

Helensburgh Heritage Trust Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

The First Street Layout for Helensburgh?

We all know that Helensburgh was planned, under the direction of Sir James Colquhoun, on a grid street system. But it now seems that a plan for the Barony of Millig based on squares and rectangles was produced in 1733. I am proposing that the present layout of the town may be traced to this earlier plan.

"A Generall Plan of Mallig belonging to the Hon. Sir John Schaw of Greenock, 1733 Surveyor, Boucher." had been seen before but dismissed as fantasy, partly because of its tree-lined avenues and roundels with lanes running out like the spokes of a wheel.

The Surveyor was one William Boucher of Comely Bank in Edinburgh. Hillary Kirkland, writing in 1988, in "*A Sense of Place*" ed. G. Cruikshank comments:-"Boucher had gained a reputation for laying out grounds in the formal French style. Some were commissioned and carried out, others unsolicited and rejected, sometimes scornfully." There is no suggestion that his scheme for Mallig was ever started.

The contention of this writer is that, contrary to Kirkland, a great deal of work was carried out, in accordance with the plan, and that there exist today, in the landscape of Helensburgh and its surroundings, many traces which bear this out. I must reiterate that Boucher worked in the French style, which was the custom at the time but by the time Sir James's Surveyor, Charles Ross considered the area in 1776-77 a different style of landscaping was in vogue. Also, in "*The Making of the Scottish Countryside*" ed. M L Parry & T R Slater (1980) streets based on a grid arrangement in planned villages are traced back to 1735.

Looking carefully at local maps, with observations in the field, the following are suggested as proof that at least part of Boucher's vision was realised. If argued that a feature is a later addition, it confirms the implementation of his ideas

Boucher had postulated at least two roadways running from the Clyde towards Glen Fruin. Parts of Old Luss Road and Highlandman's Way are not only straight but are parallel. Traditional routes like these would usually meander over the landscape, in sympathy with the topography., it can be argued convincingly that at some stage they have been re-aligned in accordance with a plan.

Blackhill Plantation runs along the hillside at right angles to the roads mentioned. Further, the O.S. maps show what appears to be a semi-circular feature in the plantation, which is very much in line with what was shown by Boucher.

The change in street grid alignment in the vicinity of Queen's Court, relative to that further west, accords closely with an element in Boucher's map. It might, of course be argued that this is coincidence, resulting from a change in orientation of the shore line.

What appear to be the policies of a mansion house on Boucher's map may well correspond with part of Hermitage Park.

One very good example of a roundel is the Scots Pine plantation adjoining the Golf Course - and it is bisected by Old Luss Road, which is exactly in accord with Boucher's concept. Examination shows that the plantation lies inside a perimeter wall, within which the ground is consistently higher than that outside. One can only conclude that a great deal of work went into creating this one feature. There are other woodlands round about which may possibly represent fragments of other roundels - but more work would be needed to confirm this.

The hillside north of the reservoirs displays a most impressive grid system of embankments and ditches, closely following Boucher - some are depicted on the 1/25,000 O.S. Map. Much slumping has occurred, but this can easily be accounted for, given 300 years of weathering, the wanderings of people and cattle, and that some land is soft and boggy. These features can be seen both high on the hillside and within the town boundaries.

Almost certainly there are other, unrecognised elements in existence, which could be attributed to Boucher, although it is easy to stray into the realms of speculation. For instance, is his influence seen in the semi-circular layout at Sutherland Crescent? Or King's Crescent - or were they inspired by another source?

In conclusion, it is suggested that some of Boucher's work did not go in vain. It may seem surprising that comments along these lines have not been made before - or perhaps they have, and are lying gathering dust in some obscure archive!

Alastair Macintyre

The Railway Exhibition

I do hope you all managed along to see our exhibition in the library on 150 Years of Helensburgh Railway

It (the exhibition, and not the railway) ran for the month of May. The comments in the Visitors Book have been highly complimentary, and I do feel that we managed to present a wide range of exhibits, many of which had not been seen before.

A lot of people were involved, but in particular I must thank one of our members, Dr Brian Cook of Shandon. He had experience of organising exhibitions, and so had a clear idea in his mind as to how ours should be done - this helped enormously with the layout as a whole and the clarity of the exhibits. Brian put in many hours and I am sure you will agree that all his efforts were worth while.

