie Sea is now partly blocked by a totally incongruous corrugated iron extension.

It is here, when one reaches the Victoria Street lanes that one begins to feel really desperate. They are still with us, though scarred. A Scottish burgh survey, 1977, states clearly: "The main trend is towards renovation rather than replacement - along Victoria Street". But events are overtaking us so quickly that one dreads what will happen overnight, despite all conservation regulations. If we explore these lanes, and share the experience with visitors, weary of concrete jungles, our sense of urgency may become sufficiently infectious to rouse placid Orcadians. But it is almost too late already.

An initial step must surely be to have them clearly identified for the visitors. Here there is scant space to convey what may imminently be lost. You will find it incredible that some of the trees in the lane called Whitechapel may already be doomed, with the wall, to make way for houses. See the gardens, attractive in spite of planning blight, and rare, because of destruction elsewhere.

Walls Close (once Poyntin's Close) is still relatively undiminished, but its charm is interrupted by the factory to the south.

Bypassing a private lane, we reach Frascr's Close, which suffers from recent heightening of the carpet store to the south, and the derelict site on the north, frequently used as a dump. But the nagging sore at the moment is the knowledge that the quaint old house at the foot, locally known as the "Doo Cot", may be entirely altered to make flats. With tiny yard and sloping cowshed, it completes a pleasing pattern of rooftops at this part of Junction Road. Surely it qualifies for preservation in as much as its exterior contributes to the architectural interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part. Its replacement by the stark walls of new flats would be a crime.

The last of the lanes in this part of the town is Gunn's Close (once Broadsands Close). The flowering bushes no longer peep over the north dyke, for beyond is yet another new car park. But the houses on the south are still delightfully unspoiled - until one comes to a great ugly gash, created by crowbar and J.C.B. within the last month. This house, though derelict was "listed", and an integral part of the row. Demolition was abruptly stopped, but unfortunately the lane is still closed.

Can we, as individuals and a society, make it plain that such irreparable loss will not be tolerated anywhere in Kirkwall. We have preserved the core. Will the precincts befit an Ancient and Royal medieval Burgh, or merely a faceless new town?

NB Since this article was written. The "Doo Cot" as described has indeed been lost.

OUR FINANCES: The society's audited accounts for the year ended 15th. May 1979 were adopted at the Annual General Meeting on 3rd. October. here is a brief summary for those members who did not receive copies at the A.G.M.

At 15th May 1978 we had:

Cash at Bank on Deposit Account	£1852	
(including £500 interest-free loan)		
Local bond £1000 @ 10% for 2 years	1000	<u>2852</u>

In the year we received:

Members subscriptions & donations	107	
Anonymous donation converting previous £500 into Publications		
Fund of £1000 for future use	500	
Bank interest thereon	23	<u>523</u>

Deed of Covenant from Occidental Oils of Britain Inc. Plus Income Tax reclaimed	4477	
Grant from Scottish Development Dept.	500	<u>4977</u>

"No Uranium" Campaign Appeal	2383	
Collections at meetings	78	
Interest on Bank Account & Investments	173	<u>2634</u>
		11,093

And we paid out:

Archaeological Account	1853	
"No Uranium" Campaign	934	
Printing, Stationery, Adverts, Postage and Secretary's expenses	87	
Grant on Boardhouse Mill repairs	100	<u>3001</u>

Which left at May 1979

Cash at Bank on deposit Account	7092
Local Bond £1000 @ 2% for 2 years	<u>1000</u>
	8092

The £8092 held at 15th May 1979 was ear-marked for the following :

Publications Account	£1023
Archaeology Account	3124
"No Uranium" Campaign	1449
General Funds of the Society	<u>2496</u>
	£8092

It would be much appreciated if Members who have not paid their Annual Subscriptions yet for 1979/80 to the Hon. Treasurer would do so now.

Annual Sub.	£1.00
Junior	.10p
life Member	£10.00

Payable to the Orkney Heritage Society.
 Hon. Treasurer, Mr R Robertson,
 Rosendal,
 New Scapa Road,
 Kirkwall.

Rousay Day Trip: August 25th: by Clunie Rowell

In arranging this trip I had the easy job. Mary Bain (bless her) did all the hard work. She had all the concern about numbers, money, tickets and putting notices in shop windows.

