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'New Life in an Old Town': Wheeler and Sproson, and the Post-War Reconstruction of Burntisland and Dysart



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Abstract and Lay Summary

This thesis explores the work of the important but little-researched architects, Wheeler & Sproson. It aims to set the practice within the broader context of Scottish post-war architectural history and to understand their place among a growing number of architectural practices between the 1950s and 1970s that set out to create a sensitive approach to architectural intervention in historic burghs, blending modern and vernacular forms and materials. Section One comprises two chapters and acts as the contextual basis of the thesis, discussing the key events and ideas that laid the foundation for the practice's work. Chapter One explores the differing regional and urban approaches adopted in Scotland in the decades following the war, complicating the primarily urban-focused understanding of the period. Chapter Two introduces the growth of a conservation inspired 'traditionalist' approach to architecture, bound up with the creation of the Saltire Society and its associated supporters. Section Two of the thesis introduces Wheeler & Sproson and two of their most prominent historic burgh redevelopment projects. Chapter Three examines the academic and employment background of the practice partners, Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson. Chapters Four and Five discuss the 1955-75 Burntisland and 1957-77 Dysart redevelopment projects in detail, exploring each phase through an extensive use of original archive material from Historic Environment Scotland's Wheeler & Sproson Collection. The third and final section of the thesis examines how Wheeler & Sproson's approaches in Burntisland and Dysart relate to those of their predecessors and contemporaries alike. Chapter Six highlights that the practice was part of a broader context and examines how their work reflects earlier approaches of figures such as Gibberd, Sharp and Sitte. Chapter Seven questions how the work of the practice fits within the context of others operating in Scotland at the time, and how Wheeler & Sproson's awards successes highlight their prominent position within this movement.

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Introduction

On the 7th of April 1956, the *Fife Free Press* published an article titled ‘New Life in an Old Town: Redevelopment at Burntisland.’¹ This article spoke of an ambitious project by the Town Council to redevelop the Somerville Street area of the burgh. At that time, Somerville Street was composed of a variety of seventeenth to nineteenth century housing which had fallen into a state of disrepair. The proposals would see it transformed, with a combination of newly constructed properties and restored early tenement housing. The article applauded the ‘logical contrast in architectural form between the old and the new’, whilst acknowledging the intention of the architects to use scale, colours, and materials ‘common to both 17th and 20th century building.’² This development stands as the first in a series of historic burgh redevelopment projects by the practice Wheeler & Sproson, which dominated the towns of southern Fife during the next fifty years.

Wheeler & Sproson were a young and enthusiastic practice that opened in 1952 as ‘H Anthony Wheeler’, soon changing to Wheeler & Sproson in 1954 when Frank Sproson joined as partner. The two partners had met through their shared experience working with the Glenrothes New Town Development Corporation in the early 1950s.³ The practice became well known for both their historic buildings preservation work and their modern designs. Following on from their work in Burntisland, the practice developed a reputation for their ability to manage difficult

¹ ‘New Life in and Old Town: Redevelopment at Burntisland,’ *Fife Free Press* (7 April 1956), p. 12.

² *Ibid.*

³ D. Watters, ‘Frank Sproson FRIAS: 19 November 1919 to 11 August 2019,’ *RIAS Quarterly*, vol. 40 (2019), pp. 96-97.

urban clearance sites in historic burghs. Their blended use of traditional and modern form and material helped to create their distinctive style.

The practice took full advantage of the expanded public sector of the post-war decades. It was mostly known for its work for local authorities, housing associations, health boards, universities, and the church. Of all the projects they worked on, it was their public sector commissions which were generally the largest in scale, the longest running and produced the works which attracted greatest attention and acclaim. These jobs also became the most successful for the practice, resulting in their 39 Civic Trust and Saltire Society Housing Design Awards and Commendations.⁴ Although successful at achieving awards, however, Wheeler & Sproson and their contemporaries did not escape critique. Most notably, their kind of sensitive, traditional architecture was often branded 'Neukery', referring to the East Neuk of Fife where much of their work was based.⁵ Despite this, the impact the practice had on south Fife in particular, is astonishing, with almost every burgh being noticeably altered in some way or other, primarily through housing schemes and health service infrastructure. Wheeler & Sproson was operational until the completion of their final job in 2005, a housing development for Canmore Housing Association in the Stenhouse area of Edinburgh.⁶

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine the housing work completed by Wheeler & Sproson in Fife at the peak of the practice. As will be examined in Chapter 7, housing accounted for almost half of the practice's overall output over their 53-years of operation. The thesis

⁴ H. R. Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design: 1937-1997* (Edinburgh, 1998).

⁵ D. Watters, 'A Modern National Tradition: Wheeler & Sproson and the Saltire Society Housing Awards,' *Prospect*, iss. 127 (2007).

⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job List,' *Historic Environment Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2016).

focuses on the period between 1950 and the late 1970s. During this time, housing accounted for 62% of the jobs taken on by the practice, with over a third of their overall work being completed before 1970.⁷ It was also within this period that 89% of the practice's awards successes occurred, indicating the high level of prominence of their work at this time. Most significantly, however, the period from the opening of the practice until the mid-1970s stands out as the era which contained the majority of their long-spanning, multi-phase redevelopment projects in historic settlements.

It is this type of project that forms the basis of this thesis and illustrates best the kind of sensitive but progressive 'modern-vernacular' architecture that Wheeler & Sproson were known for. Although 'modern-vernacular' architecture is difficult to define, this thesis will discuss architecture in which modernist impulses - in terms of form and materials - were tempered by inspiration gained from vernacular architecture and surrounding 16th and 17th century buildings. In particular, settlements will be studied where Wheeler & Sproson blended new construction with restoration and reconstruction work. To do so, an examination of their work through original architectural drawings was conducted.

The Wheeler & Sproson collection was gifted to the then Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) by Sir Anthony Wheeler in 2004.⁸ Currently under the management of Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the collection is held at an external store in Edinburgh. In total, the collection consists of 250 boxes of drawings and 489

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Saltire Society, *Diane Watters* (<https://www.saltiresociety.org.uk/about-us/branches/edinburgh/2018-2019-programme/2-march-2019-diane-watters/>).

manuscript boxes, containing countless documents.⁹ The collection is a uniquely complete and comprehensive collection within the context of the archive at HES, containing everything from large competition display boards down to detailed job files. Unlike many collections which have been divided between different institutions, the Wheeler & Sproson collection is a complete record covering the entire history of one practice. At present, the collection is in an uncatalogued condition, with many records in a poor state of condition and many items not seen since they were packaged up by the practice. As a joint research project between the University of Edinburgh and HES, this thesis is the first detailed study of the collection. As a result, full access to the collection was granted, allowing the material to play a central role in the findings of the thesis. Due to the size of the overall collection, however, it was decided that a focused approach of selecting specific case study sites was necessary, as a more general approach would not have been possible.

Across the six decades the practice operated, it undertook 1,362 jobs for 703 clients across 204 settlements (see Appendix 1). Out of all of these, just two redevelopment projects were selected to act as these case study sites. The Burntisland and Dysart redevelopment projects, which can be broken into 25 separate jobs, were selected as the main case studies to be examined as part of this thesis. These two sites were chosen for several reasons. The sites were arguably the most frequently discussed of Wheeler & Sproson's work, by both Anthony Wheeler himself, and within the press at the time of their construction. Burntisland and Dysart also distinguish themselves as two of the practice's longest spanning projects which occurred almost in tandem, with only two years between their start dates. This allowed for a detailed

⁹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection 'Murrayburn List,' *Historic Environment Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2016).

examination of the most significant and award-winning work completed by the practice in a period that is considered the peak of its success. An additional benefit of selecting these two settlements was that they also allowed for a detailed study of the practices approaches in a region which accounted for the vast majority of their housing design work, as we will see in Chapter 7. The thesis has several aims: to shed new light on these projects, drawing on the archive; to show something of the processes, organisations and individuals who were involved in shaping modern Scottish architecture and planning; and to offer a contribution to the wider histories of modernism in Scotland and Britain which looks beyond the avant-garde to the reality of practice.

Wheeler & Sproson's Place Within Architectural History

The position of Wheeler & Sproson's work and approaches within the existing literature on the subject will be outlined in the following section. There has been a varying degree of work done on the assessment of post-war architecture in recent decades. Practices like Wheeler & Sproson, who went to great lengths to produce architecture that fit within an existing environment, have yet to benefit from any substantial studies. In contrast, popular work by architects such as Basil Spence, Gillespie, Kidd and Coia and Peter Womersley who favoured bold and dramatic design, have received increasing attention in recent years. By examining the literature available on this form of 'heroic' work, as well as on regional planning, traditionalist architecture and Wheeler & Sproson themselves, we can better understand why there is a necessity for detailed work on this overlooked area of Scottish Architectural History.

Wheeler & Sproson

Despite their dominance in the redevelopment of historic towns across large swathes of central Scotland, Wheeler & Sproson have not yet been explored in a dedicated substantial study. However, over the course of 50 years, the detail in which their work has been addressed has increased in depth. The 1960s and 70s saw a small number of texts emerging that began to recognise Scottish architecture as worthy of comment, with several short photographic guides emerging on the subject. By the 1990s, a resurgence in interest in recent Scottish architecture developed, centred on the works of staff at Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh. Although increasingly detailed in approach, it was not until the 2000s that Wheeler & Sproson's work began to receive a more focused examination. The following section will explore this literature and investigate how it related to the practice.

Across the 1960s and 1970s there was a lack of discussion on post-war architecture amongst academics and critics in Scotland. Beyond the regular journals passing comment on recently completed work, there were only a small number of publications being produced that addressed Scottish architecture of the 1950s onwards. This is best discussed in Peter Willis' 1977 *New Architecture in Scotland*, where he commented that 'few architectural writers and critics over the past quarter of a century or so have acknowledged that there is any modern architecture in Scotland worth recording.'¹⁰ Willis noted that beyond such sources as Helmut Petzsch's *Architecture in Scotland* (1971) and Patrick Nuttgens' special issue of *Architectural*

¹⁰ P. Willis, *New Architecture in Scotland* (London, 1977), p. 7.

Design from January 1962 that was dedicated to 'Scottish Architecture Today', the architecture of Scotland was either only ever very briefly mentioned or completely ignored.¹¹

Through his 'personal selection of buildings', Willis was one of a small number of authors to recognise the importance of Wheeler & Sproson's work in this period, with brief mention of the Dysart Redevelopment Project.¹² Willis praises the site for its 'delicate balance' between quality accommodation and exterior aesthetic appearance.¹³ Wheeler & Sproson's work was also discussed in the previously mentioned *Architecture in Scotland*, where Petzsch's section on the 'Twentieth Century' explains how the 'skillful restoration' work at Dysart as had given the town a 'new lease of life.'¹⁴ Similarly, in *A History of Architecture in Scotland* of 1967, T. W. West mentions the 'candid use of [...] materials' their St Columba's Church in Glenrothes.¹⁵ In all three books, the authors only momentarily cite Wheeler & Sproson's developments in their short overviews of Scottish architecture. West's book is the best example of this, where his book races through from Prehistoric' Scottish architecture to the point the book was published. Despite this, West took the time to discuss Wheeler & Sproson's St Columba's Church in Glenrothes, even taking the time to include one of the book's rare building sketches on the site.

However, not all sources from this period were so fleeting in their analysis of Wheeler & Sproson's work. In his 1976 *Scottish Townscape*, Colin McWilliam took time to assess their

¹¹ Ibid; H. Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland* (London, 1971); P. Nuttgens, 'Scottish Architecture Today', *Architectural Design*, vol. 32 (1962), p. 9.

¹² Willis, *New Architecture in Scotland*, pp. 7-10.

¹³ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁴ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p.121.

¹⁵ T. W. West, *A History of Architecture in Scotland* (London, 1967).

recent housing developments and relate them to the broader context of the period.¹⁶ Although an early example, McWilliam's book is representative of the kind of thematic critical work on post-war architecture that began to take prominence in Scottish Architectural History in the 1990s. In particular the 1990s surge in interest in the subject was sparked by Miles Glendinning, who published several broad texts on the subject, starting with his *The Brave New World: Scotland Rebuilt 1945-1970*, which he wrote in 1993, alongside Ranald MacInnes and Michael Page.¹⁷

Following from this came multiple detailed thematic texts that spanned the post-war era. Notable examples that took the time to mention Wheeler & Sproson's work include Miles Glendinning, Ranald MacInnes and Aonghus MacKechnie's 1996 *History of Scottish Architecture, From the Renaissance to the Present Day*,¹⁸ and Glendinning and MacInnes' 1999 *Building a Nation: The Story of Scotland's Architecture*.¹⁹ The most significant work of this era, however, was Glendinning's 1997 edited work, *Rebuilding Scotland: The Postwar Vision 1945-1975*, which includes an interview between historian Charles McKean and Anthony Wheeler himself on his work at Dysart.²⁰ Each of these books are examples of where Wheeler & Sproson's work began to play part in the broader discussion of Scottish architecture, and while mentions of them remained for the most part brief in nature, these texts laid a foundation from which their work began to draw increasingly focused attention.

¹⁶ C. McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape* (London, 1975).

¹⁷ M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes and M. Page, *A Brave New World: Scotland Rebuilt 1945-1970* (Edinburgh, 1993).

¹⁸ M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes and A. MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Glasgow, 1996).

¹⁹ A. MacKechnie, M. Glendinning and R. MacInnes, *Building a Nation: The Story of Scotland's Architecture* (Edinburgh, 1999).

²⁰ C. McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', in M. Glendinning (ed.) *Rebuilding Scotland: The Postwar Vision 1945-1975* (Phantassie, 1997), pp. 110-114.