Many thanks once again to Brian

HSN

ACQUISITIONS FUND

Although the Heritage Trust makes little progress towards its primary aim of having a Heritage Visitor Centre in the town, a collection of artefacts suitable for exhibition is being built up. Indeed, some are being purchased, and there's the rub! Your subscriptions barely cover our admin costs, and occasional income, such as Royalties subsidises exhibitions and the like. Therefore, we appeal for Donations for an **ACQUISITIONS FUND**. Your Gift Aid Form enables us to benefit by an additional 28% tax refund. Please respond to The Treasurer, Rhu Arden Upper Sutherland Crescent G84 9PQ

Obituary - Dr Anne M. Gray

Secretary of the Trust 1996 - 2004
Honorary Vice-President 2004 - 2008

When Betty Humphrey came up with the idea of a Heritage Trust for Helensburgh, she was still living in Station Road, Craigendoran, and it was natural that she should discuss the concept with her neighbours. These included Dr Anne Gray and, before long in 1996, Anne had taken on the role of first Secretary to the Heritage Trust. Her skill and meticulous attention to detail ensured that the Trust started off on a firm footing.

When I first joined the Board of the Heritage Trust it quickly became obvious to me just who was responsible for its smooth operation. Board meetings always took place in Anne's house; she said that all her papers were there, and so she could readily consult them if required. The bonus to us as Board members was that she always remembered who liked which sort of biscuits, and Norman Glen was particularly pleased whenever fig biscuits appeared as he had found these difficult to get hold of himself!

When I became Chairman, I think that Anne realised that I try to rely on my memory too much at public meetings. Consequently I found that a little note was prepared for me just to make sure that I forgot nothing. If any form of catering were required, Anne made sure that everyone played their part in the organisation of it.

As both the daughter of a minister and the wife of a minister, Anne had a great knowledge of and deep appreciation for the Church. It was therefore most appropriate that, when "200 Years of Helensburgh" was being prepared, Anne undertook to write the chapter on the religious history of the town.

Anne was also instrumental in setting up the Heritage Trust website - it was amongst the first for Helensburgh, and perhaps even the very first. Her farsightedness in doing this had an almost immediate benefit for the Trust; someone who hit on the Heritage Trust website very early on was Malcolm Baird, who is now the Trust's Honorary President. We therefore have Anne to thank for "introducing" Malcolm to us.

Sadly, a few years ago Anne's health began to deteriorate, and she also suffered from an unfortunate series of accidents. Consequently she felt obliged to resign as Secretary of the Heritage Trust. It was a measure of the woman that one man was not enough to replace her! Donald Fullarton took on the role of Minutes Secretary from her, while John Johnston (in addition to being Treasurer) took on the role of Company Secretary. The rest of the Board did not wish her resignation to pass unmarked, and so we were delighted to make her the Heritage Trust's first Honorary Vice-President. Consequently she continued to attend Board meetings for a while in that capacity.

At her well-attended funeral service in the West Kirk, Rev David Clark said "that to be married to the Rev Ian Gray, you had to be a strong personality!" She certainly was that and her strong personality will be missed by many of us with great affection.

Stewart Noble

An original seat from Helensburgh Station has been acquired by the Trust. First Scotrail were delighted to accept it on loan and arranged for restoration. Placed in the Booking Hall, it is now in their colours!, although, to be fair, no-one knows what the original Livery was!

News from our Founder

We were delighted to have news, recently, of Mr and Mrs John Humphrey who now live in Tewkesbury. To be more accurate, they live on King Johns Island adjacent to King John's Bridge over the 'Back of Avon canal.' Recent flooding brought the water level within a couple of feet of the air vents of their house! They could not get out for three days, but fortunately were dry and warm inside. They send greetings to members and had hoped to come to the opening of the recent Railway Exhibition, but were unable to get away at the crucial moment.

DIARY DATES

24th September, 2008 -

John Urquhart: Footpaths - The Long and The Short of It

29th October 2008 -

Robert Watson: The History of Dumbarton Castle and Other Tales

26th November, 2008 -

Marion Gillies: Tales and Scenes of the West Coast

28th January, 2009 -

Helensburgh Memorabilia Night

25th February, 2009 -

Dennis Royal: Americans at Rosneath in the Second World War

25th March, 2009 -

Dr Douglas Brown: Images Across Space - Looking at Personalities and Technologies in the Baird Television Company

Two other deaths have also been reported recently, our Member Jim Fergusson and our lecturer and friend, Brian D. Osborne. We missed Jim at the Railway exhibition and we will remember Brian for his several books, and for impersonating Henry Bell !