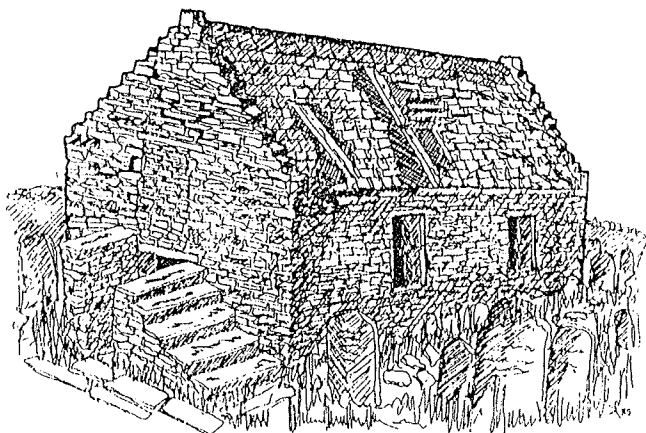


ORKNEY
HERITAGE
SOCIETY



St Boniface, Papay

NEWSLETTER 1992

The Society's Objectives

- 1 To stimulate public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of the area of Orkney and its surroundings.
- 2 To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest.
- 3 To encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in Orkney.
- 4 To pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, conferences, and publicity, and the promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.

Orkney Heritage Society Office-bearers, 1991-2

Hon President	Lady Grimond, The Old Manse, Firth
Hon Vice President	Mrs Marjorie Linklater, 20 Main Street, Kirkwall
Chairman	Iain M Heddle, Mill of Eyrlund, Stenness
Vice Chairman	Alexander Firth, Edan, Berstane Road, Kirkwall
Secretaries	Miss Andi Ross, Outerdykes, Stenness Mrs Mona Sinclair, Skaranes, The Quadrant, Kirkwall
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Committee Members	Alistair Tulloch, 29 Reid Crescent, Kirkwall William P L Thomson, The South Manse, Burray Maurice Hayes, Summerlea, Burray Mrs Elizabeth Bevan, Hopedale, 9 Ness Rd, Stromness Peter Leith, Appichouse, Stenness Paul Sutherland, Junction Road, Kirkwall Mrs Anne Brundle, Hillside School, Birsay Mrs Daphne Lorimer, Scorradale, Orphir Dr Frank Foden, Cruachan, Annfield Cres, Kirkwall Jack Rendall, The Glen, Rackwick, Hoy

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Editorial

In the euphoria of my up-grading to Vice-President of this Society I rashly volunteered to edit the 1992 newsletter. Subsequently, re-reading the editorial introducing last year's magazine I was tempted to reproduce it as my own. The burning issues then are as urgent now as they were a year ago. **Waste Not Want Not** is a timely reminder that Local Government moves exceedingly slow. Already the Science Festival is upon us for the second year and this subject again discussed under the auspices of Orkney Heritage Society.

The other burning issue is the **Restoration of St Boniface Kirk** in Papa Westray. The obstacle which prevented immediate steps being taken by the OIC towards restoration was the fact that there were no title deeds; no one appeared to own the building. However an ingenious solution has been discovered. The OIC has now invited various firms to apply for plans and to send in tenders for immediate repairs to be carried out under a protective insurance policy against any unexpected claimant. It is to be hoped that these repairs to protect the building against another destructive winter will be carried out by local masons.

A **Steering Committee for the Renovation of St Boniface Kirk** in Papa Westray has been set up following a **Public Meeting** in the Papay Community Centre on 30th July. The Heritage Society was represented by **Lady Grimond and myself**. We were co-opted on to a Committee which consists of:

Chairman Jocelyn Rendall
Secretary Paul Symonds
Committee Jim Rendall, Peter Miller

Jocelyn Rendall suggested that representatives from the Architects Department be invited to attend an early meeting of the Committee.

The Heritage Society is now actively engaged in fund-raising for the restoration of this significant medieval church founded twelve hundred years ago. Under the inspiration of our archaeologist, **Dr Raymond Lamb**, it could become the culmination of a pilgrimage linking the celebration of St Boniface in Crediton, Devon, where he was born (7th century AD) with the establishment of Christianity in Papa Westray.

Within the span of time which concerns our Society is the study and recording of grave stones - solemn (sometimes not so solemn) records of ordinary and extraordinary folk throughout Orkney. This study, inaugurated by one of our distinguished members, **Daphne Lorimer**, has been greatly assisted by a post-graduate student from Cambridge, **Sarah Tarlow**, who has chosen this subject for her thesis for a further degree in Archaeology.

Our Secretary writes about the new alignment of the road alongside the **Ring of Brodgar**. Read all about this crucial subject in her Report.

An apology for the tardy issue of this Newsletter is due to members. It is too complicated to explain. Already the search is on for another Editor next year.

Marjorie Linklater

From Your Chairman

I have been thinking a lot about recycling waste recently, and have tried to see other possibilities, but the only one to make any sense with me is to burn the combustible materials, and to take the resultant heat to use in some form of district heating scheme, so saving electricity, oil and coal.

The example of Bornholm (150 miles off Denmark) is, in my view, the only way for distant islands to usefully rid themselves of waste combustible materials, as the transport involved is already in existence and local people will, instead of paying to see it destroyed, at least see some good come from it in the form of heat.

I cannot visualise any long-term haulage of combustible materials for re-cycling being economically possible since we are 300 miles away from the central belt, plus a sea voyage as well! (Domestic cans may be crushed for eventual transportation).

Bornholm lies between Denmark and Sweden, so they have similar distance and shipping problems, but they have got their ideas already in being and the system has been seen working by Orcadian officials who visited there.

I think the Heritage Society should do all it can to encourage the Islands Council to begin planning for the eventual development of a suitable estate to be warmed by district heating. It would be very sad to see things drift on until the opportunity was missed. I shall do all I can to encourage the extraction of heat for domestic district heating from the bruck we all discard.