This is seen best in Miles Glendinning and Diane Watters' 2006 book, *Little Houses: The National Trust for Scotland's Improvement Scheme for Small Historic Homes*, which contains a detailed overview of Wheeler & Sproson's housing work in a chapter outlining the practice's involvement in the Little Houses Improvement Scheme.²¹ Although only part of the chapter discusses their large-scale housing redevelopment work, it stands out as perhaps the first time that the practice's housing work received a focused analysis. In her 2007 article 'The Limits of 'Heritage': Problems of Social Housing in Historic Towns' and her 2010 'Modernity in Context: The Postwar Revitalisation of Scotland's Historic Small Burghs', Diane Watters builds on her work in *Little Houses*, presenting a guide through Wheeler & Sproson's work and setting their schemes at sites such as Burntisland and Dysart in the broader context of Scottish post-war housing.²²

In addition to literature on Wheeler & Sproson's housing work, there has also been discussion of the two examples of their modern work that have been listed by Historic Environment Scotland. Watters' 'St Columba's Glenrothes: A post-war design laboratory for reformed worship' details Wheeler & Sproson's approach for the church, and outlines the conservation issues related to the building at the time.²³ More recently, the November 2020 listing of Wheeler & Sproson's Hunter Building at Edinburgh College of Art resulted in a detailed and lengthy description and 'Statement of Special Interest', which outlines the design and setting

²¹ M. Glendinning and D. Watters, *Little Houses: The National Trust for Scotland's Improvement Scheme for Small Historic Homes* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 74- 87.

²² D. Watters, 'The Limits of 'Heritage': Problems of Social Housing in Historic Towns,' *Docomomo Electronic Newsletter*, No.7 (2007); D. Watters, 'Modernity in Context: The Postwar Revitalisation of Scotland's Historic Small Burghs,' *Journal of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2010), pp. 3-48.

²³ D. Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes: A post-war design laboratory for reformed worship,' *Architectural Heritage*, vol. 12, no. 12 (2001), pp. 66-87.

of the building, informed by my own research.²⁴ However, as with all previously mentioned sources on Wheeler & Sproson, these articles remain simply short discussions of the work of the practice and as yet there has been no focused study of the practice of any substantial depth.

Regional Planning

One of the most interesting benefits of studying Wheeler & Sproson is the way the practice helps us to counter the current 'urban' focus of much of the literature on post-war architecture and planning. In recent years, the history of Scottish burghs has begun to experience something of a revival, with sources such as Dennison's 2018 *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns: Creation, Growth and Fragmentation* leading the way.²⁵ The work that Wheeler & Sproson were doing sits alongside others with an interest in these burghs who were also working in the field of regional planning and architecture across the twentieth century. Texts such as *Clone City*,²⁶ *Remaking Urban Scotland*,²⁷ and *Rebuilding Scotland*,²⁸ demonstrate the existence of these parallel strands of scholarship and a growing interest in the individuals involved in Scottish regional planning in the post-war years.

Patrick Geddes, Frank Mears and Robert Matthew were three of the most significant figures influencing Scottish town planning in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and feature prominently throughout the thesis. Often referred to as the 'father of modern town planning',

²⁴ Historic Environment Scotland, *Hunter Building, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh College of Art, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh* (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB52563>).

²⁵ P. Dennison, *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns: Creation, Growth and Fragmentation* (Edinburgh, 2018).

²⁶ M. Glendinning and D. Page, *Clone City: Crisis and Renewal in Contemporary Scottish Architecture* (Edinburgh, 1999).

²⁷ M. Keating and R. Boyle, *Remaking Urban Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1986).

²⁸ M. Glendinning (ed.), *Rebuilding Scotland: The Postwar Vision 1945-1975* (Phantassie, 1997), p. 112.

Geddes has been discussed at length across the past century. Most notably, his approach to regional planning, which encompassed concepts such as Regional Planning and ‘civic survey’ have been explained by authors such as Meller,²⁹ Hall,³⁰ and Hysler.³¹ Unlike Geddes, there has been less focus on his son-in-law, prominent Scottish architect and planner Frank Mears. Other than a 1987 thesis by Graeme A. S Purves on *The Life and Work of Sir Frank Mears: Planning With a Cultural Perspective*, there has been little dedicated work done on his career.³² However, a number of key texts on Scottish post-war architecture and planning briefly explore Mears’ *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland* of 1949 and its impact on the Fife area, particularly on the projected population movement to the region from overpopulated areas in the West of the country.³³ Although there is no direct mention of Geddes or Mears within the few interviews available with members of the practice, the impact of their ideas on the Fife region is without question and will be explored throughout Section 2 of the thesis. A contemporary of Mears who has received far greater attention in recent years, though, is architect and planner Robert Matthew. An advocate for Geddes-influenced planning and admirer of Scottish historic burghs, Matthew has been well discussed in several texts on Scottish post-war architecture that explore the varied approaches he adopted across his career. Most substantial of these is Glendinning’s 2008 tome *Modern Architect. The Life and Times of Robert Matthew*.³⁴

²⁹ H. Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London, 1990).

³⁰ P. Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2002).

³¹ N. Hysler-Rubin, *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning a Critical View* (Oxon, 2011).

³² G. A. S Purves, ‘The Life and Work of Sir Frank Mears: Planning with A Cultural Perspective,’ PhD. Thesis, *Heriot-Watt University* (1987).

³³ F. Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South-East Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1949).

³⁴ M. Glendinning, *Modern Architect: The Life and Times of Robert Matthew* (London, 2008).

A similar approach to regional planning was forming in parallel elsewhere in the United Kingdom across the twentieth century, with figures such as Frederick Gibberd and Thomas Sharp promoting comparable approaches to those of Geddes, Mears and Matthew. Gibberd and Sharp both produced a substantial number of texts on planning, such as Gibberd's *The Architecture of England: From Norman Times to the Present Day*,³⁵ *Town Design*,³⁶ and most famously, his plan for Harlow.³⁷ Sharp also wrote numerous books, journal articles and plans. Some of the most significant examples of these include his 1946 *Anatomy of the Village*,³⁸ his 1948 *Oxford Replanned*,³⁹ and his 1968 *Town and Townscape*.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Sharp's work has yet to be explored in detail in a substantial text. However, he has been discussed in articles and chapters by Ward in 2008,⁴¹ and by Pendlebury in 2009 and 2015.⁴² Gibberd's work, on the other hand, has been discussed in far greater detail, most notably in Christine Manley's 2017 book, *Frederick Gibberd*.⁴³

Complexity and Traditionalism

The field of architectural history has in recent years seen greater focus on popular trends such as Brutalism than on regional planning and traditionalist architecture. However, this 'visual' lens has begun to be countered, with several texts on regional architecture emerging. This

³⁵ F. Gibberd, *The Architecture of England: From Norman Times to The Present Day* (Cheam, 1938).

³⁶ F. Gibberd, *Town Design* (London, 1970).

³⁷ F. Gibberd, *Harlow New Town: A Plan Prepared for The Harlow Development Corporation* (Harlow, 1952).

³⁸ T. Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village* (Middlesex, 1946).

³⁹ T. Sharp, *Oxford Replanned* (Oxford, 1948).

⁴⁰ T. Sharp, *Town and Townscape* (London, 1968).

⁴¹ S. V. Ward, 'Thomas Sharp as a Figure in The British Planning Movement,' *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2008), pp. 523-533.

⁴² J. R. Pendlebury, 'The Urbanism of Thomas Sharp,' *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2009), pp. 3-27; J. R. Pendlebury, 'Making the Modern Townscape: The Reconstruction Plans of Thomas Sharp,' in J. R. Pendlebury E. Erten and P Larkham (eds), *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape* (London, 2015), pp. 125-41.

⁴³ C. H. L. Manley, *Frederick Gibberd* (Swindon, 2017).

work aims to explore a form of architecture that is potentially more complex and typical, more strongly rooted in place and process than the artistic visions of the architects. Prominent examples of this include works such as 'Houses in History: Regional practice and local character',⁴⁴ 'White Light/White Heat: Rebuilding England's Provincial Towns and Cities in the Sixties',⁴⁵ and 'History of the Scottish People: Urban Housing in Scotland 1840-1940.'⁴⁶

The topic of Traditionalist and Picturesque architecture is one which is receiving increasing focus from English architectural historians, with examples including Atkinson's study of post-war picturesque,⁴⁷ Campbell's examination of Robert Harvey's domestic architecture,⁴⁸ and Brittain-Catlin's look at neo-Tudor housing by Edgar Ranger.⁴⁹ The most notable example of this is Harwood and Powers' *Taylor and Green, Architects 1938-1973: The Spirit of Place in Modern Housing*.⁵⁰ However, while English architecture of this type has received dedicated work, Scottish Traditionalist architecture has been largely left to discussion in broader sources. An example of this is a chapter in *A History of Scottish Architecture*, titled 'By the People, for the People': The Traditionalists and Modernist Visions' which explores the prominent role Traditionalism played in Scottish architecture from 1914- 1960 noting how it was viewed as Modern despite its often-vernacular influences.⁵¹

⁴⁴ A. Powers, 'Houses in History: Regional practice and local character,' *Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, vol. 12 (London, 2015), pp. 8-15.

⁴⁵ E. Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat: Rebuilding England's Provincial Towns and Cities in the Sixties,' *Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, vol. 6 (London, 2002), pp. 55-70.

⁴⁶ W. W. Knox, 'History of the Scottish People: Urban Housing in Scotland 1840-1940,' *SCRAN*, pp. 1-6.

⁴⁷ H. Atkinson, 'A 'New Picturesque'? The Aesthetic of British Reconstruction after World War Two,' *Edinburgh Architectural Research*, vol. 31 (2008), pp. 26-37.

⁴⁸ L. Campbell, 'Against the grain: the domestic architecture of Robert Harvey,' *Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, vol. 4 (2000), pp. 52-60.

⁴⁹ T. Brittain-Catlin, 'Picturesque, Modern, Tudor-Style: Edgar Ranger in Thanet,' *Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, vol. 12 (2015), pp. 34-47.

⁵⁰ E. Harwood and A. Powers, *Taylor And Green, Architects 1938-1973: The Spirit of Place in Modern Housing* (London, 1998).

⁵¹ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 385.

Two of the most significant contributors to this Traditionalist movement in Scottish Architecture were Alan Reiach and Robert Hurd. The two architects were prominent activists who through the publication of their *Building Scotland: A Cautionary Guide* in 1941, argued for a modern national architecture rooted in the traditions of the past.⁵² Hurd also later became president of the influential Saltire Society which aims to protect the culture of the nation. However, although Reiach and Hurd have been discussed in several key texts on twentieth century Scottish architecture, such as *A History of Scottish Architecture*,⁵³ they have not had a dedicated book written on their work. The most detailed studies published on the architects are Frew's 2001 article, 'Alan Reiach's Scottish Vernacular Survey, 1937-43',⁵⁴ and Coleman's 2018 'Building Scotland, Building Solidarity: A Scottish Architect's Knowledge of Nation', which discusses Robert Hurd's his attempts at restoring the nation's built environment as an 'artisan of nationalism.'⁵⁵

In addition to Traditionalism, another element of Wheeler & Sproson's work to be examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis is that of 'Conservative Surgery', devised by the previously discussed Patrick Geddes. 'Conservative Surgery' allowed architects to combine their modern infill work with the preservation of existing historic buildings, avoiding the wholesale destruction of areas experienced in *tabula rasa* methods. Although Haworth's article on 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery' is the best example that relates this approach to Geddes' own work,

⁵² A. Reiach and R. Hurd, *Building Scotland: A Cautionary Guide* (Glasgow, 1941).

⁵³ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*.

⁵⁴ J. Frew, 'Alan Reiach's Scottish vernacular survey, 1937-43,' *History of Photography*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2001), pp. 161-168.

⁵⁵ L. Coleman, 'Building Scotland, Building Solidarity: A Scottish Architect's Knowledge of Nation,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2018), pp. 873-906.

little research has been done on the adoption of the method by post-war architects.⁵⁶ Glendinning's *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation* is one of the few texts that relates Geddes' 'conservative surgery' approach to post-war redevelopment work, with discussion of David Percival and Donald Insall's call for the approach to be used in historic settings in areas of England.⁵⁷

However, although the approach of 'conservative surgery' in post-war architecture has been broadly applauded by the few authors and critics who have discussed it, the topic of conservation has received far greater attention.⁵⁸ Alongside prominent work such as Powell's *Architecture Reborn: The Conservation and Reconstruction of Old Buildings*,⁵⁹ there has been a focus in recent years on exploring the topic of post-war conservation projects through international conferences. 'Mirror of Modernity: The Post-War Revolution In Urban Conservation', a 2009 conference by *DOCOMOMO Scotland* and the *Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland*, highlights the greater focus that is received by this topic when compared to the lesser studied 'Traditionalist' and 'Conservative Surgery' approaches present in architecture of the same period.⁶⁰

The Heroic and Bold

While the themes such as Traditionalist architecture and 'Conservative Surgery' approaches have fared poorly in receiving dedicated study, Scottish architectural history in recent decades

⁵⁶ R. Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' *Architectural Heritage*, vol. 11 no. 1 (2000) pp. 37-42.

⁵⁷ M. Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation* (Abingdon, 2013), pp. 298-314.

⁵⁸ R. Naismith, *The Story of Scotland's Towns* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 157-63.

⁵⁹ K. Powell, *Architecture Reborn: The Conservation and Reconstruction of Old Buildings* (London, 1999).

