

Thursday 13 March 2014 - Session One - Paper One

### 'Recording our Recent Past: State and Private Inventorisation Initiatives'

by Diane M Watters (Architectural Historian, RCAHMS)

This paper examines how Scotland has dealt with the heritage legacy of its post-war architecture and building in the last thirty odd years. The focus will be survey and inventory, rather than preservation as such, but, as we'll see, the history of building inventories and survey has always been bound up in various ways with conservation and preservation, and Scotland's no exception.

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a recurring tension between the aspirations to widen the scope of heritage to embrace more and more of the built environment and cultural landscape, and the practical reality of extending preservation that far. This first came into focus with Industrial Archaeology in the 1980s, when Scotland's vanishing traditional nineteenth and twentieth century heavy industries became a heritage concern. But the relationship between broad documentation (to include non-elite buildings) and active preservation only really became a problem in Scotland in the early 1990s, when the 'heritage' focus shifted to post-war architecture and mass housing – only a decade after the drive behind the national programme of rebuilding had fallen away.

Today, Scotland has a cluster of inter-related, or some might say disconnected, preservation registers, inventories, survey programmes, topographical publications and guides, and websites. Building preservation and survey currently form part of a state-funded heritage apparatus responsible for the survey, listing, and protection of historic buildings. But in Scotland, unlike almost all other western European countries, our system has, in the past, been sharply divided between the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), undertaking survey and dissemination, and the much-larger Historic Scotland (HS) responsible for 'listing' and, in partnership with local authorities, historic building control. This separation of the survey and documentation agency from the government preservation agency was formed, as we'll see, in the early decades of the twentieth century. This system survived into the twentieth century, but the Scottish Government decided to merge the two functions in 2012, and a new unified body to be called Historic Environment Scotland will take-over business in 2015.

Recording and preserving the post-war environment in the last four decades has been dominated by the state, but the once historically-important private, voluntary

and academic initiatives have come to the fore again in the last two-decades. Development has not simply been a linear one, of more and more of the post-war heritage being inventorised, or covered. How these state and 'private' heritage bodies developed in the twentieth century has, I'd argue, shaped their current approach to our post-war heritage. Scotland made great efforts in the twentieth century to inventorise and protect its 'historic' built environment, but at times it has been piecemeal and un-co-ordinated in comparison with other European countries. The tradition of detailed building inventory programmes in Scotland was abandoned by RCAHMS in the early 1990s. Despite our extensive national apparatus, no systematic, on-going programme of inventorising post-war architecture and housing has been carried out to date.

Post-war heritage has its own specific problems:

- Firstly, we have so much – vast industrial landscapes, peripheral housing schemes, and entire towns – even today, after a lot has been demolished. Scottish architecture following WWI was still fairly traditional, and like most other English speaking countries, we didn't launch into any kind of revolutionary Modern Movement in architecture until after the WWII. In the late 1950s and 60s the mass social programmes got underway, including new towns and public housing, and slightly later, the planning of large public ensembles, including new universities, hospitals, schools, and civic centres. These ranged from the one-off architect-designed house or church, to the ubiquitous and everyday system-built mass-housing in peripheral schemes.
- Secondly, Scotland's post-war heritage was, and still is, a focus of strong passions and conflicting views, and many people, and communities, are angry that these places can still exist today. Specialist architect-led critiques of the late 1960s and 70s, in time, gave way to outright popular vilification of the Modern Movement by the 1990s. But running parallel to this was a top-down re-evaluation of the post-war era by academics and preservationists.

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#### WHAT HAD BEEN OUR TRACK-RECORD ON HERITAGE INVENTORIES AND SURVEY? WHAT POST-WAR BUILDING HAVE BEEN 'COVERED', AND WHO AND WHAT HAS DETERMINED THE SELECTION?

Scotland began well. RCAHMS began as the first attempt at systematic nationwide heritage inventorisation in 1908. A wide definition for this was adopted, and the terminal date of 1707 was also late for its time. From 1913, the government's building preservation efforts took a different route (see below for HS), but the RCAHMS county-by-county archaeological and building inventories continued until 1992, independent from preservation responsibilities. Detailed RCAHMS building inventory stopped here.

Although the commission is almost unrecognisable from its original early twentieth century form, the continuation of three original guiding principles - *autonomy from preservation; breadth of survey and archive-gathering; and a threat-based remit* - enabled RCAHMS to provide an extensive and broad overview of Scotland's post-war built environment through its collections, and strategic surveys. These guiding principles were particularly relevant to the complexities surrounding large scale post-war built environments.

*Autonomy from Preservation:* preserving or 'listing' large post-war ensembles such as peripheral housing schemes and new towns is a difficult process: surveying for posterity and archive gathering has proven less so.