I telephoned Frank Harris, the potter, and let him and his fellow members of the Rousay Film Society do all the organising.

There had to be two programmes - one for fair and one for usual weather, and we had to be vague about how many might be.

On the day we were 60 and we had a boat to ourselves. The sky was blue and the water sparkling; so we never knew what the alternative arrangement was to have been.

On Rousay Pier we were divided into two parties - one for the provident people with packed lunches who would enjoy tea in the Community Centre, and one for the lazy folk who had opted for lunch at the hotel. One party to do the round clockwise, the other anti-clockwise and we would meet back on the pier at 4 o'clock.

The lazy party, (which included me) were driven along the coast road to a point opposite Eynhallow. We walked down to Midhouse Broch and looked in wonder at this superb building on its incomparable site. We inspected the Gairn from its steel lattice viewing-bridge and wished they had left a few bones for us to shiver at.

Out into the sun again to negotiate the difficult stoney way along the shore to Westness, past Skaill, deserted since the Clearances. This interesting group of buildings, with the old church of Swandro and the well, are well worthy of protection from further decay.

At the Westness "dig" the archaeologists were busy taking a huge plaster cast of a Viking boat grave. We gathered round Dr Sigrid Kaland who recounted the history of the site and the fascinating investigation taking place. The skeletons of the tall Viking warriors in the boat graves, with their shields and weapons had been removed and we had to be content with collections of rather peedie bones in less impressive rectangular graves. How shallow these graves are - only a few inches.

Forward in time to William Morris and his Arts and Crafts Movement so lovingly taken care of at Westness House. Dr and Mrs Firth enthusiastically took us through all the rooms of their charming home; and the only word of criticism I heard came from a lady who muttered satisfaction that she didn't have the dusting of it.

A well-earned lunch at the Taversoe hostelry and we were called to our car to be taken to Trunland House.

The lady who got limited pleasure from housework must have been really relieved here. Compared to Westness, Trunland is huge. Major Ritchie was our guide and there was something for everyone. Architecture, furniture, paintings, stamp collecting, military history. Thinking back - Westness was inviting and full of interesting twists and intriguing intimate spaces. Trunland was formal and grandiose. You could giggle in one but speak proper in the other.

It was nearly four and time to go. Back at the pier Johnnie Peace was unloading crabs and our own boat was coming in. The sun still shone.

£1 was all Mansie Flaws took for the trip there and back. Halfway over Marjorie went round with a can collecting for one of her good causes

- a proper way to end a pleasant day.

The profit to the Heritage Society was 87p. The cost per head £5 went towards the Rousay Film Society and to cover their expenses. Frank Harris received our warm thanks for the admirable arrangements.

Orkney Heritage

The first issue of a new publication, Orkney Heritage, is due to appear in the first half of 1980. Thereafter it is hoped to publish one volume each year.

Orkney Heritage is the latest in an honourable line. From 1922 to 1935 the Antiquarian Society issued a journal each year, and between 1953 and 1973 there were five numbers of The Orkney Miscellany. Articles in these publications have proved invaluable to all those interested in Orkney's history and way of life.

Due to the generosity of an anonymous benefactor Orkney Heritage will continue this tradition. Yet it will not be a mere copy of its predecessors. While it will continue to be mainly historical, it will deal with contemporary topics from time to time. It is also hoped to reprint important articles which have appeared in local newspaper and to make available material from the Orkney Archives. The following are among the articles likely to be included in the first issue:

- Marjorie Linklater - Orkney says No to Uranium
- Ronald Cant - Some Orkney Mansions.
- Ian MacInnes - The Alexander Graham Case.
- R P Feraday - William balfour after the Forty-five
- William P L Thomson - Common Land in Orkney
- Harald Mooney - Some 17th Century Records of St Magnus Cathedral
- Peter F Spence - An Eye-witness Account of the Division of the Birsay Commons (reprint.)



ORKNEY HERITAGE ORDER SLIP

Please send mecopy(ies) of Orkney Heritage No. 1 when available and thereafter further numbers as they are issued (an invoice will be enclosed.)

Name

Address

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Return this slip to William P L Thomson, Kirkwall Grammar School, Kirkwall.