⁶⁰ 'Mirror of Modernity: The Post-War Revolution in Urban Conservation,' Conference by *DOCOMOMO Scotland and Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2009).

has instead tended to focus on a select group of popular figures who aimed to make a statement with their work. A notable example of a Scottish architect who adopted this approach is Basil Spence, who despite early Traditionalist works such as his housing at Dunbar, is best known for later Modernist projects that were designed in a consciously 'artistic' way, such as his Coventry Cathedral. Spence's work has been discussed at length by numerous historians, but in best detail in Campbell, Glendinning and Thomas' *Basil Spence: Buildings & Projects*.⁶¹

The book charts the visual and material shifts in Spence's work, from the modest housing of the 1930s to the emotionally charged Coventry Cathedral of the 1950s and the monumental Brutalism of the firm's 1960s work in such places as Glasgow. It highlights Spence's continued belief in architecture as art, and in a kind of 'decorum' which related the forms and materials used in particular projects to the type of building being designed. Particularly relevant within the context of Wheeler & Sproson's work is the housing scheme designed by Spence's Edinburgh practice for the historic Canongate, a reinterpretation of traditional Old Town forms coupled with concrete arches and projecting balconies.

Gillespie Kidd and Coia has similarly been discussed in detail. A major study was published in 2007, accompanying an exhibition in Glasgow,⁶² and there have also been articles by the likes of Gavin Stamp and Otto Saumarez Smith.⁶³ As the title of Stamp's article suggests, Gillespie

⁶¹ L. Campbell, M. Glendinning and J. Thomas, *Basil Spence: Buildings & Projects* (London, 2012).

⁶² *Collective Architecture*, Gillespie, Kidd and Coia Exhibition (<https://www.collectivearchitecture.com/projects/gillespie-kidd-and-coia-exhibition>).

⁶³ G. Stamp, 'The Myth of Gillespie Kidd and Coia,' *The Journal of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland*, vol. 11 (2000), pp. 68-79; O. S. Smith, 'Robinson College, Cambridge, and the Twilight of a Collegiate Modernism, 1974–81,' *Architectural History*, vol. 55 (2012), pp. 369-402.

Kidd and Coia's work has become associated with a particular 'myth' centred on their image as heroic form-givers: the abandonment of their seminary complex at Cardross has led to an impression of the firm as misunderstood geniuses.⁶⁴ The 1970s decline of Peter Womersley's career in Scotland - notably the abandonment of his grand scheme for the extension of Edinburgh College of Art - and the abandonment of the studio building he designed for Bernat Klein near Selkirk have similarly led to interpretations of a forgotten, misunderstood artistic genius.⁶⁵

This interest in iconic architecture has drawn particular focus to sites such as Cardross Seminary by Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, and to many of the works of Peter Womersley. This can be seen explored in Crocker and Leatherbarrow's 'The Closed Loop: Ninety Years of Health Care Architecture,'⁶⁶ which discusses Womersley's Nuffield Transplantation Unit. Due to their reserved and measured approaches, Wheeler & Sproson have not received the same level of fascination as these examples, contributing to the lack of dedicated research their work has received. With a better understanding of the material available on the subject, it is now possible to outline the approach which will be taken in tackling the topic.

⁶⁴ D. Watters, *Cardross Seminary: Gillespie, Kidd & Coia and the Architecture of Postwar Catholicism* (Edinburgh, 1997).

⁶⁵ *Preserving Womersley*, Support Peter Womersley's Architectural Legacy (<https://preserving-womersley.net/>).

⁶⁶ S. Crocker and D. Leatherbarrow, 'The Closed Loop: Ninety Years of Health Care Architecture,' *Design for Health*, vol. 2, no.1 (Abingdon, 2018), pp. 20-39.

Approach

This thesis was conceived through a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh and Historic Environment Scotland, as a means through which the Wheeler & Sproson collection could be examined and better understood. With Wheeler & Sproson as the subject of focus from the outset of the project, their vast range of building types and developments had to be narrowed down to a more manageable range. With an existing interest in housing, and this type of work standing out as the largest and most recognised element of their work, it was clear that the thesis would develop with a basis in this subject.

The thesis has three main aims. It is intended that together; these aims will help us to understand Wheeler & Sproson as a practice and the work they did. By examining Wheeler & Sproson's Burntisland and Dysart projects, their position within Scottish Modern-Vernacular architecture and the relationship they had to the broader context of the architecture of their period, we can begin to build a picture of what Wheeler & Sproson were like as a practice and bring to light their overall significance within the architectural history of Scotland and beyond.

The primary aim of the thesis is to study the redevelopment projects that Wheeler & Sproson conducted in Burntisland and Dysart between 1955 and 1977, to understand the approaches the practice took to the regeneration of two densely built historic settlements. While a broad overview of these towns could have been made, it was decided that only examining the sites in close detail, as the architects would have done themselves, can reveal urban patterns and help to explain their methods. Adopting a case-study driven approach has long been a popular

method of exploring complex matters within the humanities and social sciences.⁶⁷ In recent decades, several works on architecture, such as Florian Urban's *The New Tenement: Residences in the Inner City Since 1970* and Peter Blundell Jones and Eamonn Canniffe's *Modern Architecture Through Case Studies 1945 to 1990*, demonstrate the beneficial role this approach can play in exploring the built environment.⁶⁸ It was therefore a key aim that the thesis be conducted in this manner, as it allows for a comprehensive study of each phase and job of the two projects, allowing for a full analysis of their work to be provided.

It was also important that the thesis helps to explain Wheeler & Sproson's place among an increasing number of architectural practices that sought to develop a sensitive approach to the intervention of historic burghs between the 1950s and 1970s. These architects adopted varied approaches, ranging from new construction, restoration and even reconstruction to revive historic settlements in a sympathetic manner. Through a combination of modern and vernacular forms and materials, they hoped to create a new approach to architecture that fit within the existing context of the urban environment. This thesis aims to explain in what ways Wheeler & Sproson went about developing this form of architecture and how their work relates to that of their contemporaries.

Whilst exploring Wheeler & Sproson's relationship to this distinctive approach and its advocates is essential in understanding the practice, it is equally important that their place within the broader context of Scottish and UK wide post-war architecture is also recognised.

⁶⁷ L. Bartlett. and F. Vavrus, *Rethinking Case Study Research: A Comparative Approach* (New York, 2016), pp. 1-21.

⁶⁸ F. Urban, *The New Tenement: Residences in the Inner City Since 1970* (Abingdon, 2018); P. Blundell Jones and E. Canniffe, *Modern Architecture Through Case Studies 1945 to 1990* (Oxford, 2007).

The thesis aims to acknowledge the architects and planners that came before them and establish the ways in which their approaches helped to form a foundation from which Wheeler & Sproson built their ideas.

In order to address these three central aims, a series of questions must be asked. Firstly, it is important that we establish an understanding of the formative years of Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson's careers. What was their educational background and experiences, and what did they experience in the early years of their careers? Once this has been determined, a basis can be created from which to explore two of their most significant projects. To understand why the practice were brought in to work on these settlements, it is essential that we consider why Burntisland and Dysart required redevelopment in the first place. This then sets the scene and allows us to explore what the practice's general approach was and how the various stages of the development came about and whether there were any complications in their creation.

With a view to forming a basis of understanding on the state of Scottish housing expansion by the start of the Burntisland project in 1955, we will explore how the planning and development of inter-war housing set the scene for a growth in housing construction in the post-war years. The approaches to housing development in Scotland in the years following the war will be questioned; in particular, how these differed by region. For example, were the approaches taken in Fife consistent with what was going on in the urban central regions of Scotland, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh?

Once this has been established, a more focused examination can be made of the ways in which the conservation of historic buildings developed in Scotland across the first half of the

twentieth century. Who were the main proponents of this approach and what were their methods? We can then question the significance of Patrick Geddes' 'Conservative Surgery Approach' within Scottish architecture and planning across this period and attempt to establish the impact this had on the development of Traditionalist architecture throughout the inter war years. It can then be established who the key figures were within this movement and what their aims and approaches were.

Most significantly, however, Wheeler & Sproson's place within the broader context of architecture in planning will be examined. There are several ways in which this will be explored. Firstly, we will establish what aspects of previous generations of architecture and planning gave inspiration for Wheeler & Sproson's work. How did Wheeler & Sproson blend these ideas to create their own vision for Burntisland and Dysart? We will also contemplate how Wheeler & Sproson work relates to those of similar practices operating in Scotland within the same period and begin to query in which ways their work shares similarities to these. Secondly, we will determine what aspects of their work was most successful for the practice, in terms of both critical acclaim and typology. We can then examine Wheeler & Sproson more broadly. By assessing any themes that may be prevalent in their work, we can determine how they may explain the impact the practice had on both the landscape of Scotland and on its architectural community more widely.

Methodology

In addition to literature-based research, the distinctive geographical nature of the case study sites allowed for a focused examination of the sites through various methods. Examination of

newspaper and mapping collections helped to build up an understanding of how Wheeler & Sproson approached the redevelopment projects. Information on the projects was also gathered through field work on site and through the use of interviews. However, as the thesis was so closely linked to HES and the Wheeler & Sproson collection, there was a primary focus on investigating Burntisland and Dysart using original archival material, database content and photographic field survey data held at the organisation.

An extensive examination of the archival material associated with these two redevelopment projects was conducted. This involved investigating documents for 25 separate jobs, which were stored across 33 archival boxes. This material contained information on the 65 individual buildings and 6 additional garages and store buildings that the 25 jobs encompassed. The type of material contained within the collection varied from architectural drawings such as elevations and sections, to administrative documents such as technical letter or schedules of quantities, and photographs commissioned by the practice. Unfortunately, the degree of information available for each job varies considerably, with some jobs either containing only a handful of drawings or lacking archival material altogether. An additional difficulty was that the collection is at present in an uncatalogued state, with many drawings in a poor state of condition and some rolls of drawings still taped shut from when the practice completed them.

An overall database of all 1,362 jobs the practice worked on and where the material for each of these was stored was provided at the start of the project. When this 'Job List' was received, it was unfortunately incomplete.⁶⁹ While there was a reasonably consistent provision of

⁶⁹ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

information on job number, job name, client, and location; other fields lacked completed data. This was most notable in the case of dates of construction, where jobs that were more prominent tended to have more accurate information than others.

To better understand their approaches, the types of jobs they did and the geographical distribution of their work, the first task of the thesis was to study the list. In doing so, a series of categories could be contributed to the spreadsheet based on the existing information. This included information on factors such as client type, job type, region, and whether the jobs were for the public or private sector. This data enabled the creation of the selection of charts seen throughout Chapter 7, the maps included in the Appendices, and aided in the analysis of the entire breadth of the practice's work.

In addition to the archival material and databases, various photographic survey projects have been conducted by HES (then RCAHMS) of the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects over the past three decades. A limited collection of photographs of the centre of Burntisland, including parts of the redevelopment, was taken in October 2001. However, Dysart has been far better surveyed by HES, with surveys in September 1997 and March 2008 capturing areas of the settlement that have since been lost, and even parts of Phase 2 mid demolition. The photographs taken in these surveys were used in various ways throughout the thesis. They have been valuable for identifying the location of certain buildings and some photos of demolition helped to explain how the buildings were constructed. Canmore reference numbers have been provided for almost all of the Historic Environment Scotland photographs and drawings used throughout the thesis, as seen in the List of Illustrations, and can be viewed in a higher quality and enlarged on the Canmore website.

In 2019 a survey of Wheeler & Sproson's Grangemouth development was also conducted, partially as part of the skills development portion of this thesis. This involved the examination of the archival material related to the 20 phases of the Grangemouth project and a photographic survey. Although Grangemouth was, in many ways, a very different kind of scheme to Wheeler & Sproson's work in Fife, it shared many of their key characteristics, as will be explored in Chapter 7. The development was set on a level site that had been cleared for a completely new development, compared to the urban infill schemes seen in their Fife work. Examining the site proved to be a valuable exercise, as it helped to position Wheeler & Sproson's Burntisland and Dysart within the context of their broader work.

In addition to material held at HES, valuable primary material was also accessed through the local newspaper collections held at Kirkcaldy Galleries. Information was primarily found in the *Fife Free Press* and the *Fifeshire Advertiser*, which were available in microfiche format at the Galleries. The British Newspaper Archive has digitised these newspapers up until December 1956, providing information on any time Burntisland or Dysart were discussed. Unfortunately, beyond that point, the newspapers are not digitised. This meant that searching for any information on the two redevelopment projects involved visually scanning for any key words on the microfiche machine.

Due to the local authority structure of the time, Burntisland was its own administrative areas and was therefore primarily discussed within one area of the newspaper. On the other hand, as Dysart was simply one area of the broader Kirkcaldy local authority, any information on the redevelopment tended to become lost amongst news of the various other redevelopment sites

the council were managing at the time. It also became apparent with both developments that beyond the initial excitement and controversy of the first few phases, the newspapers gradually became less interested in reporting on the new housing schemes. This has meant that the extent of newspaper material used in the thesis varies dependant on which phases are being discussed.

Alongside the use of newspapers, historic mapping was also used to better understand the changing nature of the towns across the 20th century. Maps were valuable in identifying the location of certain buildings and help to identify prior land uses, such as in cases where land was impacted by industrial activity, such as mining. Maps of the two areas were accessed through a range of sources, each offering a unique type of material. The National Library of Scotland Mapping Collection offered maps up until 1938, providing information on what came before the redevelopment projects and highlighting former uses of the land. Digimap was valuable in its provision of mapping across the period the sites were being constructed, with maps available from the 50s, 60s and 70s. Finally, Google Maps allowed for present day detail of the site and for Street View imagery.

The restrictions brought about due to Covid19 also had an impact on the continued visitation of the sites, with various stages of lockdown preventing travel between areas. This led to the necessity for inventive means of conducting visits. The most valuable of these was the ability to use a virtual reality headset to explore the sites using Google Earth. This enabled the sites to be visited in a way that helped portray the scale of the buildings and the relationship between spaces in a way that was almost like reality. Most important, however, was the discovery that Google Earth contains access to various years of their street view data. This has

meant that buildings that have since been demolished are still visible and can be viewed in three dimensions and to an accurate scale. However, this is dependent on coverage and dates available, so certain areas of Dysart were not available to be viewed in this way.