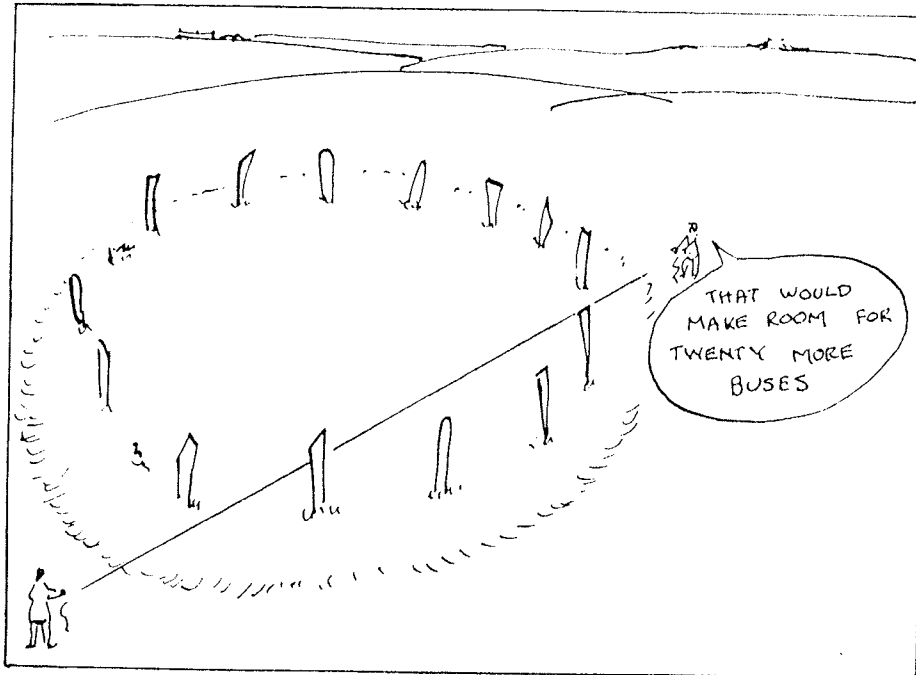
Ian R Heddle

Secretary's Report

Andi Ross

On 'going to press' the issue uppermost in my mind is the proposed alteration to the roadway at the Ring of Brodgar. Again we find ourselves replying to newspaper reports when, if this Council had a shred of decency about it, we would be replying to an informative response to our three-page letter, addressed to the Chairman of the Roads and Miscellaneous Services Committee. Instead we have the latest incumbent of the Chair calling us 'do-gooders' and telling us that we are 'going over the top'.

We have now been formally invited to present our views to the Director of Planning, who will eventually call a meeting of all interested parties to try to come to an agreement or suitable compromise.



From our letter to *The Orcadian*, you will have the gist of our submission. I think that we have a very good case against alteration; all our points are valid and important - safety and the protection of an internationally important monument. It is hoped that we will see more support for our position from Historic Scotland. Raymond Lamb has undertaken very careful measurements of the area from the Engineer's plans, and estimates that the new road would extend some 7 metres not including disturbance for drainage. Of course one can only imagine the amount of disturbance which will be caused by the plant machinery needed for the workings.

We really do need to protect our environment against some of the worst effects of tourism. Our traditional visitors are just as upset about the proposed changes as ourselves. Most of the operators have the sense to take only one bus at a time to Brodgar; the others who schedule their coaches to arrive three and four at a time are not only causing a dangerous situation in the area, but are 'de-grading the product' to use their own language. Some of the tourists who come in these convoys are rushed around so fast that they cannot possibly appreciate what they see. Those who are part of these whirlwind tours barely have time to go to the toilet, so I have been told at different times by various of them. I envisage thousands of pairs of feet trampelling the ground, wearing everything away, and then disappearing, complaining that they were part of a herd and really would have liked more time. Who knows how many of these people will return another year to visit Orkney at a more leisurely pace, as it should be visited?

There is some disappointment that nothing much seems to have followed on from our very successful Waste and Recycling Conference last year. It is true that the Society has not really followed through with further action, but now we see that the Council seems to be taking the issue seriously. The need is felt for a group to liaise between the Council and public. The Heritage Society would like to be instrumental in establishing such a working group. To start the ball rolling Frank Foden chaired a small meeting at which it was agreed to ask Rick Nickerson of Shetland Anti litter fame to come and give advice on practical ways forward. We would like to see some co-ordinated action throughout Orkney on litter control; the summer beach cleaning by various groups are great, but the general issue of litter in the streets and attitudes to this type of pollution need to be addressed publically.

Earlier this year Laura Grimond hosted a meeting of people interested in waste management and recycling. It was very useful in that three Council officials, Bob Cross, Louis Kerr and Alan Leslie, addressed the meeting and shared with us their hopes and aspirations regarding waste management and recycling projects. The meeting itself was rather inconclusive, except that all present agreed the necessity of having a working group, but could not decide on its form or role. It was finally agreed that the group meet again when people thought that they had something to discuss!

It seems that the problem is the eternal one: those who believe 'something needs to be done' are already over-stretching themselves on all other subjects which they feel need 'something done' about them.

Part two of our slide show was held in Stromness in April. A very small audience saw and heard very interesting accounts of Stromness environs, past and present. We were lucky in our speakers, Frank Foden and Jim Troup. Stromness never seems to bring a very good turnout for our interesting evenings.

Sandy Firth again organised the Eynhallow trip in June. Thanks to Sandy and Raymond.

The Society has been the recipient of a collection of letters and books by Edwin Muir, very kindly donated to us by Miss Swale. All of the materials have now been passed to the archivist; it was agreed that the letters be checked for anything very personal and, following upon that, access be allowed at the discretion of the archivist.

It was hoped that the Society would host a one-day conference on Kirkwall and its development. There is great concern in the Society that discussions seem to centre on the problems of traffic, and not necessarily on the needs of all the users of the town. It seems that very little headway is possible on the issue of pedestrianisation. It is still a horror trying to walk through Albert Street, and the new scheme proposed for Victoria Street will not be very helpful, although maybe a step in the right direction.

Treasurer's Report

As reported by Sandy Firth last year during my absence south, the former Occidental covenant has been honoured by ELF and the payment of £6000 under this deed of covenant has been received from them, plus the Income Tax of £2000 from the Inland Revenue. The total sum of £8000 which has been handed over to Orkney Islands Council goes towards payment of the archaeologist's salary, and they make up the rest of the salary.

During March 1992 the Society received the sum of £1100 from the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments of Scotland. This represents an agreed grant allocation between RCAHMS and the Society in respect of our computer which requires repair.

The Marwick Bequest continues to supplement our income, this year to the sum of £2600. The Society's funds maintain their healthy balance. Subscriptions received this year have shown a marked improvement over last year, and this includes arrears from the previous year. Again we would welcome new members of the Society, the membership fees being Adult £5, Family £10 and Life £50.

