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Dr. Raymond Lamb

COMMITTEE

Mrs. Marjorie Linklater  
Messrs. C. Rowell, A.J. Firth  
A. Tulloch, I. Hedde, J. Hicks,  
P. Twatt, T. Sinclair, P. Leith,  
W. Thomson.

PEOPLE and AFFAIRS - AN UPDATING

Members who rely on the newsletter for information may justifiably be wondering whether the Society has gone into oblivion. We hasten to assure them that it is still operative, having had regular quarterly committee meetings, the A.G.M. in October, and various sub-committee meetings, all with serious and interesting discussion on matters relevant to our aims, and decisions taken where considered necessary. We would remind any whose membership has lapsed that 80/81 subscriptions may be paid to Mr. Bill Melville, Deputy Manager, Royal Bank of Scotland, Kirkwall, who was introduced at the A.G.M. and warmly welcomed as our new Treasurer, in succession to Mr. Ronnie Robertson, who had kindly and efficiently come to our rescue after the retirement of Mr. Philip Skea. Our thanks are expressed to Ronnie for his work and our hopes for a speedy recovery to health for his architect wife Joan, also over the years a talented and helpful member of the Society, so that they might enjoy their new life in Kirkcudbright.

The last newsletter, distributed in January '80, was compiled by Mrs. Marjorie Linklater, who had actually by that time vacated the chair which she had occupied for three years. In committee and at the A.G.M. tribute was paid to the vigour, determination and charm she brought to the office during that period, the most arduous and anxious ever faced by the Society, which then led to the fight against the prospect of uranium mining in Orkney. On that subject, members at the A.G.M. ratified the earlier decision by sub and executive committees that we should to some extent be satisfied with the indeterminate outcome of the Enquiry, in the hope that investigation has been stalled for the time being at least, though we are by no means to become complacent. All are expected to keep a watching brief on the whole question and be ready, whenever it might seem necessary, to support the Islands Council which represents the whole county and which will use every means at its disposal to resist any attempt to carry out exploratory drilling or any other process which would lead to the mining of uranium in Orkney. They also decided that the No-Uranium Fund would not be allowed to fall below £1000, a contingency precaution. The executive committee has consistently resisted the temptation to/

Matters discussed by the committee have included the following:- further reviewing of place-names, preservation of rights of way, war relics, Springfield quarry, parking meters, Kirkwall pierhead, Dundas Crescent, the Crafty, car parks instead of dwellings, tree planting, overflowing refuse bins, the Peerie Sea, vandalism, derelict cars, positioning of caravans and, just recently, the draft written statement of the Kirkwall and St. Ola Local Plan. This latter was studied and commented on in writing, mainly by Kirkwall members, after a constructive, helpful and informative meeting with Mr. Maurice Sargent, Director of Planning. From this document will be prepared the final Draft Plan upon which there will again be opportunity, for the public and all interested bodies like this Society, to have consultation and make observation. We value this chance to look towards the future. We are grateful too that Conservation Area Planning applications continue to be passed on for comment. Members are reminded that these are always displayed in the O.I.C. Offices (Planning Dept.) for public perusal. Only occasionally a controversial issue arises, such as the "Hatston sheds" - some of us are not too certain we should have supported their retention in what is intended to be a green area, to offset the Hatston industrial estate and provide a clear vista of the Ancient and Royal Borough from the Western approach. What do members think? Do we regard them as significant war relics or could their stone be put to better use elsewhere, bearing in mind that repair costs will be substantial?

E.B.

#### PUBLICATIONS and REVIEWS

Look out in a week or two for the first issue of our own "ORKNEY HERITAGE" outlined in the last Newsletter. Our thanks are due to Mr. Wm. Thomson, K.G.S. Rector, for all his work in editing and organising this, to the anonymous donor (whose idea it was) and O.I.C. for financial help. It is hoped that sales' income will ensure further issues. So make sure you get your copy. Going back to last year, we find another publication from our Archaeological Officer:

IRON AGE PROMONTORY FORTS IN THE NORTHERN ISLES is a study by Raymond Lamb based on field surveys made between 1970 and 1973 for his Ph.D. thesis at Birmingham University and is a mine of interesting information and thoughtful speculation - highly recommended reading for anyone who wonders about, or at, "pickie knowes!"

We congratulate no less than three prominent members on the recent almost simultaneous publication of their books, all significant works of scholarship and talent, all evidence of a deep attachment to and interest in our islands and their history. We are fortunate indeed to have such spokesmen. First to appear was "ORKNEY FEUDS AND THE '45" by Ray Fereday, Principal Teacher of History, K.G.S. It is reviewed below by Jim Troup, his counter-part in Stromness Academy. Second was "THE LITTLE GENERAL AND THE CROFTERS" by W.P.L. Thomson, Rector K.G.S., also reviewed, by Ray Fereday. Thirdly has come "PORTRAIT OF ORKNEY"/

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"THE LITTLE GENERAL AND THE ROUSAY CROFTERS"

Mr. Thomson has written a major work of scholarship that is eminently readable. His book is a definitive account of the conflict in the 1880s between the peppery General Traill-Burroughs and the Free Church and Radical crofters who opposed him.