When it was possible to visit the sites, however, field work was conducted. This included site visits and photographic surveys of the two redevelopment areas. The sites were both visited on several occasions. These visits enabled a better understanding of the settlements and how the redevelopment projects sit within the broader context of the areas. Having identified the various phases through archival research, site visits allowed for certain buildings to be identified and mapped, whilst also providing information on which buildings are still in use, and which have been demolished. Visiting the sites in person was also an invaluable way of understanding the general layout of the schemes, the scale of the buildings and the design of the public spaces. A photographic survey was also completed of the towns to capture them in their present condition and to provide up-to-date illustration. This was particularly important for buildings or phases that lacked archival material or where past HES survey work missed certain areas.

In 2019, the combined results of the research discussed above resulted in the creation of an exhibition on the work that Wheeler & Sproson did in the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects (see Figure 0.1 and 0.2). This was completed as part of the skills development portion of this thesis. The exhibition consisted of ten A1 information poster boards and twenty A2 prints of images from the Wheeler & Sproson collection at HES. The ten text-based boards can be viewed in Appendix 2. It opened in the University of Edinburgh's Minto House for a week from the 23rd to the 27th of September, with a private evening event

on the 27th. The exhibition then moved to the Mercat Centre in Kirkcaldy from the 8th to the 13th of October. The Kirkcaldy event was attended by 494 visitors across the week and provided an opportunity to talk to members of the public who have lived in the developments over the years. The most valuable outcome of the exhibition, however, was that it provided an opportunity for the family members and colleagues of Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson to gather to discuss their work and share memories.



Figure 0.1. The exhibition's week in Edinburgh University closed with a private event which was attended by members of the architecture community, as well as family members and colleagues of Wheeler & Sproson.



Figure 0.2. The 'New Life in an Old Town' exhibition was held in an empty shop unit in the Mercat Shopping Centre in Kirkcaldy. The Mercat was chosen for its location between the two case study sites and the opportunity to draw in passers-by.

Only a handful of interviews were ever conducted with Anthony Wheeler during his lifetime. This includes an interview conducted by *Scottish Field* with Wheeler in 1967, a 1995 interview by Miles Glendinning and a 1997 interview led by Charles McKean.⁷⁰ Although few interviews exist, they have proven to be of particular value in understanding how Wheeler viewed his work, at least retrospectively, and the architecture of the world around him. To provide additional information, connections made at the exhibition allowed for an additional interview to be conducted with a later partner of the practice as part of this research. Bill McLeod, who became partner in 1975 and senior partner in 1986, took part in an interview in October 2020. This interview provided a first-hand account of the operations of the practice from the point he joined the office in 1967 until he retired in the year 2000. Unfortunately, this interview was

⁷⁰ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 112; Sir Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning, 30 May 1995, Transcribed by K. Breen, 27 April 2018; 'Building a New Scotland,' *Scottish Field* (1967), p. 30.

not conducted in a traditional way due to the restrictions imposed due to Covid19. Instead, a series of questions were formulated and McLeod helpfully responded to them through email. Ideally, a traditional face-to-face interview would have been conducted to allow for improved opportunity for follow up questions. Despite this, the information gained is an invaluable addition to our broader understanding of Wheeler & Sproson as a practice.

Structure

The thesis will be approached in three sections. The first section of the thesis (Chapters 1 and 2) acts its contextual basis, introducing the key figures and concepts that laid the foundation for the practice's work. Section Two (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) overviews the early years of Wheeler & Sproson as a practice and provides a detailed chronological study of both the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects. The third and final section of the thesis (chapters 6 and 7) assesses Wheeler & Sproson's approaches in Burntisland and Dysart in greater detail, and examines how their work relates to that of those who came before and how it fits within the context of the period in which they practiced.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the approaches to public housing which had formed over the half-century prior to the practice's formation in 1954. By examining early local authority housing policy, we can set a basis from which we can examine the positions the practice took when designing their own work, and the forms of planning and architecture they set out to counter. With the regional element of Wheeler & Sproson early work one of their principal distinguishing factors, the chapter also concentrates on the differing regional and urban approaches adopted in Scotland in the decades following the war. This includes an

investigation of the regional planning approaches that were explored in Scotland after the war, such as Frank Mears' *Regional Plan for Central and South East Scotland*, which focused on the areas Wheeler & Sproson primarily worked in. This forms a basis from which to explain the differing approaches taken in the cities and built-up areas, compared to those adopted elsewhere in the country. By doing so, we can complicate the primarily urban-focused understanding of the period.

Chapter Two introduces the primary discussions and approaches within the relevant architectural circles within Scotland in the period leading up to the foundation of the practice. The section begins by setting the scene, examining how the Conservation movement developed in Scotland, and what impact this had on the approach to architectural interventions in the post-war years. Stepping away from this broader study on Conservation, an examination of Patrick Geddes' Conservative Surgery Approach will then be made. We are then able to move on to a discussion of the ideas of Traditionalism and Continental Modernism in the inter-war years, and how these approaches were gradually adopted by a group of architects who blended them to form a Modern-Vernacular approach to building design, one which they considered to be 'organic' and reflective of 'national' concepts.⁷¹

Once the contextual basis of the thesis has been explored, we can then begin to examine the practice and their work in more detail. Chapter Three studies the academic and employment background of the practice partners, Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson, and formative years of the practice before they began their work in Burntisland. The chapter begins by discussing

⁷¹ M. Glendinning and D. Watters. *Home Builders: Mactaggart and Mickel and the Scottish Housebuilding Industry* (Glasgow, 1999), p. 167.

their education, including their time at university and in architectural training. It then continues to detail Wheeler & Sproson's early careers, such as the involvement they both had in designing the New Town of Glenrothes. The chapter finally describes the formation of the practice, the development of their offices, and the creation of their first job at The Bowery in Leslie.

The following two chapters detail the development of the 1955-75 Burntisland and 1957-77 Dysart projects through a descriptive sequential account of each stage of their expansion. Each chapter outlines the historic context of the settlements before Wheeler & Sproson began work there to better explain the reasoning for and implications of their interventions. This is followed by an overview of the two developments, including a description of their overall layouts and explanation about how they were woven into the fabric of the existing settlements. The twenty-five different jobs that make up the redevelopment projects are then explored in detail, using original drawings, details from collection manuscript documents and discussion from the newspapers of the time. The aim of these two chapters is to provide a focused chronological study of the two sites to form a basis for analytical discussion of Wheeler & Sproson's work in later chapters.

Once the two case study sites have been introduced in turn, a more detailed analysis of the work of Wheeler & Sproson can then take place. Chapter 6 will question how Wheeler & Sproson took inspiration from earlier architects and planners to create their own distinctive style and approach in Burntisland and Dysart. This will be done by examining their work in the two towns in tandem through four elements: layout and landscaping, conservative surgery and conservation, materials, and forms.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by questioning how the work of the practice fits within the context of others that were operating in Scotland within the same period. By examining their work through themes such as the blending of modern and vernacular forms and materials, the scale of their developments and the geographical distribution of their own work, we can directly compare the approaches they took to the work of other architects creating comparable designs at the time. The chapter also examines Wheeler & Sproson's awards successes, examining which kind of work tended to be more successful in achieving recognition over others.

Although the thesis aims to provide a thorough examination of the work of Wheeler & Sproson, there are limitations to how far this could be done. Out of the 1,362 jobs the practice worked on, this thesis has only focused on the 25 jobs that compose the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects. Out of the remaining 1,337, jobs, there is ample scope for further work to be done that could further strengthen our understanding of the practice and how they operated. Within their housing work, there is a need for many of their other significant developments to be studied to a greater degree. Large multi-phase housing developments such as Buckhaven, Langlee, Grangemouth, Lochgelly, Kinghorn and Broxburn require detailed examination. Beyond housing, other significant areas of their work, such as educational projects, health care facilities and religious buildings could also be further explored. However, Wheeler & Sproson's work in Burntisland and Dysart highlights not only the significance of the practice, but also the importance of this form of sensitive historic burgh redevelopment within the broader context of post-war architecture in Scotland and beyond.

SECTION 1: WHEELER & SPROSON'S WORK IN CONTEXT

Chapter 1: Approaches to Housing Demand

1.1. Introduction

At the turn of the century, overcrowding in Britain had reached a chronic state, with poverty and unemployment rampant in towns and cities.¹ Visionary thinking and utopian ideals of reformists heralded hope for the coming century.² The following Section will be divided into two chapters, with Chapter 1 examining the conditions within housing policy and architectural discourse that paved the way towards the situation Wheeler & Sproson stepped into at the start of their Burntisland project in 1955.

This chapter will begin with a brief study of the beginnings of the social housing provision around the turn of the century, with the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1885 and the formation of the Garden City Movement. A detailed analysis of the inter-war period will follow, with focus on the most significant acts and reports of the era, before examining the private development boom of the 1930s. Lastly, a third period will be explored which will help us to better understand the situation in Scotland, and Fife in particular, by the opening of Wheeler & Sproson in 1954. The section will begin by discussing the developments on the West of

¹ L. Rosenburg, *Scotland's Homes Fit for Heroes: Garden City Influences on the Development of Scottish Working Class Housing 1900 to 1939* (Glasgow, 2016), p. 49.

² Dennison, *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns*, p. 247.

Scotland, with the *Clyde Valley Regional Plan* and the *Bruce Plan*. This will then set the stage for an examination of Frank Mears' *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland*, and its call for the expansion and redevelopment of towns such as Burntisland and Dysart.

1.2. The Dawn of the Council House

Housing policy in the United Kingdom has long been a complex and multifaceted topic, with varying approaches across different countries and regions. Throughout the nineteenth century, there was a growing belief amongst housing advocates that legislation was necessary to better the conditions in towns and cities. The nineteenth century saw rapid expansion of housing across the United Kingdom. This was experienced most intensely in Scotland, where housing was concentrated over a smaller area than in England.³ There are several reasons for this, with high density tenement housing, compactly formed cities and migration from the Highlands regions and Ireland combining to create overpopulated areas. This high density led to overcrowding and social problems which affected life in Scotland well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

In response to these conditions, newly formed charitable trusts attempted to demonstrate that private enterprise could provide decent housing for the working classes. Organisations such as the Peabody Donation Fund, the Guinness Trust, and the Sutton Dwellings Trust were formed in London in this period.⁴ Although these helped to improve living conditions for many,

³ D. Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland* (London, 1979), p. 13.

⁴ P. Balchin and M. Rhoden, *Housing: The Essential Foundations* (London, 1998), p. 2.

government intervention into housing markets was essential if living standards were to improve for the masses.⁵ Mass housing created by agencies other than private builders was much in its infancy in this period. There were a handful of voluntary local authority led housing programmes in cities across England, including London and Nottingham. Most influential on government legislation was the first local authority built municipal housing of 1869 in Liverpool.⁶ Similar initiatives were introduced by philanthropists in Scotland, such as the Free Church of Scotland. This included the development of 'Colony' housing in Edinburgh.⁷ The colony flats were typically built as two-storey double flats, with front doors on opposite sides allowing for tenants to each have a front door and private garden. Each flat would usually contain four rooms, with a separate toilet externally in the garden.

The Royal Commission on Housing

In response to the growing housing problem, in February 1883, the Marquis of Salisbury proposed to parliament that a commission be created to investigate the housing of the working classes.⁸ The result was the Royal Commission on Housing. Although intended to address issues across the United Kingdom, much of the information they selected was from London and only a small number of other towns. The commission recognised that even in areas where overcrowding was not present, conditions were often still poor. The report also acknowledged

⁵ M. Glendinning and S. Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (London, 1993), p. 1.

⁶ Balchin and Rhoden, *The Essential Foundations*, p. 4.

⁷ Rodger. R, *Housing the People: The Colonies of Edinburgh* (Glendaruel, 2011), pp. 1-5.

⁸ P. Nuttgens, *The Home Front* (London,1989), p. 47.

that private enterprise, philanthropy, and charity would not be capable of achieving the same impact that state involvement could, as it alone held the necessary power and wealth.⁹

The Commission report resulted in the creation of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1885. This act accepted that state intervention in housing was necessary and granted local authorities powers to condemn slum housing and govern the construction of new private buildings, including their spatial and sanitary provisions.¹⁰ By the second edition of this act in 1900, powers were provided through which urban authorities were able to buy land and construct their own housing.¹¹

The resultant housing was better insulated from cold, damp and noise, and benefited from better ventilation and lighting conditions than their predecessors.¹² Nuttgens argues, however, that although the Housing of the Working Classes Acts were beneficial in improving sanitary conditions, the subsequent 'by-law' housing was dull and uniform, following unimaginative interpretations of the new regulations.¹³ They were also criticised for their monotony and poor workmanship.

⁹ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 48.

¹¹ Balchin and Rhoden, *The Essential Foundations*, p. 4.

¹² Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, p. 48.

¹³ Ibid, p. 49.

The Garden Cities

Like Nuttgens, Architect and Town Planner, Raymond Unwin, argued that although improved standards for light, air and ventilation were secured through the Housing Acts of the late 1800s, he was disappointed by the resultant appearance of these houses.¹⁴ In response to this, Unwin's 1902 *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* publication attacked 'by-law' housing and called for self-contained Arts and Crafts inspired cottages, set in quadrangles (see Figure 1.1).¹⁵ Influenced by Unwin, by 1908 London County Council moved from building 'by-law' estates in places such as Shoreditch, to cottages on the edge of the city. Loosely based on the 1898 book *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* by Ebenezer Howard, Unwin proceeded to make his ideas a reality on a large scale in the 1909 Letchworth Garden City.¹⁶ Similar ideas could be seen in Scotland, though their adoption was less successful than in England.¹⁷ Rosyth Garden City in Fife was built from 1914, having been chosen to act as a naval base in 1909. Rosyth acted an experimentation for sanitary working-class housing development, with the creation of streets of Arts and Crafts inspired 'English' cottages (see Figure 1.2).¹⁸ The development of Rosyth was not a smooth process, however, with initial housing areas composed of corrugated iron huts.¹⁹ Permanent homes would not be built until after the onset of war. Despite these delays and tepid reception in Scotland, Garden City inspired cottages proved hugely influential in shaping the next half century of social housing in the United Kingdom.²⁰

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

¹⁵ R. Unwin, *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* (London, 1902).