*Breadth of survey and archive-gathering:* The wide definition adopted in 1908, and still retained today - 'ancient and historical monuments and constructions connected with or illustrative of the contemporary culture, civilisation, and conditions of life of the people in Scotland' - has allowed a broad-based approach to surveying and collecting. It is well suited to the large collective post-war planning of entire new areas. The traditional emphasis on high-status architect-designed buildings can be given due recognition, but equally important is the non-elite houses, streets, industrial zones, and ordinary architecture of these new environments. RCAHMS's traditional site-based approach counter-acts any tendency to give dominance to any particular architect or individual building, and positions that architect's work within the broader collective nature of the urban environment. Private practice architects' papers from the post-war era

often cover a full range of building types, from a firm's important public works, down its 'bread and butter' domestic work and alterations.

#### HOW DID RCAHMS SET THE PACE FOR POST-WAR BUILDING SURVEY?

A special niche for threat-based recording was established for RCAHMS under the 1969 Planning Act: recording prior to demolition, and making that record available to the general public, was seen as the 'last resort' in the new conservation development control system. This created a recording role of RCAHMS who had the statutory right to record any listed building prior to demolition (Geoffrey Stell was initially in charge of this programme). However, up until the late-1990s only a small number of post-war buildings were 'listed' by HS, so this had no real impact. The real impact came alongside this new threat-based role, with a programme of recording building types under long term threat, outside the statutory framework, to include non-elite building types. Our activity was hugely boosted in 1985 with the newly-formed Industrial Survey, under the direction of Miles Oglethorpe, which led the way with its systematic coverage of the vanishing traditional heavy industry in the 1980s and early 1990s. Recording included: products of 1950s coal-mining expansion such as Monktonhall Colliery (surveyed in 1989 prior to demolition); the vanishing steel industry, such as Ravenscraig Steel Works, built from 1957 (recorded prior to demolition in 1990); and de-commissioned nuclear and coal- powered stations. Archive gathering whilst 'on site' also began.

From the 1980s threat-based and area survey programmes were under the direct control of Miles Glendinning. This long term threat-based approach pioneered in industrial sites was quickly extended to a wide range of non-industrial types under threat, ranging from Victorian lunatic asylums to Cold War defence sites facilities such as MHQ Pitreavie Underground Headquarters (surveyed prior to closure 1996), and coming forward to the mass post-war buildings now suddenly in many cases obsolete through redevelopment.

The scale of the threat to Scotland's post-war heritage over the last three decades is reflected in the RCAHMS collection. These range from factory closures (Cummins Diesel Factory, surveyed 1996 prior to closure), to

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young churches burdened with technical problems (St Benedict's, Drumchapel, recorded prior to demolition in 1990). In terms of housing, 1990s records ranging from tower blocks to small prefabs dominate RCAHMS archives, such as Dundee's massive Ardler Estate (surveyed 1997 prior to demolition).

The vanishing 1950s and 1960s site-sensitive neo-vernacular housing developments in the east of Scotland, such as Buckhaven Central Redevelopments, became the focus of survey in the first decade of the new century, as did the numerous post-war schools earmarked for demolition such as Smithycroft High School, Glasgow (surveyed prior to demolition in 2002). Post-war School demolition continues apace today – the ambitious Portobello High School and Gillespie's High in Edinburgh have been surveyed in 2013 prior to demolition.

A series of non threat-based thematic and area surveys were also set-up in the late 1980s which greatly expanded the post-war built environment archive by focussing mainly on urban areas (beginning with the vast Glasgow and the Clydeside area), and chiefly consisted images of post-war housing schemes, schools, hospitals, and new administrative and commercial town centres. In the 1990s low level oblique aerial photography was introduced and all five post-war New Towns were recorded from the air.

In terms of collecting post-war architects' papers, it was the ambitious salvaging of office papers from Scottish architectural practices, threatened with closure and downsizing in the challenging financial climate of the early 1990s, which formed the core of commission holdings. The ground-breaking Scottish Survey of Architectural Practices set up in 1992, enabled RCAHMS, in collaboration with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, to survey and selectively re-house 200,000 architectural papers. Although the majority of practices surveyed were established prior to 1950, a large proportion of these date from the post-war period. These collections ranged from big-practice leading firms (Spence Glover & Ferguson); to prolific regional practices (Buchanan Campbell); and to key influential designers (J L Paterson).

Architects' papers at RCAHMS are diverse, but the traditional broad-based approach to collecting, has led to the acquisition of a number of non-architect archives that focus particularly on housing design and

the 'ordinary' architecture of post-war environments, such as the Saltire Society archive, which records the winners and runners-up of the national housing awards established in 1937, and the unique Mactaggart & Mickel central-belt speculative house building archive.