St Boniface Kirk

Jocelyn Rendall

In 754 AD Archbishop Boniface of Crediton was murdered in Friesland, after a lifetime of pioneering missionary work on the Continent. He had been a close friend of both the Pope and the Emperor and a key figure in bringing the pagan tribes of northern Europe into the religious and political fold of the Carolingian Empire. He was canonised after his death and shortly afterwards a new church in Orkney, founded to spread Christianity among the northern Picts, was dedicated to his memory.

If we are surprised that a Devon saint who spent most of his life on the Continent should be commemorated on Papay, it is a measure of the extent to which twentieth century communications have distorted our view of Orkney. A few decades of motor transport have taught us to see islands as remote, isolated, and therefore insignificant, attitudes unknown to previous millennia for whom they were welcome havens, centres of political power, market places for goods and ideas on the main highways of cultural and economic commerce.

In the eighth century Papay seems to have been chosen as a base for a Christian mission to the Picts of the Northern Isles. The Picts were losing their control of the north of Scotland to the Scots, and around 715 AD the Pictish king Nectan sought an alliance with the powerful Roman Catholic kingdom of Northumbria to bolster his position. To cement the treaty he changed his allegiance from the Celtic to the Roman church and invited Northumbrian missionaries to organise the church in his dominions on the Roman pattern.

The choice of Papay as a base was not arbitrary. Although small, the island is exceptionally fertile, a suitable endowment for a new ecclesiastical foundation which would depend on the produce and revenues of a profitable estate. Its geographical situation makes it an ideal springboard between Orkney and Shetland. The west-coast seaway avoids the hazards of North Ronaldsay and Fair Isle, and the next natural landfalls are the sandy bays of St Ninian's Isle or Papil in Burra - also fertile places where there is archaeological evidence of Christian Picts in the eighth century.

The part of Papay where St Boniface Kirk stands had clearly been favoured long before the arrival of the churchmen. Recent excavations have shown that it had been occupied for well over a thousand years when the first kirk was built, and that an Iron Age chieftain built his broch here. This was a prestigious site for the local chief or sub-king to gift to the church for Orkney's first bishopric.

Two eighth century cross slabs found in the kirkyard are all that survives of the first church, but clearly the Vikings found a church of some importance on the isle, for they gave it the name 'Papay', the isle of the priests. The Orkneyinga Saga relates that Earl Rognvald Brusisson was brought here to be buried in 1046, so even in late Viking times Papay was still regarded as a sacred place.

St Boniface's kirk survived the Reformation and, although much altered, remained in use into the twentieth century. The twelfth century fabric was substantially re-built in the early eighteenth century, and this phase is quite well documented in the North Isles Presbytery Records. The Kirk session's practice of fining parishioners for their sins of immorality and utilising the money for church improvements ensured a steady progression of alterations and enlargements. The original chancel was removed and the kirk was extended to the west with a loft entered from external stairs; new box pews and a high pulpit with a sounding board were added.

Like so many other Scottish churches, the fate of St Boniface was sealed by the Disruption of 1843 when the Free Church broke away from the Church of Scotland, and parishes thus acquired an additional church. When the churches were re-united in 1929 it was usually the larger Victorian church which was retained while the older building was abandoned. In Papay St Anne's, built by George Traill for the Free Kirk congregation, became the parish church, and worship ceased at St Boniface for the first time in about 1200 years.

Initially William Traill of Holland took over responsibility for (and possibly ownership of) the old kirk, and maintained it until his death in 1944. His heir, however, had no interest in it and destroyed the deeds relating to the kirk, which was then totally neglected. After its door blew off in a storm its condition rapidly deteriorated, the eighteenth century pews rotted away and, with the decay of the roof, the gables became increasingly unstable.

In the 1980s the OIC expressed an intention of taking over the kirk and restoring it, but this foundered on the kirk's lack of title deeds. The OIC was unwilling to spend money on the building without a clear title to it and this proved a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Another problem was Mainland councillors' lack of awareness of the historic importance of the kirk. Had even emergency repair work been undertaken when it

Kirkyard Survey - St Magnus Cathedral

was first mooted most of the roof (now almost non-existent) could have been saved and at least some of the furnishings.

Clearly in the post-Thatcherite world historical value is not enough to guarantee survival, and up and down the country holy places and saints neglected since the Reformation have been undergoing vigorous marketing to bring in an income. The best known example is Iona, where thousands flock annually to the island made famous by St Columba, and the restored abbey offers a focus of pilgrimage. At the Bede monastery museum at Jarrow tourists pay not for luxury but to savour the life of an Anglo-Saxon monk - even in the industrial shadow of Sunderland.

St Boniface may not have the fame of Columba or Bede, but the kirk could offer the essential ingredients of the 'pilgrimage package': peaceful surroundings on a lovely island, a location hallowed by history, accommodation already existing in the excellent hostel and guest house for retreats or Christian conferences. An intelligently restored and well 'marketed' St Boniface's could bring badly needed tourism to Papay which would benefit the whole community. If the kirk could also act as a small beacon of Christian inspiration, it would in some measure re-capture the vision of its founders.

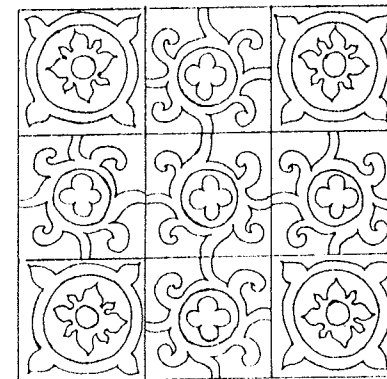
Daphne Lorimer

The Orcadian is a traveller and, like his Viking forebears, a settler in distant places, but the call of the Northern Isles is strong, and his descendants come back generation after generation, to find their roots. Unfortunately most of them land up in the Archivist's office and she is getting desperate for the easily accessible information provided by competent kirkyard surveys.

As a result of the archivist's *crie de coeur*, the Heritage Society is proposing (the OIC and Kirk Session willing) to start to record St Magnus Kirkyard in October, and this is a preliminary indication that as many helpers as possible will be wanted for this task.