¹⁶ J. Short, *The Post-War Experience: Housing in Britain* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 214.

¹⁷ Dennison, *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns*, p. 248.

¹⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 355.

¹⁹ Dennison, *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns*, p. 248.

²⁰ E. Harwood, 'Mass Housing as the Essential Twentieth-Century Building Type,' *Twentieth Century Architecture*, vol. 9 (2008), pp. 8-11.



Figure 1.1. Raymond Unwin's proposed quadrangles of cottages from *Cottage Plans and Common Sense*.



Figure 1.2. Rosyth Garden City is situated in Fife, just 8 miles from Burntisland.

By the end of the nineteenth century over 90% of the United Kingdom's housing stock was still privately rented accommodation.²¹ With the population of Great Britain increasing from 11.9 million in 1811 to 40.8 million in 1911, poverty and squalor were becoming a common sight in

²¹ Balchin and Rhoden, *The Essential Foundations*, p. 4.

the country's urban housing areas.²² Despite these initial attempts, by 1900, 75% of the population of Scotland were living in an urban setting and little was being done to alleviate the pressure.²³ Within the space of 100 years Scotland had gone from an agriculturally dominant nation to one of town dwellers where most of the population lived in rented accommodation and a reliance on private sector developers to provide housing.²⁴

The years between 1893 and 1904 were the last concentrated period of housing building before the First World War. Although local authorities were provided with the powers to extend their boundaries for the purposes of house building due to the Housing and Town Planning etc. Act of 1909, construction of new homes was limited.²⁵ Factors such as the rise in the cost of feus in Scotland, as well as town rates, legal costs and bank rates, all led to a reduction in the number of houses built by speculators in the 1910s.²⁶ Another contributing factor was that speculators had become suspicious of councils as a result of the housing acts. Some private housing schemes were cancelled due to this suspicion, and there was a marked decline in housing construction. By 1910, house building in areas like Scotland had practically stopped, with a dramatic decline in house completions.²⁷ By the start of the war, house building had almost ceased completely.

²² Ibid. p. 2.

²³ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 25.

²⁴ R. Rodger, 'Introduction,' in R. Rodger (ed.), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1989), p. 5.

²⁵ R. Rodger, 'Appendix,' in R. Rodger (ed.), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1989), p. 239.

²⁶ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 25.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 26.

1.3. Inter-War Housing Policy

The Impact of War

In Scotland, conditions at the start of the century were considerably worse than most other areas of the United Kingdom, with housing described as ‘unspeakably filthy’ and badly constructed’.²⁸ Before the First World War, Scots had lived in a nation tied to the global capitalism of the British Empire. By the time they had returned, prevailing concern from across the United Kingdom about these living conditions had transformed the political stance to one increasingly focused on welfare driven approaches.²⁹

The First World War had a huge influence on attitudes towards housing in the United Kingdom. The impact that total wars have on social policy is well established. Titmuss argues that as the conflict in the First World War included the whole population, and as it required such extensive resources and sacrifices from the people, the government committed to major social reforms to ‘constitute the other side of an unwritten social contract.’³⁰ As Walter Long, the President of the Local Government Board, put it:

‘to let them [our heroes] come home from horrible, water-logged trenches to something little better than a pigsty here would, indeed, be criminal...and a negotiation of all they have said during the war, that we can never repay those men for what they have done for us.’³¹

²⁸ A. McIntosh Gray and W. Moffat, *A History of Scotland: Modern Times* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 70–1.

²⁹ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 1.

³⁰ J. Burnett, *The Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (London, 1986), p. 219.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 219-220.

Titmuss' argument is that modern war is only worthwhile if the people can see the prospect of a better world at the other side. Although several areas saw improvement after the war, such as women's emancipation and educational reform, it was housing reform that benefited from the greatest attention from the government.³²

Another motivation for governmental intervention in the housing market was the increasing concern of the time that there was a mounting political unrest and a threat of left-wing uprising. As Swenarton argues, housing quickly took a central position as an 'insurance against revolution' for the Government.³³ This was most necessary in areas such as Glasgow, where workers' strikes in early 1919 resulted in a riot in George Square, which was only quelled when six tanks moved in.³⁴ First examined in Christopher Addison's classic 'The Betrayal of the Slums', and subsequently developed on by Bowley in her study written during World War II, nearly all subsequent commentators on council housing were in broad agreement that a reconfiguration of social and political forces occurs in the wake of the war.³⁵

Although housing conditions for the majority was in a poor state at the end of the war, the period from 1915 to 1919 saw a pioneering housing development take place in an unlikely corner of Scotland.³⁶ The Gretna new town was developed by the Ministry of Munitions amid

³² Ibid, p. 219.

³³ M. Swenarton, *Building a New Jerusalem: Architecture, Housing and Politics, 1900-1930* (Watford, 2008), pp. 41-58.

³⁴ "Churchill rolled the tanks into the crowd': mythology and reality in the military deployment to Glasgow in 1919,' *Scottish Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019), pp. 32-62.

³⁵ J. Smyth and D. Robertson, 'Local Elites and Social Control: Building Council Houses in Stirling Between the Wars,' *Urban History*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2013), pp. 336-354.

³⁶ J. Minett, 'Government Sponsorship of New Towns: Gretna, 1915-17 and its Implications,' in R. Rodger (ed.), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1989), p. 104.

war to house workers of a new Cordite factory. Something of a social experiment, the architecture and planning for the site was determined by Raymond Unwin and David Lloyd George.³⁷ A combination of housing types was used in the settlement, including conventional semi-detached or terraced houses, and innovative two-storey brick hostels which could later be converted to cottage housing. Gretna represents a rare early example of government sponsorship in new town development.³⁸ For the rest of the country, however, the progression of housing reform was a far slower process.

The Ballantyne Commission Report

The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland produced their Ballantyne Commission Report in 1917.³⁹ It was the first time the government recommended that the state should accept responsibility for housing the working classes and that they should back this up through financial assistance.⁴⁰ Created in 1912, the Commission was produced due to agitation by workers, particularly miners, over the condition of homes. The report considered that private enterprise had failed to provide a suitable standard of housing for the working class, describing conditions as 'terrible'.

The Ballantyne Report denounced speculative housing, demanding that Glasgow Corporation utilised municipal control to launch a building campaign.⁴¹ Densities of 400 and even 1,000 to

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 110.

³⁹ Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland, *Report Of The Royal Commission On The Housing Of The Industrial Population Of Scotland, Rural And Urban* (Edinburgh, 1917).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ J. Melling,, 'Clydeside Rent Struggles and the Making of Labour Politics in Scotland – 1900-39,' in R. Rodger (ed.), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1989), p. 49.

the acre were recorded in areas of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee.⁴² At the time, 47.9% of Scottish people lived in one or two room homes compared to only 7.1% in England.⁴³ What makes this even more incredible, is the fact that overcrowding standards in Scotland were 3 per room compared to 2 per room in England.⁴⁴ The report had identified the need for a quarter of a million new houses in Scotland.⁴⁵ Most significantly, the report was quite clear in its view that the state should impose the obligation of providing housing on local authorities.⁴⁶

The Tudor Walters Report

The era immediately after the First World War saw middle-class reformers encouraged the construction of dry, sanitary, and affordable dwellings.⁴⁷ Many saw Unwin's housing experimentation at Gretna as a model on which they could base an expansion of social housing. By 1918 rents had been steadily rising for over a hundred years.⁴⁸ Due to the laissez-faire attitudes of the time, if interest rates rose, then landlords attempted to raise rental prices to cover any loss in profit.⁴⁹ Pressure by reformers and worsening conditions persuaded the Scottish administration to bring in a form of rent control for all tenanted properties in 1915.⁵⁰ This was a first for the government, as it had never intervened in the housing market before.

⁴² Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 26.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 27.

⁴⁶ United Kingdom Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population in Scotland, Rural and Urban* (London, 1817–18).

⁴⁷ Harwood, 'Mass Housing as the Essential Twentieth-Century Building Type,' pp. 8-11.

⁴⁸ Balchin and Rhoden, *The Essential Foundations*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 26.

One of the most ground-breaking and influential responses to these post-war concerns was the 1918 Tudor Walters Report. Inspired by the Garden Cities, it aimed to 'profoundly influence the general standard of housing in this country.'⁵¹ The report criticised earlier local authority housing, showing that long term savings were made by investing in high-quality work, as opposed to the low-quality construction seen before. Aiming to improve the standards of housing areas more broadly, the report recommended a minimum of 12 houses to the acre in urban environments and stated that buildings of varying type should be constructed.⁵² The proposals of the Tudor Walters Report were revolutionary as they initiated a major innovation in social policy, ultimately affecting the character of working-class life.⁵³ It remained the model used in the inter-war years, and arguably even longer.

The Addison Act

Influenced by the 1918 Tudor Walters Report on the condition of housing at the time, prime minister David Lloyd George, declared in 1919 that over 500,000 'Homes Fit for Heroes' were to be built by local authorities and public utility societies.⁵⁴ These were to be completed by 1922 and funded through a system of subsidies. This was incorporated into the Housing and Town Planning (Scotland) Act 1919 (Addison Act) which aimed to fix the standard of housing to a level well above what were standard conditions for working class housing at the time.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, p. 248.

⁵² C. M. H. Carr and J.W.R. Whitehand, *Twentieth-Century Suburbs: A Morphological Approach* (London, 2001), p. 80.

⁵³ Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Burnett, *The Social History of Housing*, p. 219.

⁵⁵ Balchin and Rhoden, *The Essential Foundations*, p. 5.

Unlike the 1900 Housing Act, this was mandatory and as a result, for the first time all local authorities were given a clear responsibility for the provision of housing and in turn were provided with financial support from central government. One result of this was the Addison Act in Scotland was that local authorities now had to consider the housing needs of their people and submit to the Scottish Board of Health proposals to build houses in their areas.⁵⁶ All areas received subsidies and advice and most of the costs was to be government funded, without any substantial impact on local funding. The first public housing scheme to benefit from these subsidies in Scotland was the 1919 Logie Housing Estate in Dundee, which had been planned for since as early as 1911.⁵⁷

The Addison Act required that local authorities survey the housing needs in their areas and design building programmes to tackle them.⁵⁸ They were determined not just to build enough homes, but they were also determined to build homes of a standard deserving of war heroes and that could 'restore the depleted strength of the nation.'⁵⁹ In order to meet these standards, facilities such as bathrooms were included in new homes.⁶⁰ They were to be planned, designed and built by professionals in an up-to-date manner to assure health standards and architectural quality.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Lenman, B and Carroll W.D., 'Council Housing in Dundee', *The Town Planning Review*, vol. 43, no.3 (1972), pp.275-285.

⁵⁸ Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Burnett, *The Social History of Housing*, p. 220.

⁶⁰ Carr and Whitehand, *Twentieth-Century Suburbs*, p. 80.

⁶¹ Rodger, 'Introduction,' p. 5.

The Addison Act set a precedent for the professional design of mass housing, with a number of architects commissioned to submit plans for the guidance of local authorities. One example are the cottage plans designed by S. B. Russell, which implemented 'clear layouts of streets, sunny living rooms, as many bedrooms as possible, a cool place for the larder, easy access to the coal store and an avoidance of rear projections.'⁶² Soon the cottage became the symbol of the new state housing programme.⁶³

The subsidies of the Addison Act encouraged local authorities to act quickly, whilst also transferring the full financial burden from local authorities and local rates to government and national taxes.⁶⁴ Although this subsidy was only intended to be provided short term, subsidies of one form or another have been adopted by each successive government ever since. Although only about 10% of the homes projected to be constructed under the Act were built, writers on council housing agree on the importance of the new policy of building houses through subsidy.⁶⁵ The Act effectively established '*council housing*' as we know it today.⁶⁶ This began a near 60-year relationship whereby the national purse was open for local housing provision.⁶⁷

⁶² Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, pp. 53-54.

⁶³ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 157.

⁶⁴ Gibb, 'Policy and Politics in Scottish Housing Since 1945,' p. 156.

⁶⁵ Rodger, 'Appendix,' p. 239; Smyth and Robertson, 'Local Elites and Social Control,' pp. 336-354.

⁶⁶ Nuttgens, *The Home Front*, p. 53.

⁶⁷ Gibb, 'Policy and Politics in Scottish Housing Since 1945,' p. 156.

Housing of the 1920s

Within a few years of 1919, council housing provision had far outstripped private contributions.⁶⁸ Between 1920 and 1923, some 25,500 houses were built due to the Addison Act.⁶⁹ The Act brought about a new apparatus of administration and intergovernmental relations that each council area was responsible for.⁷⁰ Despite these advancements, it was estimated that out of the 500,000 homes the act aimed to build across the UK, 250,000 homes were still needed in Scotland by 1921.⁷¹ This again highlights the disproportionate numbers of poor quality housing across Scotland at the time.

In the following years leading up to the Second World War, several other housing acts were passed which introduced various levels of state subsidy for council house building and encouraged state funded slum clearances.⁷² Most notably, the 1920, the Housing (Scotland) Act provided local authorities with the power to 'hire' (compulsory purchase) private properties for housing for the first time.⁷³

Now that the local government was responsible for rental housing, the speculative builder now played a subsidiary role in the building programme. Even the 1923 Housing Act, which aimed to give speculators incentives for the construction of housing for lower paid workers, failed to achieve the desired result. This end of the housing market was seen by speculative house

⁶⁸ Rodger, 'Introduction,' p. 5.