### WHAT HAVE THE PRESERVATION 'LISTING' ACTIVITIES OF HISTORIC SCOTLAND HAVE ADDED TO OUR KNOWLEDGE?

About 200 post-war buildings in Scotland are listed – this represents, in HS's own words 'a tiny percentage of the nation's built heritage'. Scotland has, in the past, lagged behind English Heritage's initiatives for post-war protection – despite the fact that our interwar prototype 'listing' in Scotland, unlike that in England, was at the beginning focussed on townscape and group-significance of the built heritage. If we had retained our original broader significance criteria, preservations dealings with post-war heritage may have been easier. It was an interwar initiative – a semi-private one which formed the basis of Scotland's post-war government-listing programme. It focused on the preservation of Scotland's historic burghs and towns, and its driving force was our premier interwar preserver 4<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Bute who instigated the compilation of a basic map-based inventory of groups of old burgh houses by architect Ian Lindsay in 1935-9. Unlike the narrower Victorian definition of heritage, Lindsay's lists focused on the whole environment of towns. These lists were expanded from 1947 into state-sponsored official lists roughly along the same lines as England, but these were purely advisory. Lindsay's 1948 guidance for listing focuses on his preferred 'townscape' approach and planned towns were very important 'The houses in themselves are often rather dull but nevertheless in certain places they should all be included for group effect.' National statutory coverage was only achieved in 1967. By this stage listing became caught up in the growth of town and regional planning, and unlike earlier ancient monument protection, listing designation crucially did not imply financial responsibility by the state.

Now the lists became more overtly art-historical, detailed, concerned with the work of known architects and with other historically significant buildings – most notably Industrial ones, and Lindsay's 'group' value' was increasingly jettisoned. David Walker became Lindsay's

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successor in the mid-1970s, and extensive listing of nineteenth, and in turn pre-1914 heritage flourished with his extensive expertise. An inventory pioneered by the RIAS Scottish Thirties project in the early 1980s led to HS's innovative listing programme of interwar architecture. Under Walker, Scotland developed one of the widest listing programmes in Europe – today it's estimated that one and a half times as many buildings are listed in Scotland than in England.

Listing of post-war buildings began tentatively in the late 1980s and early-1990s, but still along similar traditional lines: focusing on the elite projects of some leading architects – Basil Spence, Morris & Steadman, and Peter Womersley, and traditional building types – including churches, individual houses, schools, and the odd civic centre. The work of the Glasgow-based avant-garde architects Gillespie Kidd & Coia was given a privileged position in HS post-war lists, and from the mid-to-late 1990s almost every church and school designed by the firm.

Scotland's post-war listings were not at this stage very different from those of England. English Heritage also began listing post-war buildings by key architects, but by the mid-1990s, it developed a more ambitious scheme, listing public housing tower blocks by known architects, and moving on to complex local authority designed estates such as Park Hill, Sheffield, and in 2003 it listed the avant-garde Byker estate. It focussed on a more holistic approach to selection and preservation, involving leading conservation architects and historians alike. In the early decades of this century, HS also expanded its coverage to include more complex architect-led public works, including new universities, leisure centres, and selected small-scale housing, but it carefully stayed away from controversial large public housing schemes. More recently HS has raised awareness of its post-war listing programme with a series of publications. These stated that selection followed its traditional evaluative system 'but with a rigour on account of their youth'.

As a case-study, Cumbernauld New Town highlights the difficulty our traditional Scottish heritage apparatus has in dealing with the collective environments of the post-war era. Despite being a multi-award winning New Town, by the early-1990s Cumbernauld adopted a notorious reputation, amidst a general anti-Modern Movement climate, as one of Britain's most reviled product of post-war architecture and planning. To date

six post-war buildings have been listed in the new town area: four religious and educational buildings by private architects. Yet, the most significant architectural and planning elements of the new town design – its layout, housing patterns, landscape, and the avant-garde Town Centre designed by the in-house team, have no heritage protection under our state system, and the award winning innovations made in design terms are not to be found in the educational and religious set pieces of the listed and protected buildings, interesting though they are.

Unburdened by controversial preservation concerns, RCAHMS carried out a full ground and aerial photographic survey of the town in 1990, and began archive gathering in anticipation of the winding-up of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation in 1993. This included the most significant architectural and planning elements of the new town design – its layout, housing patterns, landscape, its massive megastructural Town Centre (G Copcutt, Phase I, 1963-7), and also included its listed buildings.