Recording kirkyards is a fascinating activity (and can incidentally be great fun): it is possible to trace the movements of families from the changes in surnames over the years, to recognise the marks of itinerant stone-masons, to find out trades and professions of past inhabitants of the parish, to follow fashions in Christian names and even the fashion in funerary ornaments (which, like flowers, has a language of its own).

Nearer the time a call for volunteers will be made on Orkney radio and in the 'Orcadian' but, meantime those who are interested might like to read two fascinating little books: *Understanding Scottish Graveyards* and *How to Record Scottish Graveyards*, both by Betty Wilsher and published by the Council for Archaeology (formerly CBA Scotland).



Dead Interesting: The Orkney Graveyard Project

Sarah Tarlow

My interest in the way people have understood death, and how those understandings have changed through time, has brought me to Orkney this summer to record a number of Orcadian graveyards. With the help of Orkney Archives and a few volunteers (including my brother who was lured to Westray under the false pretence that he would be having a restful holiday by the sea), I have completed the recording of four graveyards. The biggest challenge - St Magnus - now looms but, with the assistance of Orkney Heritage Society and other local helpers, we should be able to finish before the winter's frosts damage the monuments any further.

The gravestones of Orkney are a wonderfully rich source of information. Inscriptions and epitaphs on the stones can tell us a lot about how people lived and died in the past. Names and dates of birth, marriage and death are invaluable to genealogical researchers, and one picks up all sorts of odds and ends of information which some relative must have felt indispensable for the commemoration of a life. One stone in Pierowall graveyard imparts the essential 'bio-data' that the deceased was "cousin to the great African explorer Dr Livingstone". Well, everyone needs some claim to fame.

But it is not only the inscriptions which are interesting. The form and decoration of the stones can be just as informative. They are shaped to resemble bedheads, scrolls, obelisks, broken pillars and shrouded urns, or they are given roofs and pillars like little houses for the dead - and each family lair is marked out with a stone kerb, or iron railings, like a row of suburban gardens.

The stones are decorated with motifs suggesting a heavenly resurrection - doves and cherubs - or in a more macabre vein, motifs of transience and mortality - hourglasses, coffins, spades, funeral bells, skulls and cross-bones and grinning death's heads.

All these things are evidence of the way people thought about death in the past. Recording graveyards can be enormously rewarding. Please come and help us at the cathedral if you have any spare time. We need enthusiastic volunteers to come and record a vital part of Orkney's heritage before it flakes off.

Viking Boat-grave in Sanday is Britain's richest so far

Raymond G Lamb

Sanday is both the archaeologically richest and worst threatened area of Orkney; many settlement sites of extraordinary richness (including another Skara Brae) are steadily succumbing to the erosion of the soft low-lying coasts. Observation over the past twelve years, combined with the longer-term experience of landowners, leaves no doubt that the rate of erosion is increasing. It is especially disconcerting to discover hitherto stable lengths of shoreline, up to now grass-grown, suddenly starting to erode at an alarming rate.

The site of the latest spectacular discovery, on the north coast of Burness between Scar farmhouse and the Riv, is one of these newly attacked areas. It was archaeologically surveyed in 1979 when a hitherto unrecorded and quite indeterminate mound was noted; there was then no erosion. In the mid 1980's the farm was bought by the late Mr John Dearness, who noticed the first exposure of bones. By 1991 it was obvious that a complete human skeleton was present, and in the County Show week Mrs Dearness called at this office to let me know about it. Unfortunately, with an inadequate travel budget and high fares to the outer isles, I could not make a special trip at that time, and had to leave it till I could combine it with other work in Sanday.

Late in September, Julie Gibson went to Sanday in connection with her archaeological tourism consultancy sponsored by Orkney Enterprise. She was taken to see the skeleton, and found a boat rivet near it, immediately suggesting a Viking boat-grave. Mrs Dearness then remembered an object which John had picked up on the spot, but had done nothing further about after a neighbour had identified it as part of a car battery. Wisely, he had kept it, and it was subsequently identified as a bullion weight - part of the equipment of a Viking-age merchant.

The discovery came at a time of especially severe stringency in Scottish archaeology (which throughout has been operating to a much lower level of funding than has developed in England) but Patrick Ashmore of Historic Scotland succeeded in assembling an investigation team, and Orkney Islands Council unanimously granted £5,000 towards the cash

costs. The team, led by Magnar Dalland, had to begin work at the worst time of year, with appalling weather and failing daylight; several times during the first month storm waves were lashing right up to the site. Luckily the weather improved as December came with a fortnight of calm as the crucial stage was reached.

This proved to be the richest Viking grave yet found in Britain. The boat itself is large for its kind, 6.5 metres in length. It contained the remains of a man, woman and child, with rich goods. Most immediately notable was a whale-bone plaque, the size of an A4 sheet of paper, ornamented with horses' heads; such plaques occur with wealthy women's burials in Norway, but this is the first complete example from Britain. Probably more spectacular once it has been cleaned up, is a huge equal-armed brooch of gilded bronze; this appears to have 'gripping beast' ornament characteristic of the first half of the ninth century, its closest parallels being among the best brooches from the Swedish trading centre of Birka. There is a complete set of playing-pieces for the Viking board-game of 'hnefatafl'. The man had a large bone comb and a sword; probably he had other equipment beyond these, but that part of the boat-grave had already gone into the sea.

The conservation and study of the metalwork at the Ancient Monuments laboratory in Edinburgh will take many months. The circumstances of finding what appears to be a family group in one grave appears to be unique.

Blood group and DNA testing of the bones should establish whether there is indeed a relationship between the adults and the child. Radiocarbon dating of the bones, together with some surviving wood from the boat and from the handle of an iron sickle, offers an unusually good chance of arriving at a date for the burial.

Waste Not, Want Not

Frank Foden

Ever since the Heritage Society's very successful conference on waste disposal during last year's Science Festival, the idea of doing something purposeful and systematic in Orkney has been simmering in many minds. Visiting speakers from Shetland and Bornholm (Denmark) told graphically of various measures which had been adopted in their isolated island communities to collect, re-cycle and otherwise dispose of waste paper, plastic, straw, bottles, cans and other metal waste. Other speakers told of productive ways of re-cycling sewage.