⁶⁹ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Rodger, 'Introduction,' p. 5.

⁷¹ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 27.

⁷² 'Editorial,' *The Town Planning Review*, vol. 8, no.1 (1919), p. 1; J. Clarke, 'Slums and the Housing Act, 1930,' *The Town Planning Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1931), p. 163.

⁷³ Rodger, 'Appendix,' p. 239.

builders as being highly unpopular and unreliable.⁷⁴ There are only a few examples of such homes in areas like Carrickvale in Edinburgh and Cardonald in Glasgow, both of which appeared very similar to local authority homes of the time.⁷⁵

Brainchild of the Scottish Labour movement educated Health Minister John Wheatley, the 1924 Wheatley Act was another attempt at encouraging local authorities to build houses for the working-class. Rather than being focused solely on slum clearance as many of its predecessors had, the Act proposed the creation of employment in the building industry through the construction of homes for low-income families, with little attention paid to their present housing conditions.⁷⁶ It allocated generous subsidies from central funds and recommended that substantial contributions should be taken from local rates. Rents were capped to allow lower paid workers to benefit from the new housing.⁷⁷ The repayment period for capital expenditure that came from the new housing was to be extended from 20 to 40 years. In Glasgow, Knightswood and Carntyne were developed as a result (see Figure 1.3).⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ *UK Parliament*: John Wheatley and the Housing Act 1924 (<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/towns/collections/labhousing1/housea2/>); Rodger, 'Appendix,' p. 240.

⁷⁷ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 28.



Figure 1.3. The Knightswood area was bought by the city of Glasgow in 1924 and developed over the following three-year period.

Under the Act, the Government encouraged the Board of Health to reduce the costs of housing submitted for approval.⁷⁹ Design standards for housing were reduced to the bare minimum, resulting in what Niven describes as ‘dreary rough-rendered brick boxes which were formless, practically shorn of all detail, colour or ornamentation and utterly lacking in imagination.’⁸⁰ This ‘design’ was reproduced in local authorities across the country until the Second World War, with only slight local variations and adaptations.

Layouts of these 1920s estates were still being inspired by English Garden City plans but appeared lifeless due to a lack of landscaping. Ridged applications of local by-laws by road engineers and burgh surveyors also led to a rather dull environment. This approach was widespread and according to Niven, collectively it ‘completely destroyed the continuity of

⁷⁹ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 23.

⁸⁰ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 28.

domestic architectural design in Scotland’, something which a small number of architects and planners of the time fought to retain, as discussed in Chapter 2.⁸¹

The Era of Clearances

Although a subsidy had been made available for slum clearance since the early 1920s, there had been little action in this area since the war. This was due to the fact that there was an overall housing shortage and had they cleared housing there would have been more people in need of homes than they could provide for.⁸² The Housing (Scotland) Act of 1930 (known as the Greenwood Act), encouraged local authorities to clear slum properties in their areas. The Act promised a £2.50 sum for each person rehoused by the local authorities for a 40-year period.⁸³ This resulted in the construction of 15,800 homes between 1933 and 1934, compared to the 19,700 built in the entire 13-year period between 1919 and 1932.⁸⁴ However, the negotiations required for demolition were considered difficult and time-consuming by local authorities, who called for an improved version of the system.⁸⁵

In the late 20s and early 30s prices for new homes dropped steadily until 1932, when the Department for Health reported that building costs were roughly comparable to those in 1914.⁸⁶ The time had come for large-scale housing programmes and the raising of standards in Scotland. Unfortunately, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 led to the British Government stripping

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, p. 29.

⁸³ Rodger, ‘Appendix,’ p. 240.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 28.

funds from many social services, including the current housing programme. In 1932 the Wheatley Subsidy was cut by a third, and by 1935 it was discontinued altogether. The government attempted to use this time for slum clearance work and to encourage speculative building, but the house builders did not take this seriously.⁸⁷

The Housing (Scotland Act) 1935 augmented the 1930 Act, provided a subsidy for local authorities to remove people from overcrowded property in areas outwith slum clearance zones.⁸⁸ It was estimated that slum clearance in Scotland was on average six times greater than in England. Overcrowding standards of the time were considerably below the standards of today, with the living room able to sleep two people, children under ten were counted as half a person and babies did not count at all.⁸⁹ It was estimated that in Scotland over a quarter of the working-class population lived in overcrowded conditions, not including those who lived in sub-standard or slum properties.⁹⁰ Under the 1930 and 1935 Acts, Glasgow Corporation built areas of three storey high blocks with communal back greens, such as those at Blackhill, Springfield Road, Carntyne South. Buildings were faced with reconstituted stone, a recognisable feature of all slum clearance housing of the time in Glasgow.⁹¹ Ferguslie Park in Paisley was the largest slum clearance development in Scotland. Edinburgh built Craigmillar, Pilton and Niddrie (see Figure 1.4). Dundee, Aberdeen and Stirling also built slum clearance sites. In these areas there was little provision for shopping and little attention was given to landscaping between buildings.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ A. Slaven, *The Development of the West of Scotland 1750-1960* (London, 2013), p. 246.

⁸⁹ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Slaven, *Development of the West of Scotland*, p. 246.

⁹¹ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 29.

⁹² Ibid.



Figure 1.4. Cropped aerial view of the East Pilton area of Edinburgh, designed by Mactaggart and Mickel to a street layout by Ebenezer James MacRae, 1932-35.⁹³

1930s Private Development

In the 30s private developers started to show real interest in the housing market. They were encouraged by government and a small number of building societies developed to support them, who would lend money on small individual properties.⁹⁴ There was a boom in the construction of detached and semi-detached houses all over Scotland. The period between 1934-1939 was considered the 'golden age' of the bungalow, with ribbon developments and suburban sprawl, encouraged by the expansion of transport networks, seen nation-wide.⁹⁵ The best examples of these can be seen in Bearsden and Newton Mearns in Glasgow and Blackhall and Fairmilehead in Edinburgh.

⁹³ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, pp. 75-77.

⁹⁴ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 30.

⁹⁵ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 297.

During the 1930s, housing associations were given little encouragement by local authorities or by central government. As a result, little work was done by housing associations in this era.⁹⁶ One exception to this was the work done by the Scottish Special Housing Association, formed in 1937. By the late 1930s, the Government had begun to sponsor industrial development programmes which were increasingly linked to social building in the worst suffering regions. The Scottish Special Housing Association aimed to work in these depressed areas to improve conditions.⁹⁷

The Impacts of the Inter-War Period

Housing built in the inter-war period in the United Kingdom was subject to both successes and failures. There was a great output of new homes that appeared at a far faster rate and in of a higher standard than ever before.⁹⁸ There were also powerful attacks on slum conditions across the country.⁹⁹ In the 20 years before 1939, 3,998,000 new homes were built across the United Kingdom (1,112,000 by local authorities and 2,886,000 by private builders, of which 430,000 were subsidised).¹⁰⁰ By 1939 approximately a third of all homes were new.

In Scotland, 337,000 houses were built between 1919 and 1939. Two-thirds of these were within the public sector, in strong contrast to the 25 percent in England and Wales.¹⁰¹ By the

⁹⁶ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 31.

⁹⁷ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Burnett, *The Social History of Housing*, p. 249.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Knox, 'Urban Housing in Scotland 1840-1940,' pp. 1-6.

outbreak of the Second World War, local authorities in Scotland provided homes for most households. Between 1919 and 1941 they had been responsible for 70% of all new build houses, compared to just 28% in England and Wales.¹⁰²

The most significant success of this period, however, was the manner in which local authorities bore the responsibility for the promotion of housing programmes. Councils were aware that rehousing certain portions of the community would be difficult, and potentially unsuccessful, yet nobody else was prepared to rehouse the poorest sections of society in the political, social and economic climate of the inter-war period.¹⁰³ There are several factors blamed for the shortfall in housing construction in the inter-war years. By the 1930s, the cost of house building had trebled compared to 1914 values due to shortages in materials and labour.¹⁰⁴ The building industry had also gone into decline during the war and was slow to regroup and reorganise itself.¹⁰⁵

Councils also faced a challenge learning how to manage and build up expertise in house building. Although there were some good examples of successful housing areas in Scotland, such as Riddrie and Craigton areas in Glasgow, in the end, this housing proved to be too expensive for the lower paid workers and was instead taken up by skilled artisans and office workers.¹⁰⁶ Whilst the Housing and Town Planning (Scotland) Act of 1919 resulted in a degree

¹⁰² D. Robertson and R. Serpa, 'Social Housing in Scotland,' in C. Lévy-Vroelant (ed.), *Social Housing in Europe* (Oxford, 2014), p. 44.

¹⁰³ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁴ Glendinning & Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁵ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

of recovery throughout the coming decades, with projects like this, the country was still hit hard by the deep slump of the 1930s.¹⁰⁷

Another reason for failure was that there had been no consistent housing policy between the wars. Housing had become a political football, kicked back and forth between opposing parties and had never had the opportunity to gain any permanency.¹⁰⁸ While state aid was viewed as an emergency measure for one political party, its opposition were determined to make housing a lasting responsibility of government but lacked the political power or economic resources to do so.¹⁰⁹

By 1939, reformers could optimistically have believed that the housing 'shortage' was almost over, and with continued intervention at the same rate, future housing problems would be more qualitative than quantitative.¹¹⁰ This, however, proved to be a rather naive outlook, as it was not until the 1931 census results were published after the Second World War that it was appreciated quite how rapid the rate of family formation had been. All projections prior to this had counted on there being population decline and had not realised the extent of growth in this time.¹¹¹

On the eve of World War II, the fractions which John Boyd Orr used in describing nutritional status also applied when examining the condition of housing for the working classes. About a

¹⁰⁷ Rosenberg, *Scotland's Homes Fit for Heroes*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁸ Burnett, *The Social History of Housing*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

third were housed in newly built accommodation, another third was living in older properties, and a final third were still inhabiting sub-standard housing, much of which was in slum condition.¹¹² By the start of the Second World War, housing problems and housing issues were far from resolved when they were thrown into the background for the six years of war to follow.¹¹³

1.4. Post-Second World War

Impact of War

By the end of the Second World War, the United Kingdom had developed a healthy economy due to a focus on economic planning throughout the war.¹¹⁴ Scotland had avoided the effects of economic depression and its towns and cities had escaped relatively unscathed from the effects of war, with the exception of the air-raid-stricken Clydebank area. However, overcrowding in its towns and cities encouraged demands for increased reconstruction through centralised planning.¹¹⁵ After the Second World War, the new Welfare State emphasised the comprehensive provision of public services.¹¹⁶ Although over 1.5 million state-aided homes were built in the interwar period, the 'housing problem' was deemed to be even worse than previously imagined.¹¹⁷ The 1942 Beveridge Report aimed to address this issue.¹¹⁸ With 'squalor' cited as one of the five 'giants' it saw to be blocking the road to progress, the

¹¹² Knox, 'Urban Housing in Scotland 1840-1940,' pp. 1-6.

¹¹³ Burnett, *The Social History of Housing*, p. 249.

¹¹⁴ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 119.

¹¹⁵ Knox, 'Urban Housing in Scotland 1840-1940,' pp. 1-6.

¹¹⁶ P. Beresford, *All Our Welfare: Towards Participatory Social Policy* (Bristol, 2016), p. 70.

¹¹⁷ C. Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2005). pp. 341-362.

¹¹⁸ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 119.

report hoped to tackle slum conditions created by a growing population and buildings left bombed out by the war.¹¹⁹ Even with materials and labour in short supply, housing remained a priority.¹²⁰ As Petzsch put it in 1971, 'not since Victorian times has the demand for new buildings been on such a scale or resulted in so rapid a change in the appearance of many of our towns and cities.'¹²¹

Several reports and acts were produced in across the course of the Second World War to ensure the country was a better place for soldiers to return to. The 1944 Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act, proposed the construction of prefab housing as a stopgap measure until there were enough finances and labour to construct permanent housing.¹²² In total, 32,000 pre-fabs were produced for Scotland, 20% of entire United Kingdom wide programme.¹²³ Also produced in that year was the 1944 Dudley Report (the report of the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of Central Housing Advisory Committee), which called for the design of social housing to be adapted to better suit modern day living.¹²⁴

The Dudley Committee hoped that their report would shape the form of post-war housing as the Tudor Walters Report had done in 1918.¹²⁵ Before the war, flats were viewed as housing for slum dwellers, but the Dudley Report fully endorsed the concept of flatted dwellings and

¹¹⁹ W. Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London, 1942).

¹²⁰ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 73.

¹²¹ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 120.

¹²² J. Grindrod, *Concretopia: A Journey Around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain* (Brecon, 2014), p. 65.

¹²³ Rodger, 'Appendix,' p. 241.

¹²⁴ N. Bullock, *Building the Post-war World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London, 2002), p. 164

¹²⁵ N. Bullock, 'Plans for Post-War Housing in the United Kingdom: The Case for Mixed Development and the Flat,' *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2, no.1 (1987), pp. 71-98.

viewed them as a positive contribution to the housing stock.¹²⁶ However, the report criticised local authorities for continuing to follow the standards set by the outdated Tudor Walters Report. Instead, it suggested that local authorities consult ‘representatives of the women’s movement, the medical and sanitary professions, local government and the construction industry’ to gain a better understanding of the needs of those designing, building, and living in homes.¹²⁷ In terms of design, the Dudley Report contained no illustrations showing what kind of housing they viewed as appropriate, or how local authorities were to furnish their interiors.¹²⁸

The message of the Dudley Report was further fortified in Scotland by the Westwood Committee Report (*Planning Our New Homes*), published in the same year by the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee on Design, Planning and Furnishing of New Homes.¹²⁹ Alan Reiach (discussed further in Chapter 2) played a prominent role in the creation of the Westwood Committee Report, further drawing together the aims of architecture and planning in the period.¹³⁰ The Report recommended a mixed approach to housing, combining ‘cottages – single or two storeyed, detached, semi-detached or terraced’ with flatted building types, including ‘flatted houses’ and ‘flats (‘tenements’).¹³¹ The report also laboriously lists and defines the various requirements they viewed as essential for modern housing, ranging from utility room space to outhouses, and from construction methods to the design and supply of furniture.¹³² Most significantly, the report highlights that little focus had been paid to the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, *Planning Our New Homes* (Edinburgh, 1944).