The internationally-renowned Town Centre was part demolished and refurbished from 1999-2007, and RCAHMS recorded its painfully slow demise throughout the 1990s. Survey and archive collecting was clearly less problematic than active preservation, in this instance, but no detailed inventory was made.

Today, heritage professionals and academics alike appear to have accepted that whilst our traditional listing can deal effectively with one-off architect-designed buildings, there still remains vast post-war schemes, new towns, and mixed-use civic schemes threatened with demolition and redevelopment, which have no heritage protection. It has been argued that to list large environments and turn them into protected buildings, would specialise their ordinariness and therefore be contrary to their original idea.

This on-going dilemma is highlighted by two cases:

- On the one hand we have the enormous Glasgow landscape of 20 storey slab blocks marching in parallel at Sighthill Estate. For 40 years it housed nearly 10,000 Glaswegians, and latterly asylum seekers, but is now under phased demolition which began in 2008-9 with five blocks being demolished. It was system built by the local authority, was not designed by a renowned architect and there is little-known about it.

## INVENTORISATION OF MODERN HERITAGE: URBANISM AND LANDSCAPE

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- On the other, we have the architect designed point blocks picturesquely sited on landscaped ground on Cumbernauld's highest points of 1964-7. These 12 blocks with unique artwork and rich landscaping are due for phased demolition. When these are demolished, the all-important Italian hill-top town aesthetic of Cumbernauld will be lost.

So, if these large schemes cannot be simply preserved, then all that is open to us is recording and documentation for posterity. Both schemes have been surveyed by RCAHMS, but effective detailed inventorisation of large complex areas such as Sighthill is a challenge. This challenge on a local or national level is currently not one favoured by our cash-strapped state.

But in Scotland we have a history of inventory programmes and research being pioneered by voluntary and quasi-private initiatives. Some of examples of these being:

#### THE DESIGNER/CREATOR-LED INVENTORY BY SUBJECT EXPERTS

- The county by county *Buildings of Scotland* publications, formulated in the late-1960s by Colin McWilliam and David Walker, followed the selective art-historical pattern laid down by Pevsner, but our Scottish series deviated in important ways. In his 1978 inaugural Lothian volume, McWilliam's stressed the value of buildings of all periods. In his six-page section on Livingston New Town he deviated from the normal Pevsner hierarchy 'In the case of Livingston the historical and planning background is of such importance that it must come before the descriptions of individual buildings..'

The guides in turn became all-important reference books in themselves – a formula chiefly created by John Gifford, lead *Buildings of Scotland* author and researcher for over 40 years. *Buildings of Scotland* brought a new focus on public buildings, and included all schools buildings regardless of date. Full national coverage is expected by 2016. Underlining all this work was Gifford's extensive *Buildings of Scotland* research, now held in the RCAHMS

- The online *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, is a database providing biographical information and job lists for all architects known to have worked in Scotland during the period 1840-1980. It began in 2002 as an academic initiative to 'publish' a lifetime of David Walker's scholarly notes on nineteenth and early twentieth century architects. Under the direction of Yvonne Hillyard, and with the support of HS and Edinburgh College of Art it has mushroomed into an essential architect and site resource. The all-important extension to cover the 1940-80 period began in 2007.

#### THE TRADITIONAL SITE-BASED INVENTORY

- More modest was the *Cumbernauld Inventory Project* formed part of a three-year government-funded PhD thesis by a Docomomo member Jessica Taylor, begun 2002 (also part-funded by RCAHMS). It broadened and successfully developed the Docomomo detailed fiche-based inventory to cover an entire planned town, examining in detail the unique non-area clustered zoning of Cumbernauld's town plan. The task was made simpler because its built fabric had changed little over 50 years.

So, with the focus now shifting back to documentation, is it possible, in Scotland, to envisage any kind of coherent, site based 'inventory' of these post-war mass environments? Can we devise a sufficiently sophisticated recording technique to reflect a much greater diversity of the 'creators' – not just big-name architects – and one which covers the everyday and outstanding environments? Even if the will is there, who would fund such a process?

Our heritage inventory projects in the past have been pioneered by voluntary and quasi-private initiatives, which were eventually incorporated into the state structure. Amidst a growing acceptance that preservation can't deal with the scope and scale of our contentious post-war heritage, this model might be repeated.

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

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M Glendinning and D Watters 'Cumbernauld New Town: Reception and Heritage Legacy' in H Moravcikova (ed) *Architektura & Urbanismus, Journal of Architecture and Town Planning Theory*, 2012

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D Watters 'Recording our Recent Past: Scotland's Survey and Preservation Initiatives for Post-war Sites and Monuments, 1985-2012', in *Docomomo International Specialist Committee for Education and Technology Newsletter*, Spring 2012