These issues have never been more topical than they are at present in Orkney, our country and roadsides never more bestrewn with cans and bottles, many of our coastal coves, goes and beaches never more choked with rotting junk, fridges, discarded kitchen utensils, plastic containers and bags, cars and car parts, domestic and farm effluent flowing into the sea in far greater volume than officially 'allowed'. This is a time when the Orkney Islands Council is committed to spending considerable sums on new sewage schemes, especially in Kirkwall and Dounby and will doubtless in the near future have to spend more on replacing the Chingley Brae waste-burning plant. Like many other localities, Orkney is now running short of dump sites.

We have yet, it may be added, to discover more ways of integrating projects with one another and especially of saving the sea from becoming a yet fouler and fouler repository of the often lethal by-products of our consumption society. The sea is our life-blood, not a handy dumping ground.

Various authorities, voluntary groups and other agencies in Orkney have from time to time attempted to do their bit. The OIC last year made a determined effort to persuade owners of rusting cars to bring these in or have them collected. Yet the casual walker along lanes in the central Mainland may still come across dumps of dozens of rusting hulks, while many a single stranded car-shell adorns the moorland hillside. Several Community Councils have from time to time attempted bottle, can and paper collections, and there have been one-off clean-ups by youth groups and others of some of our littered beaches.

But so far in Orkney there has been little attempt at a planned, integrated attack on the blight and corruption of casual waste disposal, sometimes excused on the grounds that "We don't know what else to do with it". The problems are partly those of lack of investment in the more advanced technical means of waste disposal (usually seen as lack of money), lack of co-ordinated effort and, fundamentally, insufficiently developed public concern about the matters of disposal and re-use of the rubbish produced by affluence, and the habits of mind induced in a 'throw-away' market-led culture.



As we learned from the examples put before us of Shetland and Bornholm, things do not have to be that way. Imagination, technical know-how, judicious planning and investment were shown to be significant ingredients of the sophisticated district heating scheme based on the burning of combustible waste in Bornholm, and sheer enthusiasm was a prime motivator of 'Redd-up' in Shetland. Orkney really has fewer disadvantages for setting going 'clean-up' and beneficial disposal and re-cycling programmes than either Shetland or Bornholm: like them it is a relatively rich, high consumption community, but it is much closer and has more frequent connection with mainland facilities than either of the other two.

With such thoughts in the mind of its members, the Heritage Society is now seeking to promote the creation of an 'Orkney Amenity Group' or 'Trust', a voluntary combination of interests concerned to:

- a Co-ordinate clean-up and related conservation activities, such as the collection and disposal of cans, glass, paper etc. and so seek ways and means for their being put again to use by re-cycling. This will involve, among other things, discussion and agreement with OIC, other public agencies such as Orkney Enterprise, commercial concerns, shipping companies etc on conditions and terms under which material can be moved.
- b Initiate with appropriate publicity periodic conservation efforts such as beach and coastal clean-ups similar to those now undertaken annually in Shetland, and to harness for this purpose the interest and enthusiasm of local societies and youth groups.
- c Collect and circulate information by means of press, radio and possibly a Trust newsletter on all matters to do with clean-up, conservation and the combatting of pollution.
- d Seek to promote discussion with OIC on wider and longer-term issues such as investment in conservation techniques and processes, and to raise levels of public awareness of these issues.

The Society has no illusions that the sort of policy now being advocated can be costless or, as some guardians of public funds are apt to try persuade ratepayers, a 'paying proposition'. It is true, however, that increasingly some of the material we thoughtlessly throw away, particularly aluminium and steel cans, bottles, paper and straw has a market value. This is a factor which can in future be profitably exploited.

You will see that in his chairman's remarks at the beginning of this newsletter, Ian Heddlie has chosen to highlight the advantages of district heating schemes, the biggest and potentially the most costly improvement in our modes of waste disposal, yet one which is capable of producing spectacular benefits in our chilly climate where our homes are quite wastefully heated on the individual, one-at-a-time process of pumping in more electricity.

Local Studies Competition, 1992 (The Fereday Prize)

In session 1991-2 the Society once again organised a local studies project competition for second year pupils in Orkney secondary schools. The judges were very impressed by the number and standard of the entries, and more than a dozen projects were in close contention for prizes. In both Stromness and Kirkwall the project has become an integral part of the history course, and it provides an excellent introduction to the 'Investigation' section of the Standard Grade History course. The judges regretted that no entries were received from island Junior High Schools this year.

The winner was Steven Spence (Kirkwall Grammar School) with 'The Van', a detailed study of the part played by horse-drawn and motorised vans in the life of the rural community, which is published in this Newsletter. Second equal prizes were awarded to Mark Donaldson (KGS) for 'Kirkwall Harbour' and Thomas Moylan (KGS) for 'The History of the Old Ship Inn'. Fourth prize went to David Matheson (Stromness Academy) for an excellent survey of 'Stromness Trades, Crafts and Businesses'.

The Heritage Society thanks school history teachers for supporting the competition, and Alison Fraser, archivist, for assistance which has resulted in many pupils making quite sophisticated use of archive sources. However, the main thanks goes to parents and grandparents who have provided such excellent oral sources.

Next session the Heritage Society will again be running the competition. While not restricting pupils' choice of subject, the Society hopes to encourage a number of entries on a Second World War theme. It would like to see projects, not so much on the great events of the war, as on every-day life for servicemen and civilians in the war years. If the entries warrant, it may be possible to publish several of the projects in a small booklet.

Highly Commended

Gary Budge
Inga Cromarty
Erland Dass
Magnus Dearness
Lucy Fraser
Sheila Garrioch
Amy Girvan
Hilary Goggin
Heidi Jamieson
Erlend Johnston
Catherine Johnston
Andrew Knox
Finn Macleod
Karen O'Connor
Yvonne Seator
Andrea Scatter
Ginette Spence
Susan Spence
Jade Stout
Thorfinn Tait
Craig Thomson
Kerrie Thomson
John Wishart
Joanna Wood

The Van; the History of the Travelling Shop in Orkney

Steven Spence

(Editor's Note: This splendid survey of travelling shops and the part they played in the life of rural Orkney is this year's winner of the Society's local studies competition. For reasons of space, the study is published only in part - what has been omitted are many of the illustrations and a very valuable district by district survey of firms, their vans and the routes they followed.)

Introduction

The van or travelling shop has largely disappeared from the Orkney way of life. Once they formed a very large part of country life in Orkney; as well as supplying foodstuffs and merchant items they also acted as a courier service, carrying messages and parcels between people and shops. These vans were extensions of general stores.