¹³⁰ Glendinning (ed.), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 11.

¹³¹ Scottish Housing Advisory Committee, *Planning Our New Homes*, pp. 11-14.

¹³² Ibid.

possible provision of central heating to homes and outlines possible options for local authorities to explore, from space heating to district heating.¹³³

By the late 1940s, new housing had begun to more frequently implement such new innovations. It was assumed that all new housing would be fitted with a piped hot-water supply, with communal systems implemented in flatted accommodation.¹³⁴ In the post-war period, state-sponsored scientific research led to the creation of a report written in 1946 by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research: *The Heating and Ventilation of Dwellings*, or, for short, the Egerton Report.¹³⁵ The report set out recommendations on minimum temperatures and central heating systems.

Further significant policy was introduced in 1946 with the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act, which provided subsidy increments for flats in blocks of four or more storeys and for miner's housing.¹³⁶ This act proved to be particularly beneficial for areas such as Ayrshire and Fife, which contained growing mining communities. Such areas also benefited from a selection of policies centred on improving the condition of deteriorating housing areas. Improvement grants were provided to local authorities as an intermediate policy stage between new construction and demolition by the Housing Scotland Act 1949.¹³⁷ This was reinforced in 1954 when the Housing (Repairs and Rents) (Scotland) Act offered modernisation grants for privately rented property. These 'patching' grants allowed local authorities to make

¹³³ Ibid, pp. 32-33.

¹³⁴ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 18.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

¹³⁶ Rodger, 'Appendix,' p. 241.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

properties habitable while they awaited demolition and replacement.¹³⁸ By 1957, the Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act had introduced higher subsidies for overspill houses and homes for areas expecting an influx of industrial workers.¹³⁹

Scottish West Coast Approaches to the Housing Crisis

It was in this setting of every changing planning policy and housing guidance that the planners of Scotland were faced with the task of distributing large populations from its overcrowded city neighbourhoods. By the end of the 1940s, new ideas were developing about how best to deal with the demand for housing. Although there was consensus that new housing was necessary, disagreement about how to approach mass housing construction played out amongst architects and planners. Two contrasting planning proposals emerged in this period, with each believing their method was the way forward.¹⁴⁰

One proposal for managing the overcrowded conditions in the Glasgow area came in the form of Glasgow Corporation's First Planning Report to the Highways and Planning Committee of the Corporation of the City of Glasgow (otherwise known as the Bruce Report) in 1945.¹⁴¹ The Bruce Report advocated the retention of the population within the city. This was to be done through large scale clearance and construction of high-density tower blocks championed by David Gibson, convener of the city housing committee (see Figure 1.5).¹⁴² This upwards

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 242.

¹⁴⁰ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ R. Bruce, *First Planning Report to the Highways and Planning Committee of the Corporation of the City of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1945).

¹⁴² Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 3.

expansion was further aided by the 1956 Housing Subsidies Act.¹⁴³ This act provided financial support for taller buildings on a sliding scale, with the tallest buildings receiving the largest funding.¹⁴⁴ Although the Bruce Report was never completed to its full extent in Glasgow, its legacy led to many Scottish cities adopting its ideas, clearing large areas of slum housing for both low and high-rise comprehensive redevelopment.



Figure 1.5 The Corporation of the City of Glasgow’s First Planning Report (Bruce Plan), showing large scale clearance and redevelopment of Glasgow’s City Centre.

A very different approach to this was introduced with the 1946 Town and Country Planning Act. With this act, provisions were made for the implementation of New Towns, green belts and the planning consent system.¹⁴⁵ It endeavoured to transfer populations from overcrowded

¹⁴³ Harwood, ‘White Light/White Heat,’ pp. 55-70.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ P. Larkham and K. Lilley, *Planning the City of Tomorrow: British Reconstruction Planning, 1939-1952* (Pickering, 2001), p. 32.

inner-city areas to new external settlements, whilst creating a buffer to prevent further urban sprawl. It was the campaigning of F.J. Osborn, Secretary (from 1936) of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, later the Town and Country Planning Association, which best describes the idea of the New Towns.¹⁴⁶ He proposed that 100 New Towns be built across the United Kingdom to rationally restructure housing and industry.¹⁴⁷ He saw local councils as irrelevant institutions whose views on reform should be disregarded. However, the Town and Country Planning Association were often dismissed by commentators of the time as a group of ‘monomaniacs’ who sought attention.¹⁴⁸ Despite this, Osborn’s doctrine of decentralism was only partly watered down in the post-war proposals. The Barlow Commission Report of 1939 which ultimately established the concept of mass population dispersal, the regional plans of Sir Patrick Abercrombie and the 1946 and 1947 New Towns Acts, all adopted Osborn’s ideas to one degree or another.¹⁴⁹

In this period, the aim of the Scottish Office was to combine diversification of industrial growth with social regeneration, whilst managing the growing cities and catering for incoming populations from the rapidly depopulating Highlands.¹⁵⁰ To achieve this, it looked towards the creation of New Towns. In Scotland the responsibility of investigating the New Towns fell to Robert Matthew, who was involved in much of the leading documentation and design work of the time.¹⁵¹ He was heavily involved in planning legislation, becoming Department for Health’s

¹⁴⁶ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 157.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁸ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ M. Glendinning, ‘Cluster Homes: Planning and Housing in Cumbernauld New Town,’ *Twentieth Century Architecture*, vol. 9 (2008), pp. 132-146.

¹⁵¹ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 10.

Deputy Chief Architect in 1943, then in 1945 became Chief Architect and Planning Officer.¹⁵² This allowed him to advocate the integration of architecture and planning to allow for the construction and mass-production of modern dwellings within a community planning environment.¹⁵³ The Clyde Valley Regional Plan was commissioned in 1943 by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who wanted a 'regenerated city surrounded by regional parks and with a lower population achieved by decanting population via overspill.'¹⁵⁴ It proposed relocating 550,000 Glaswegians to either the suburbs or to areas outside of the city limits.¹⁵⁵ In 1944 Robert Matthew and Patrick Abercrombie were commissioned to produce the plan, which they went on to do between 1946 and 1949.¹⁵⁶ The aim was to determine the best approach to re-house over 25% of Glasgow's population.¹⁵⁷

Following the advice of the Clyde Valley Regional Plan, a series of five post-war planned towns were developed across Scotland in the following years inspired by the still prominent Garden City concept, with neighbourhood units separated by greenery and with a separate town centre.¹⁵⁸ In the West of Scotland, work began on East Kilbride in 1947, Cumbernauld from 1955, and Irvine from 1966.¹⁵⁹ Two New Towns were also formed in the East, with Glenrothes from 1948 (where Anthony Wheeler & Frank Sproson took on work) and Livingston from 1962.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ J. R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (Oxon, 2007), p. 81.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ A. McIntosh, 'The Clyde Valley Regional Plan: 1946 Prepared for the Clyde Valley Regional Planning Committee,' *The Town Planning Review*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1949), p. 291.

¹⁵⁷ Glendinning and Page, *Clone City*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ Glendinning, 'Cluster Homes,' pp. 132-146.

Founded on a utopian enthusiasm for sweeping reconstruction, the aim was to make these settlements as contrasting as possible to the high density, mixed *laissez-faire* cities.

Unlike typical housing intervention in existing settlements which had dominated the first half of the century, New Towns were designed as a single unit, with housing making up just one part of an overall integral plan and community vision for the town.¹⁶⁰ It was not until the 1950s that attitudes to New Town construction changed.¹⁶¹ New Towns began to be looked upon with suspicion, and at times hostility, by the powerful political leaders who had thus far dominated the municipal public housing market. As Niven explains, 'the problems of attempting to design and build 500-1,000 houses to a satisfactory standard and to meet 'political' deadlines should not be minimised.'¹⁶² Equally, criticism of the low density approach of the New Towns began to gain traction, with articles such as J. M. Richards' 'Failure of New Towns' in the 1953 *Architectural Review* suggesting that a higher density 'urbanity' be used instead.¹⁶³ Eventually the regional planning movement was swept aside in favour of governmentally managed New Towns.¹⁶⁴

The Approach in South East Scotland

Areas such as the Clyde Valley were also often hampered by political bureaucracy, which was often caused by their populous nature and large number of authority areas. In the South East

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 114.

¹⁶³ J. M. Richards, 'Failure of the New Towns,' *Architectural Review*, vol. 114, no. 679 (1953), pp. 28-3.

¹⁶⁴ Glendinning, 'Cluster Homes,' pp. 132-146.

of Scotland, by contrast, housing politicians worked closely alongside small local authorities, allowing for a potential for architect-led innovation.¹⁶⁵ Architects recognised the post-war need for planned communities as a solution to the housing crisis. They saw an opportunity to harmonise the old and the new and took on the responsibility of understanding historic urban character and manage its change.¹⁶⁶ There was the potential for a new kind of environment to grow out of the old, as architects tackled the overall planned ensemble of these settlements.¹⁶⁷

In 1927, Frank Mears was made responsible for the establishment of the 'Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland', through which he extended his interests in planning mainly through the production of standard designs for smaller local authorities who lacked in-house facilities to use.¹⁶⁸ These local authorities could hire planning consultants to manage any land-use or civic design matters.¹⁶⁹ One of the responsibilities of these consultants was to produce a survey and development plan for each burgh within their area in accordance with the current planning act.¹⁷⁰

Mears also worked to encourage the use of regional planning to better understand the relationship between settlements and their surrounding environment. Regional planning was a concept first conceived by Mears' father-in-law, town planner Patrick Geddes. At the turn of the century Geddes was inspired by a group of French geographers who had a belief in

¹⁶⁵ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 33-48.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 421.

¹⁶⁹ F. Tindall, 'Small Burgh Planning,' *Architectural Prospect*, vol.7 (1957), pp. 22-25.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

anarchistic communism based on free confederations of autonomous regions.¹⁷¹ Inspired by French sociologist Frédéric Le Play, Geddes formed his idea of the natural region.¹⁷² For Geddes, planning started with a survey of the resources of a region and the human responses to them and the resultant complex cultural landscape.¹⁷³ In Geddes' Outlook Tower in the Old Town of Edinburgh, he endeavoured to bring together people of all kinds to learn how to study the relationship between 'place, work and folk'.¹⁷⁴ He believed that by studying the area within river basins, we could then better be prepared to understand the cities within.

Geddes argued that the planners' ordinary maps were useless and instead they should draw cross-sections of regions from mountain to sea to understand the climate, vegetation, and animal life within. It was important to Geddes to first understand the natural fabric of the region before studying the human elements. To understand the human aspect, he proposed the study the layers of built environment from the past through to the present. The saying 'Survey before Plan' used by planners to this day comes from this concept by Geddes. For Geddes, regional survey allowed for the understanding of an 'active, experienced environment' which was the driving force behind human development.¹⁷⁵ Geddes hoped that planners would adopt this method of surveying and would in turn develop regional planning models that would respond to these conditions.

¹⁷¹ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 143.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 146.

¹⁷³ Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement*, p. 141.

¹⁷⁴ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 146.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 150.

Whilst working at the 'Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland', Frank Mears began implementing his father-in-law's regional planning method through his role as planning consultant for the burghs of Dumfries, Elgin, Girvan, Greenock, Perth, Stirling and Thurso and the counties of Aberdeenshire, Fife, East Lothian, Midlothian, Inverness-shire, Peebles-shire and Sutherland. The most significant works that resulted from this post, were his 1946 *Fife Looks Ahead*, and his 1948 *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland*. In particular, the *Regional Survey and Plan* is one of the major Regional Development Plans that stemmed from the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.¹⁷⁶ The purpose of the post-war Regional Development Plan was to study the relationship between towns and their surrounding areas. All aspects of life were considered, including industrial, economic, social, value of land, buildings, services and historic interest.¹⁷⁷ They planned out land use zoning for a twenty-year period and were exhibited to the public to be subject to any objection or inquiry. One of the aspects of the Development Plan was to identify areas for comprehensive development, either in town centre sites or in the outskirts. County Councils could then act as an estate developer and clear land for reuse.¹⁷⁸

Up until the Second World War, the regional burghs saw very little architectural or planning intervention, apart from St Andrews and Thurso, as local authorities did not consider themselves responsible for urban development.¹⁷⁹ As planning became mandatory in 1947, local County Councils, such as Fife County Council, were forced to create Planning Authorities

¹⁷⁶ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁷ Tindall, 'Small Burgh Planning,' pp. 22-25.

¹⁷⁸ Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁹ Tindall, 'Small Burgh Planning,' pp. 22-25.

for burghs that combined the county architect and the county planner's responsibilities.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, County Planning Authorities were still not responsible for much of the development in the Small Burghs contained within these county areas. Areas such as permitted development, lighting, road works and signage were outwith their control and were instead the responsibility of Small Burghs, such as Burntisland, Kinghorn or Buckhaven and Methil.¹⁸¹ County Planning officials controlled only private development, and therefore were also not responsible for council building, which lay under the control of the individual Small Town Councils. Therefore, the County Planning Committee had little over-riding ability within the County area, and their work was dependant on how convincing planning officers were in persuading Town Councils to consider their services.¹⁸²

Mears' *Regional Survey and Plan* aimed to tackle these issues whilst responding to the main issues the region faced. Management of population was the most significant part of the plan, with general migration to the region expected from across Scotland (see Figure 1.6). However, it was the impact on planning caused by the expansion of the region's coal mining industries which caused the most concern, with an expected 45,000 people expected to arrive in the Fife mining area from the Greater Glasgow area (see Figure 1.7).¹⁸³ In Fife, Mears' plan promised of a vast expansion of the coalfields, with large new sinkings proposed in Dysart, Rothes and Earlseat (see Figure 1.8).¹⁸⁴ By 1975 the Central and South Eastern region was expected to account for 75% of Scottish coal output, up from 55% in 1939.¹⁸⁵ The population of the East

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Tindall, 'Small Burgh Planning,' p. 63.