The background to the conflict is skilfully drawn. Chapters on the General's family and his Indian experiences are matched by chapters on the development of the Rousay estate, the agricultural improvements and the clearance of Quandale and Westness. Despite the friendly and prosperous atmosphere of the 1870s, the General and some of the crofters were on a collision course. In the 1880s, with agricultural depression, the troubles came. The Napier Commission (1883), the Crofters Act (1886) and the amazing goings-on in Rousay, marked a fundamental change in society. In Rousay, as in the rest of the British Isles, there was a shift from aristocratic paternalism to democratic demands.

Burroughs, a quaint and remarkable character, is condemned but not vilified. His virtues as well as his faults are delineated. To know all is to forgive quite a lot and he appears not so much a villain as a prisoner of his past. The opponents of the General are just as interesting. Vital intellectual support for the crofters' delegates came from the Rev. Archibald MacCallum the Free Church minister, until he succumbed to alcoholism. James Leonard of Digro, the chief opponent and victim of the General, achieved a tragic dignity in struggle and adversity. In any age it is dangerous to criticise the powers that be and Leonard sacrificed himself for the cause of social justice.

This book will be treasured in Rousay and enjoyed by everyone with an interest in Orkney's past. As a case-study of the relationship between crofters and their landlord it will be valued in the universities. Its excellent tables, diagrams, maps and graphs will be used henceforth as textbook examples of economic and social change. Best of all, the book tells a gripping human story.

R. Fereday

W.P.L. Thomson: "The Little General and the Rousay Crofters" published by John Donald, Edinburgh, 1981, £15.

TROOT HOUSES by Peter Leith

In days of old, trout was just another food source to be utilised. The best time to catch the fish was when it returned to the burn of its birth and swam up against the current to spawn in the gravel far from the sea.

It was not hard to catch the fish in the shallow water of a burn, and there were no game laws to forbid it; but some people went even further and almost automated it by building a "troot hoose". This was a stone-built, open-topped building about 6 ft square with a narrower roofed section leading off upstream. The only record we know of the technique used is the remembered remark of an old man, "De built a force (dam) across the burn tae pit the watter thro' the hoose an' teuk the fish cot in the morning wae a peerie heavie (landing net)". This/... over

indeed any of the piers which Clouston says "were raised to defend the houses from the sea and some houses are erected on foundations built in the sea". Access is still possible down many of the piers though 20th century acquisitiveness has built gates where once there were none. Such a gate to a pier opposite the Bakehouse Close was demolished with an axe and some ceremony by the late Provost Marwick, appropriately keeping free the way past Alexander Graham's house. Up that very same Bakehouse Close is another delightful paved lane hidden from the street, containing houses, gardens and white-washed coal-houses whose clinker-built wooden upper parts used to be tarred a shiny black. This lane follows the course of a burn and contains a very small house which has recently been given planning permission to enlarge itself at the expense of one of the gardens, the light to neighbours' houses and the visual harmony we inherited from the past. There is no need for planners to be so positively insensitive.

You can regain the street from the Bakehouse Close by going down Pigeon Creek, indeed you may flow down it in company with Stockan's oatcakes. When they are loaded for export, a temporary conveyor belt is installed from the Bakehouse to the van, a good example of industry coping with the restrictions of a site by a little ingenuity, rather than seeking the removal of buildings. Leslie's Close is nearby, so-called from the old lady who lived in the bottom house. She was an aunt of Willie Leslie, merchant, whose father published the short-lived Stromness News in 1884. The house at the top was still called "The Brewery" in my boyhood. When it functioned as such, there was nothing but real ale in Stromness. That Close leads you by an adjoining lane of considerable attraction to Kyber Pass. I'm still in doubt whether its name is a tribute to British Imperialism or Stromness humour. But there is no doubt about the good work done by the Planning Department here in reconstructing the old houses. You will not find Puffer's Close so named by a sign, which is a pity, because that name is used by old Stromnessians for the Close opposite the Baby Linen Shop.

Puffer was an irascible and somewhat <sup>reputable</sup> ~~disreputable~~ old character whose youthful brushes with the law and memorable illness, which coincided with that of King George V's in the 1930s, made rich local stories. This habit of calling Closes and lanes after people provides valuable stepping stones into local history. I doubt if Puffer ever climbed the lane above his close to admire the view over the South end of the town. As I remember him, he preferred to sit on the window sill of what was Rendall's butcher shop, seriously damaging the view of the cuts of meat behind him, and ready with his stick to lash the ankles of any boy who came close to him.

Stromness is full of lanes and closes not all lovely. The Bank Lane is dour which perhaps befits its title. The Boys' Lane in its narrow enclosed upward thrust prepared pupils for the prison above. But Miller's Close is lovely. It retains in stone from 1719 the assurance, to sadly the last in Stromness of the same family 261 years later, that "God's Providence is mine inheritance". The Manse Lane has the most colourful flag-stones I've seen anywhere in Orkney. In/ 8