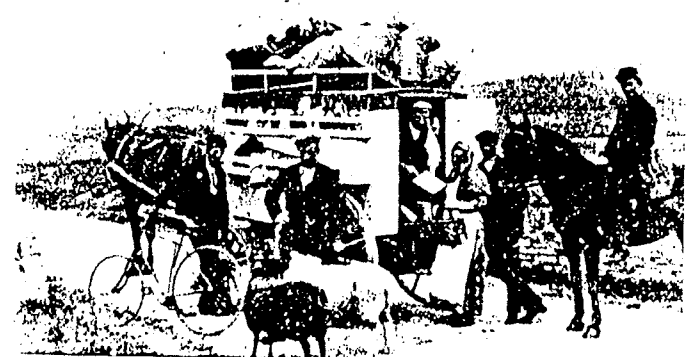
The vans were mainly horse-drawn, normally using one or two horses, but sometimes more depending on the size of the van. The areas they covered were quite large; vans from Stenness and Finstown would do the West Mainland, and vans from Kirkwall and Deerness served the East Mainland. Familiar firms still running today ran vans such as W B Firth in Finstown and Gardens in Kirkwall. What follows is a record of the old shop vans and a few anecdotes and accounts of some experiences which people had with the vans.

The Vans and their Stock

The horse-drawn vans all followed more or less the same pattern. Some of the early vans were little more than carts with boxes on the back to carry goods. Most of the horse-drawn vans were fairly small. On the inside they were lined with shelves and drawers and in the middle was a square hole where the van-man stood, able to reach everything from there. There was a door at the back for customers, and a smaller door at the front for driving the horse. Round the outside of the van were racks for carrying ironmongery and cans of paraffin, and heavy goods travelled on top, tied to rails along either side and covered by a tarpaulin. The van carried most items that a shop would stock such as bread, confectionery, salt fish, butcher-meat, sewing thread, newspapers, shoelaces, tea, lentils, animal feedingstuffs and so on.

The van was stocked up first thing in the morning by the shop staff, and a lot of goods had to be weighed up, as many things were bought in bulk by the shopkeeper, but sold in ounces, pounds and stones. This was the case with good such as lentils, split peas, flour, sugar, and baking soda. Sugar, for example, came home in two-stone bags, and had to be weighed-out each day. Biscuits came in bulk in 7 lb tins. Tobacco in 1 lb tins and was weighed in ounces for re-sale. 'Black Twist' tobacco was supplied in rolls known as 'Bogie Roll' and was measured into one-ounce lengths. Salt came in two-stone blocks and small blocks were cut off with a cleaver. Cheese came in wooden barrels weighing 2 cwt, and was cut using a cheese wire. Treacle and syrup were in casks with a tap, and weighing it was a very sticky job, especially on cold mornings when it would not 'run' and had to be ladled out. So getting the van stocked was a big job.

Cans of paraffin were hung round the outside of the van, and salt herring were carried in a pail of brine also on the outside. Animal feedingstuffs and other bulky items went on top, covered by a tarpaulin. On a windy day it could be a difficult job if anyone wanted an item off the top, as the wind would catch the tarpaulin like a sail, and it was hard to tie it down again.



The horse van on the road. The rider on the right is the postman.

Most horse-drawn vans were locally built. The wheels were designed so that when the van turned it stayed stable. The front wheels were always smaller so that it could manoeuvre when it was turned in a confined space.

The motor vans were gradually introduced over a period of about twenty years from 1921 up to the Second World War. They were bigger than horse-drawn vans (about 20 feet long and about 8 feet wide). Some of them were converted buses, but firms such as Flett & Sons and

Gardens had custom-built vans. Often the chassis came from south and a local coach-builder would add the body. Some vans had a removable body. The motor vans carried much the same stock as the horse-drawn vans although, by that time, more newspapers were sold. On Tuesday it was the 'Orkney Herald' and on Thursday the 'Orcadian'. No daily papers were sold, and of the weeklies, the 'Peoples Journal' and the 'Christian Herald' were favourites.

Cigarettes and tobacco could be sold in the van provided the shop had a license to sell them. However, there were some vans without a tobacco license, and so the police sometimes stopped and searched these vans. Alcohol was not supposed to be carried, although sometimes it was, so the police searched vans for alcohol too.

The van-men worked very hard and had an extremely long day. Some van-men would start at 9 am and finish as late as midnight. Yet the job must have been rewarding when so many people were prepared to do it.

Buying and Selling

One very important aspect of the vans was the way in which farm-wives traded their butter, eggs and cheese for groceries. It was a source of profit for the farms and stimulated egg production in Orkney before the days of the egg packing stations. In the early days the eggs were put loose into boxes holding 60 dozen with straw in the bottom, but later there were special 30 dozen boxes. Some of the eggs were sold at the shop, but most were put on the steamer for Leith. Before the first world war J & W Tait had a shop in Leith Walk in Edinburgh to sell Orkney produce. The South Ronaldsay eggs were shipped directly from St Margaret's Hope. The first packing station was a government collecting agency for eggs in the wartime, and Orkney Egg Producers was a peacetime version of this. The egg industry grew so big that lorries had to go round collecting the eggs from the farms, although very often groceries from the vans were still paid by the fortnightly 'egg cheque'.

Butter could be a problem for the vanmen, for he often received big quantities and, in the days before refrigeration, keeping it cool was difficult. Also the quality of butter and cheese varied. In one business there were three prices for butter, one for good butter, one for medium butter and one for 'grease'. The vanman foolishly told one woman who had got the top price, and she told her neighbour who had been paid the bottom price. A terrible row followed!

Shops which had a bakehouse were lucky as they could use up the butter for baking, otherwise they had to sell it as best as they could. On one occasion a Kirkwall shop had two boxes which had gone rancid when fortunately an Indian gentleman came round and took the lot, because it was to his taste for putting in his tea.

The vans were a social service, very often the highlight of a person's week, since someone living in a remote area might not see very many people. The vanman was expected to know all the news and to pass it on! In the early days vans did not go up to the houses, but people came down to meet them, and often quite a number of people would gather to wait for the van. There was also a system of signalling when the van was coming. For the benefit of people who lived out of sight of the road, a neighbour might hang out a sheet to indicate that the van was coming. There were some great characters in those days. One old lady who lived on top of a hill used to come down to the Stromness van with a sack. Everything went into it, salt fish and bread, all unwrapped, and of course on top went the two-gallon tin of paraffin. The vanman used to say, "My goodness, what will all that be like by the time you get home?", but she would say, "Doesn't matter, it all goes the same way in the end". She lived into her eighties, so it can't have hurt her.

