

Helensburgh Heritage Trust Newsletter

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Raking about in Rubbish; *Part One*

Academy Sites

Or. Colgrain Matters!

Having been alerted at a Trust Board Meeting, to the evidence of an old bottle dump opposite the new Hermitage Academy, I felt motivated enough to take a look. This stemmed partly from curiosity, but also from my feeling that there might just be something of local provenance that could feature in a future heritage centre.

Given that the site is somewhat squalid, while at the same time heavily overlooked by the main road, I couldn't help but feel somewhat self-conscious as I moved on to the piece of land described to me. It quickly became apparent that a great deal of digging activity had already taken place I found myself in the middle of a great number of pits, some of which were at least as deep as I am tall. The coarsest of vegetation was growing nearby, to the extent that the pits were partially obscured and a real hazard to the careless or young. Additionally there was a lot of broken glass strewn around.

[This is the famous Helensburgh Green Belt-Ed]

The best course of action seemed to be to swallow pride and jump down to find out what was there. Quantities of bottles, and earthenware vessels of various sizes and shapes were revealed, to the extent that I did not need to dig. I selected a number of bottles to take away. The Chairman had said that it was believed that the dump is not particularly old, and without knowing much of the history of bottles I tend to agree.

It was then that I had a real stroke of good fortune in finding a dating clue. Beside one of the holes was a fragment of newspaper with charred and torn edges. It could easily have passed for a bit of contemporary rubbish, but something made me give it a second glance. Although fragile, amazingly I was able to tease out the fragments of several pages, and immediately spotted an illustration showing ladies of fashion with cloche hats - a real giveaway!

Back home, I was able to identify "The Glasgow Herald" for 30th September 1925. I would probably have thought it impossible that the paper could have survived for so long underground had it not been for recalling a TV programme dealing with the Archaeology of the Rubbish Dump. Here it was stated that plastics when buried are crushed almost into nothingness, but paper could successfully survive. Indeed the legacy of this is that printing ink can contaminate groundwater for many years afterwards.

And what of the news in 1925? No headlines were present, but snippets informed us that the British Broadcasting Corporation Ltd was about to extend its service to daytime programmes on an experimental basis, Sir Kingsley Wood was telling us that children born to-day could expect to live five years longer than their grandparents; a previous year's Bean car could be bought for £350; and a good-sized house, along with servants' quarters, could be had for between £500 and £700.

Obviously, one old paper does not tell the whole story of the dump, but it does help to set the scene. In a follow-up article, we shall look at the bottles themselves, not only for dating evidence and associations with local firms and suppliers, but also to find out something about what the good people of Helensburgh were buying and consuming in times past

Alastair McIntyre

The apparently imminent opening of the new Hermitage Academy on its new site at the eastern entrance to Helensburgh at Colgrain gives an opportunity to survey the many sites previously considered.

Hermitage School was built in 1880 in East Argyle Street between Sinclair and Grant. In 1946 a decision was made to build a new school. By 1954 a proposal was in favour of Colgrain because of the number of pupils arriving by train and steamer. Then bus services expanded and the Provost suggested a new school could be on the same (East Argyle) site. In 1959 Dunbarton County Council agreed that it should be built at Woodend and Suffolk Street. In 1960 the Burgh Council planned to refer the dispute to the Secretary of State. Later that year the County Council confirmed that it would build the new school at Suffolk Street! Yet by November its Education Committee changed its mind in favour of Colgrain. Given the new name of Hermitage Academy, it was built and opened in 1966, but soon found to be too small!

A second adjacent building almost the same size was built in 1973. Since the turn of the century again the battle has raged over whether to rebuild or new build. But 34 years later we will have a brand new Hermitage Academy slightly further out and on a new site, but still the first large building to greet visitors from the Glasgow Road.

KNC from research by Alastair McIntyre in the local newspapers

WWW.

helensburgh-heritage.co.uk

By the perseverance and genius of Donald Fullarton and Jim Chestnut, the Trust has a new look redesigned Web Site. Many more web surfers than you would imagine have been 'logging-on' to our records and information pages. Some just wish to know more about the town and others raise questions about people and places long ago. A recent addition is a full list of the agreed corrections which could be made to the content of '200 Years of Helensburgh.' Stewart has been collecting and appraising the suggestions received, in case a re-print is ever proposed. Whilst there may seem to be quite a number, this must not be seen to detract from what is not only the major but also the definitive History of Helensburgh.

The web site can also be used to keep in touch with you, our valuable members. The Board already receives its Agendas and Minutes by e-mail rather than the expensive post. We are wondering - - can this be extended to circulation of this Newsletter and general correspondence? Our Chairman Stewart Noble is keen to compile a membership list based upon your e-mail addresses - He would like to send out meeting reminders. - If you agree with the idea please send an e-mail to :-

stewart.noble84@freeserve.co.uk

Exhibitions

Last season's exhibitions were a great success. Because the Library is open to the public, and they rarely sign a Visitors Book, we have no attendance figures. But the comments on 'The Maclachlan Dynasty of Town Clerks' and 'Gregor Ian Smith' have been most complimentary, especially from their descendants. The latter resulted in donations both to The Anderson Trust and ourselves.

Programme of Public Meetings 2007 - 08

The members' annual general meeting starts the season on Wednesday, 26th September 2007 at 7 p.m. We do hope that this year, we will have a quorum at the first attempt! The agenda is not boring but it is brief! We hope that business will be dealt with in about half an hour so that the company can continue for another year. Then at 7.30 Councillor Ronnie Kinloch will entertain us with the history of Cardross, a local village of which he has a very considerable knowledge.

At the end of October, Marion Gillies will take us out to the West of Scotland, November brings us back home when Kathleen Siddle will talk about Helensburgh's Conservation Areas. These have existed for a long time but are not well known, so the Community Council and Argyll are making efforts to increase public support. The new year will bring a return to our favourite subject, the father of our President. We first met Dr Douglas Brown as an assistant to Dr Peter Waddell when he gave the very first of our lecture series, on 9th May 1997 ! Since then, Douglas has also conducted the successful series of Workshops in Helensburgh Primary Schools which we promoted. He has a very considerable interest and knowledge to impart. The subject, of course, is John Logie Baird. February will see the return of Sean Barrington who was very well received a couple of years ago. He is to talk about being a Storyteller. May Montgomery will talk about Ardardan in March - the Farm, Shop and Tea Room which she and her husband have made such a success. Finally, in April, we intend to accept the invitation issued by Rev Dane Sherrard last year to make an evening visit to the Luss Pilgrimage Centre.

Your members pocket programme is enclosed with this Newsletter.

Museum visits

When in the North recently, I was struck by what I saw as a new Curatorial approach. At The Highland Folk Museum in Kingussie, a small room is dedicated to the 'best' or 'favourite' artefacts of each of the Heads of Department at the Museum. The display is changed each season.

A variation on this at Tain Heritage Centre, where the Curator put on show in a special case his own 'Object of the Month' with description.

Much further North - or it felt so - and East, in Moscow and St Petersburg the great Museums are so much in demand, that deals have been done with the party organisers from Cruise Liners and River Cruise Boats. Whilst the Hermitage and Catherine's Palace open daily at 10.30 a.m. to long public queues; coach loads of Cruise passengers are on timed admissions from 8.30 a.m. through a side door! Inside, all the attendants are in post and every room has its Baboushka. Mostly these are elderly grannies who just sit and watch - but woe betide anyone who touches anything - including walls and doors, or any Licensed Guide who lets her guests linger and might cause a build-up. Everyone wears an obligatory pair of plastic overshoes, and the tips of walking sticks are inspected to ensure the rubber tip will not do damage to the floor!