In those days the jam was in stone jars, not transparent jars like it is now. Another old lady would pick up a jar and say, "My! That's lovely looking jam". All the vanmen used to laugh at this, and it became a bit of a catch-phrase.

The van went out in all weathers except deep snow. The roads were narrow in those days with deep ditches on either side. On a June day it was pleasant to be vanman, travelling the countryside and meeting folk, but on a cold day it was different both for the men and their horses. Generally the horses were quiet and well behaved, and indeed they knew the road as well as the vanman. But occasionally if they got their heads they would set off for home. Once at the Brae of Grind in Deerness, Garden's van was coming home when the vanman heard something falling and he went round the back to see what it was, but the horses set off and galloped a long way down the road. "The very fire was standing off the feet of them", said the vanman.

The vans could be on their rounds as late as midnight. Sometimes people would leave a basket and a notebook in a shed. It could be lonely at night when there was less light in the countryside than there is now, and occasionally there were hold-ups - a bit like highwaymen. One vanman with his hands up felt along the roof where he knew there was a heavy piece of wood. He brought it down as hard as he could on his attacker, then whipped up his horse, leaving the unsuccessful highwayman lying on the road.

The Firms, their Vans and Routes

Several vans went out from Kirkwall. These included R Garden's, J & W Tait's, C T Stewart's, Stout & Rendall, and one or two smaller businesses.

J & W Tait's business began in 1870 and they started with a van about 1880. This was a one-horse van which worked both the East and West Mainland driven by Willie Tait (the 'W' of J & W Tait). The vans sometimes went out loaded with enough to do two or three days, and spent the night at farms along the way where the houses were 'loused' and the vanman got his night's lodgings. Tait's vans spent the night at Campston, at Ingsay, and at a farm near Graemeshall. After the first world war they obtained a motor van with a Model T Ford chassis and a top speed of 10 mph. The West Mainland van was an Albion, replaced in 1946 by a Morris Commercial. Eventually the vans became uneconomic and were sold off to smaller operators.

Before the First World War Flett & Sons ran two vans out from Finstown and one from Kirkwall. The Finstown vans covered the whole West Mainland including Firth, Rendall, Evie, Costa, Birsay, Marwick, Sandwick, Stromness and Stenness, spending the night in Sandwick. The routes of the Kirkwall van were as follows:

Monday	St Andrews and Deerness
Tuesday	Tankerness
Wednesday	half day
Thursday	Holm
Friday	St Andrews and Deerness by a different route.
Saturday	Orphir as far as Willie Farquhar's (the longest and hardest day).

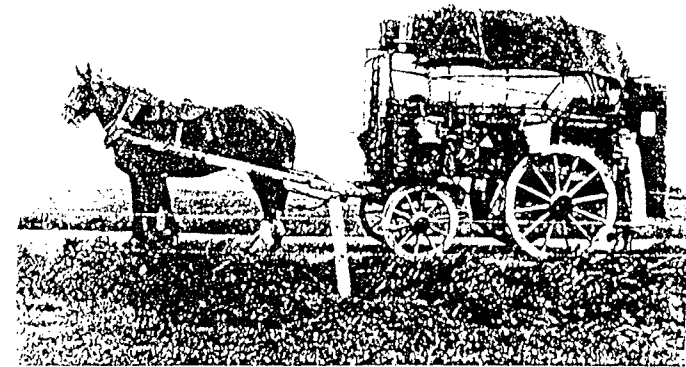
Flett & Sons suspended their van trade from Kirkwall during the 1914-18 war due to lack of manpower. Their first motorised van was a 1928 Morris Commercial. The chassis came from south and the body was built by William Harvey of Stromness who also built buses. This van was driven by a Shetland man, Willie Moncrieff. In 1939 this was replaced by a two-ton Albion, again with the body built by Harvey of Stromness. It had a specially re-enforced roof to carry loads on top, and running-boards on the sides to carry paraffin. It ran until 1965 and was replaced by a high-roofed Ford, previously used for newspaper deliveries in Glasgow, and this ran until 1974 when Flett's stopped their van runs from Kirkwall.

At this time Garden's had two big Ford vans on the East Mainland route, and other East Mainland vans were run by Quoyburray, T Cromarty of Toab, the Deerness Co-op, Frank Buchan of Holm, and the Holm Co-op. In later years Lipton's also ran a van. On the Halley road on a Friday afternoon there were no less than five vans - but the countryside was more populated then and they all got customers.

(Steven's project gives similar details of about another thirty firms. This section has been omitted for reasons of space. Edit.)

The End of the Vans

Most vans stopped running in the 1960s and 1970s. More and more people had cars and they increasingly went into the towns to do their shopping, and so vans became uneconomic to run. One van, on its last week of business, only took in £5. Regulations about hygiene also made it increasingly difficult to run vans, and there were safety checks and MOT tests which were expensive and time-consuming. Mr Doull in South Ronaldsay still runs a van every afternoon leaving at lunchtime and sometimes on the road for ten hours. Although there are still fish vans and greengrocer vans, Mr Doull's is the only true shop van still running in Orkney.



This is said to be the horse van in Orkney on it's last trip. Said to be W B Firths.

Notes

Published sources are Ernest Marwick's 'Van-days of Long Ago' from the 'Orkadian', and Edith Sinclair's 'Vanished Van Days' from the 'Orkney View'.

The author thanks the following people who provided information: Mr A Flett, Kirkwall; Mr J Doull, St Margaret's Hope; Mr J Groat, Longhope; Miss C Flett, Doumy; Mr T Tulloch, Aberdeen; Mr J Russell, Kirkwall; Mr D Sinclair, Stromness; Mr P Leith, Stenness; Mr A Grieve, Stromness; Mr G Stevenson, Westray; Mr W I Tait, St Ola and Mrs M Firth, Finstown.

Bring Back the Red Flag to Orkney Streets

Ian MacInnes

Popular manuals of Science used to tell us that, because of its ability to adapt, the human species had succeeded in making itself at home even in the most inhospitable places on earth. The Eskimo's diet and the lung capacity of the Tibetan Sherpa were examples which made us happy to be human rather than buffaloes or birds which had to migrate yearly to survive. But this ability also confined Eskimos and Sherpas for their own comfort to their places of birth. They appear happy enough to accept the confinement, and will survive as long as the environment is unchanged.

Adaptation over thousands of years is fine; when it is required in a short space of time it presents problems. It is just about a hundred years since the age of technology gave us, along with powered flight, the motor car. There was a remarkable acceleration in the pace of change in the 1890s so that by the turn of the century the motor car was a thing of elegance and considerable efficiency. In 1896, in an advertisement addressed to "the nobility and gentry", the Great Horseless Carriage Co Ltd claimed the honour to present to them that "the Daimler wagonette is admirably suited to the needs of the sportsman and lover of the countryside, giving as it does full facilities for the enjoyment of fresh air and an uninterrupted view of the scenery". It added that this was a new mode of transport that had undoubtedly come to stay - the implication being that fresh air and scenery would also stay! Up to 1896 vehicles were restricted to four miles per hour on open roads, and to two miles per hour in towns. In addition three people had to accompany each vehicle, one of whom had to walk twenty yards in front carrying a red flag. A bill to get rid of these restrictions was vigorously debated with the motorists' lobby arguing that car production would encourage employment. Prime minister Asquith saw in a new act an opportunity for new taxation; two or three guineas annually, "almost an ideal tax", he remarked, "Because it is a tax on luxury which is apt to degenerate into nuisance...".

In the short space of less than a hundred years humans have had to adapt, first, to Asquith's "nuisance", and latterly to an oppression of a physical kind. In that time also we have started the process of biological adaptation to pollution. I doubt if we will be as successful as the Eskimos or the Sherpas.

Daimler addressed his advertisement of 1896 to the rich and powerful and they responded. By 1914 Kaiser William II had 25 motor cars in his stables; Emperor Franz Josef was an enthusiast, as was Edward VII. Tsar Nicolas II had two Rolls Royce cars which after the Revolution Lenin used as state cars. A symbol of power far more powerful than a crown or sceptre had arrived. Observe it in the TV coverage of a third world state occasion, or the arrival of diplomats at some international conference. British royalty on such occasions stick to the horse and carriage - a symbol of their powerlessness.

Henry Ford and William Morris by mass production gave some of this sense of power to the ordinary man. Now we are all at the nobility and gentry game, oppressing each other with our motor cars. We particularly oppress those who cannot afford a motor car.

Observe Stromness street in summer (Kirkwall is probably little different). Cars, vans, lorries, large trucks and Council vehicles with various duties fight for space that was meant for humans. Occasionally they fight themselves to a stand-still and fart carbon monoxide into the atmosphere. At the wheel of each vehicle is maybe a Kaiser William, a Tsar Nicolas, a Lenin or a Hitler, convinced that he or she has precedence over a pram or a pedestrian by virtue of superior power.

It is time, in Orkney at any rate, that pedestrians reclaimed the streets, that wheelbarrows were resurrected, that the Locomotive Act of 1876 was dusted down and that consideration was given to reducing machines in order to boost employment.

Obituary: George R J Scarth

The death of George R J Scarth of Twatt Farm, Birsay, brought to an end the life of one who had a great interest in, and a great knowledge of, his native islands. Not only that, he found the time in a busy farming life to commit some of that knowledge to paper, and we must be grateful to him for that.

Born in 1908 at Twatt where his father farmed, he first attended Oxtro School in his native parish, and later what is now Stromness Academy where he was dux in 1926. From there he went to Edinburgh University where he obtained the degree of B.Sc.(Agric.). He then decided to try his luck in Canada as did so many young Orcadians of his time but, soon after his arrival, the recession started to bite very deeply and unemployment was widespread. Failing to find suitable work, he decided to return to his native Orkney; soon after, the death of his father left him with the running of Twatt Farm, to which he applied himself with diligence and success.

He also took an active part in the establishment of the NFU in Orkney, being the first secretary of the Birsay branch which was founded in 1934, a post which he held until 1955. He later became branch President and held that post until 1963-4 when that body was re-organised and he became the first Area President. Though naturally a quiet man, not given to pushing his opinions to the fore, he was always willing to take his share of responsibility, and his views and advice were always much appreciated in the farming world.

In addition to his work in the wider field, he had great interest in his native parish and did a great deal of research into the division of the Birsay commonities which had taken place about a century earlier. He also wrote an article about the Boardhouse Mill which was published in the Heritage Society's journal in 1984. He retained his memory until his death, and always enjoyed a 'crack' about Birsay and indeed West Mainland worthies. His passing will leave us all the poorer, but still the richer for having known him, and we extend our deepest sympathy to his family and friends.

GJW

The Waves Our Heritage

*The Orkney Science Festival 1992 has come and gone. Outstanding for me, and perhaps for OHS members generally, were the sessions in Stromness: **Energy Strategies for Island Communities**. The sea around us could supply all the energy Orkney requires for industrial and domestic purposes.*

*Professor Stephen Salter's exposition of **Wave-Power** technology revealed, not only the potential for island communities, but also the skulduggery in high places frustrating - for over twenty-five years - his ceaseless and brilliant research and development of this source of timeless energy. Gone are the "bobbing ducks" replaced by **The Mace** - an upside-down pendulum fixed to the seabed. Its operating mechanism, clearly explained by Professor Salter, could generate electricity at the cost of 3p per KWh. **But Profit Rules the Waves** and is manipulated by cynical moghubs in the City of London.*

An attempt to set up an experimental wave generating unit in Shetland has been thwarted. No government money is forthcoming and without that nothing is available from the EEC.

We have campaigned, as a Society, against the threat of Uranium-mining in Orkney. Is it not time, and within the Society's remit, to launch a campaign in support of Wave & Tidal power?

As Professor Salter observed: "Innovation is always resisted at high administrative levels." Which is why we continue to pollute this pathetic planet.

1992 Science Festival: "Don't Let It Go To Waste"

This follow-up to last year's discussion on the subject (both sponsored by the OHS) certainly revealed the Local Authority's dedication to this vital aspect of administration. The four officials who addressed the meeting eloquently explained their responsibilities; controlling pollution in every aspect. It seems that we are heading in the right direction and it is to be hoped that the deplorable state of our economy will not prevent the various schemes from realization.