Fife Coalfield area was projected to increase from 95,000 in 1949 to 140,000 within the following decades.¹⁸⁶ Of this, an expected 5,250 coalminers would arrive by 1975, as well as their families and those working in supporting services and industries.¹⁸⁷ This was intended to reverse the decline of industry in the region through the creation of thousands of new jobs.¹⁸⁸

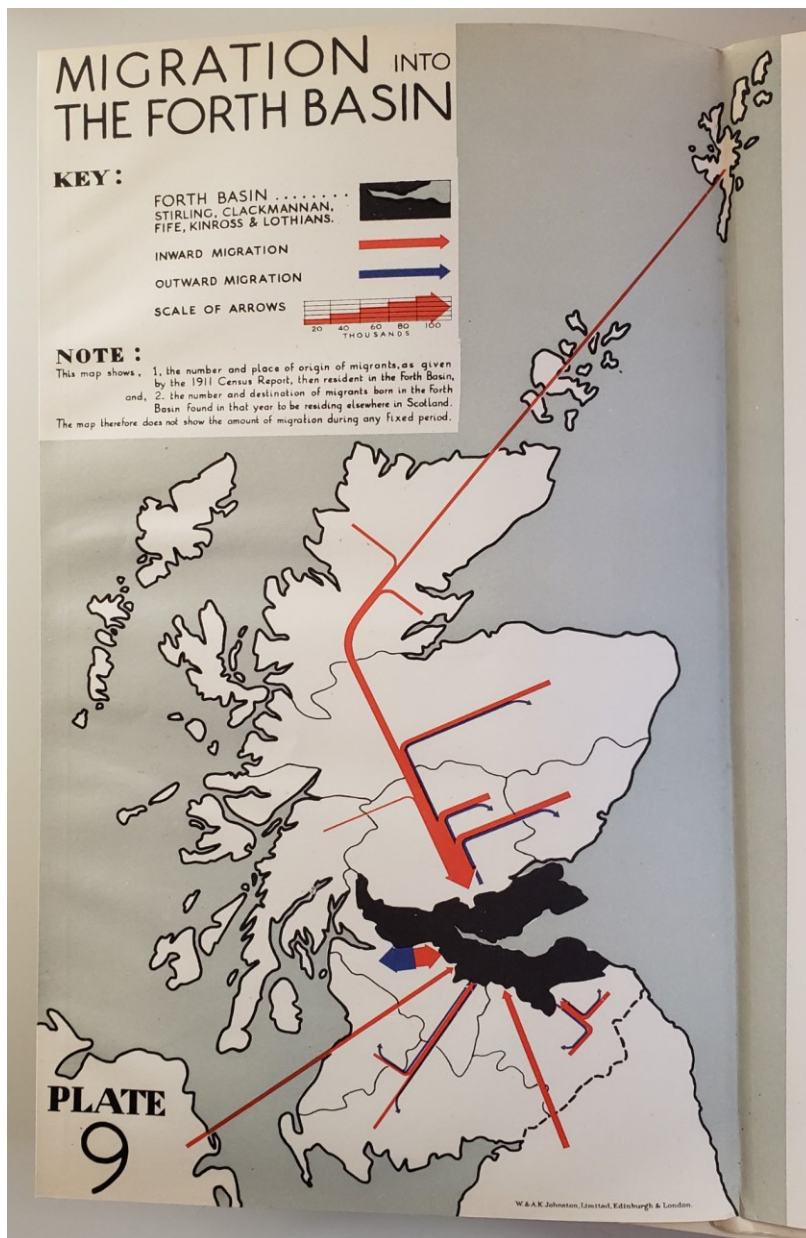


Figure 1.6. 'Migration into the Forth Basin' shows the number of people who had changed residence and moved to the Forth Basin area since 1911.

¹⁸⁶ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁷ Tindall, 'Small Burgh Planning,' p. 80.

¹⁸⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 434.



Figure 1.7. 'Future Movement of Mining Population', showing the predicted movement of 45,000 people into the Fife mining areas.

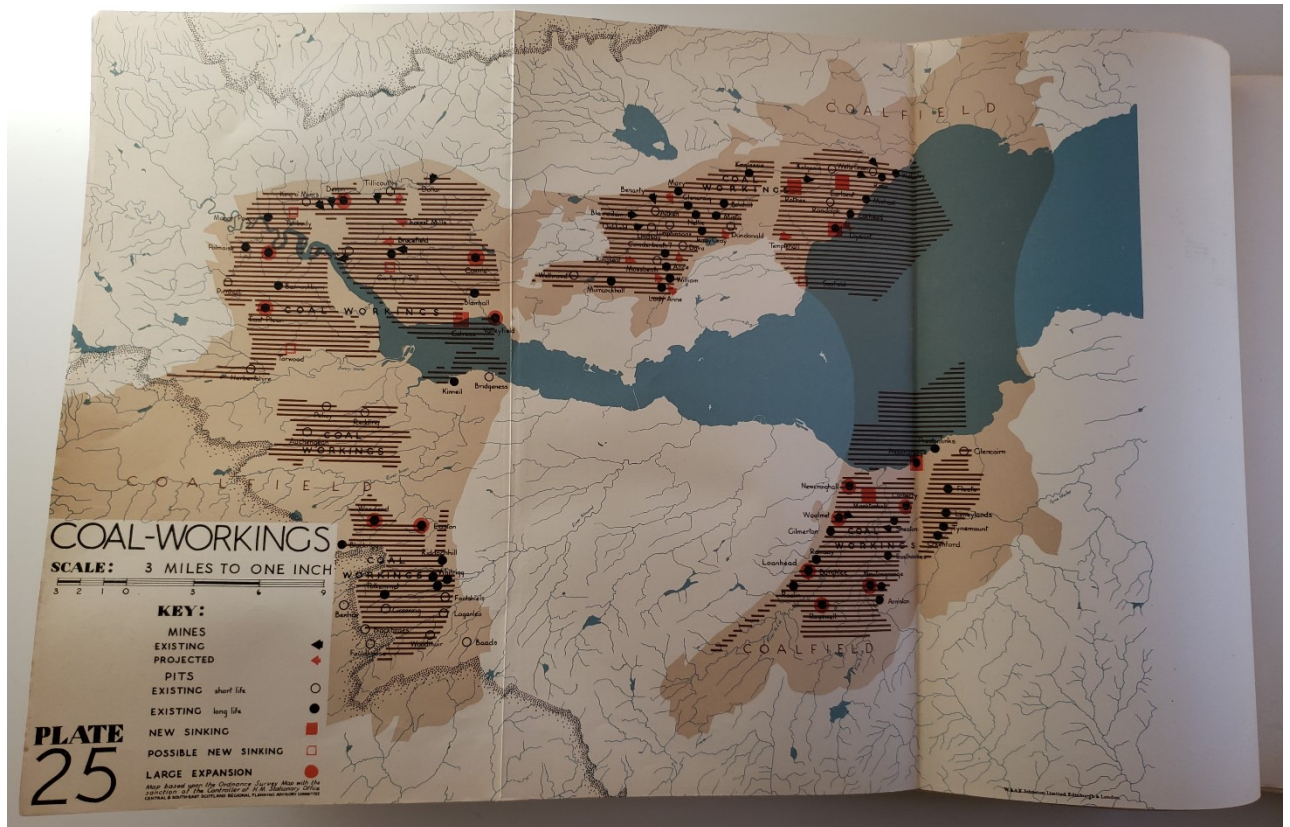


Figure 1.8. Map showing coal-workings across the Central and South East region of Scotland. The map significantly shows areas where projected mines, new sinkings and large expansions were planned to take place, with Dysart being earmarked as an area for such development.

Mears, however, recognised that there was a limit to the expansion of individual towns before the nucleus became congested and streets were filled with traffic. He argued that ‘experience in the inter-war years suggests that such extensions are unsatisfactory and create unbalanced development both in physical layout and living conditions with far outweigh any apparent economies.’¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, in most of the Fife burghs, mining subsidence severely limited the number of sites available for development. The nature of mining being dispersed across the region and the existence of many historic burghs also meant that large scale New Towns, such as those proposed by the Interim Report would not be suitable for Fife.¹⁹⁰ Instead, he proposed distributing the population across the region, as opposed to concentrating it in one

¹⁸⁹ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 65.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

place. Therefore, the ‘facilities provided under the New Towns Act should be granted to groups of towns and villages which already are inter-related through physical proximity and common interests of work and play, into {...} constellations.’¹⁹¹ These constellations would allow small towns to gain funding for expansion, whilst ‘preserving [...] their own individuality.’¹⁹² Rather than creating New Towns alone, Mears proposed a network of smaller towns be created through town expansions (as seen in Figure 1.9).¹⁹³ As a result, series of complex central area redevelopments became necessary in most areas.

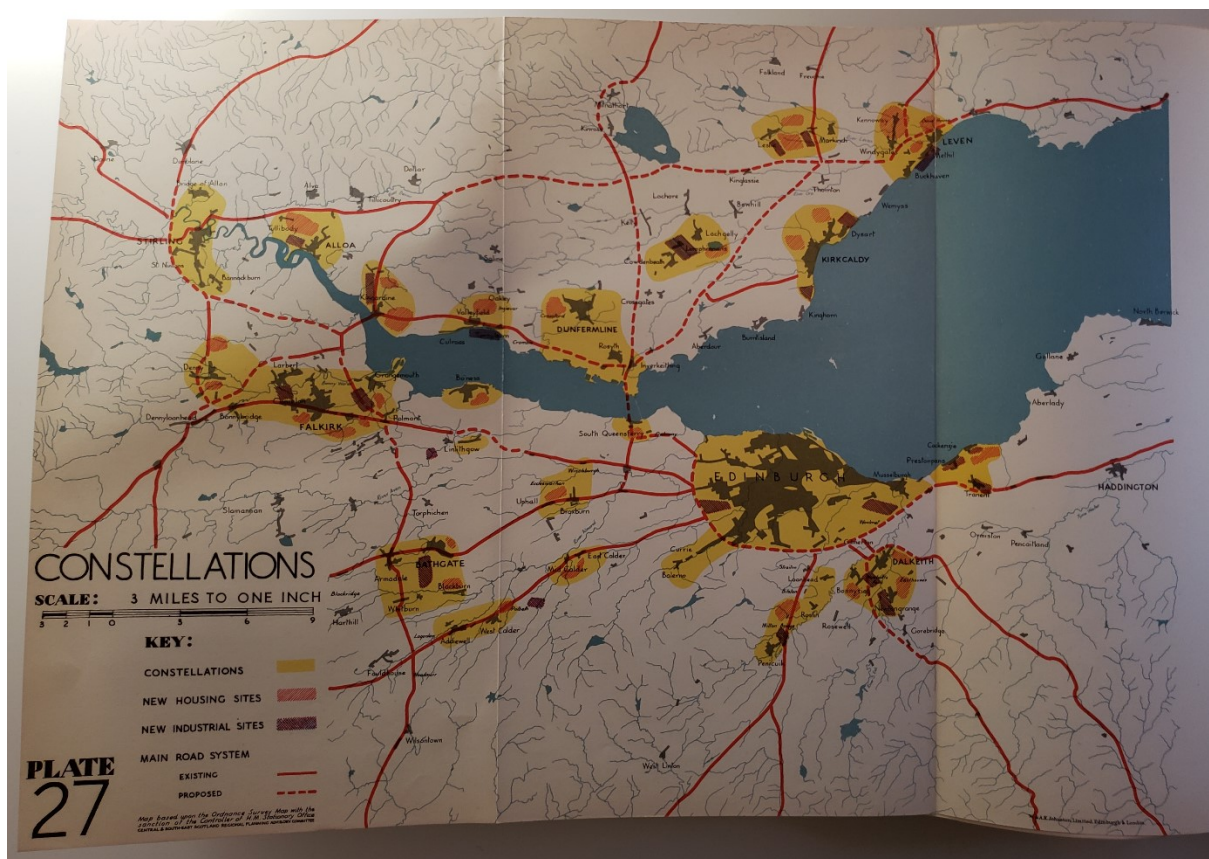


Figure 1.9 Mears’ ‘Constellations’ of settlements across the Forth Basin area is shown here, with Dysart highlighted as a ‘new industrial site’.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3-48.

Mears argued that this challenge would only be met through the cooperation of the county council, the 25 burghs and the government.¹⁹⁴ New housing was to be proposed for Kirkcaldy, Kennoway and Leven, and the Markinch-Leslie area (Glenrothes New Town). In Kirkcaldy, two neighbourhoods of 350 acres were earmarked, partially for the general housing needs of the town and partially for the newcomers from the West.¹⁹⁵ Mears realised, however, that 'it will be some time before the completion of Kirkcaldy's short-term housing for her own people, and it will take a number of years to develop the new neighbourhood unit.'¹⁹⁶

Much of the research Mears conducted when compiling his proposals for the mining areas was based on surveys of miners and their wives. He found that miners leaving the industry was a risk to the economic security of the region, and that they were more likely to stay within the industry if they lived in a pleasant environment with offered social activities and access to the countryside. Thus, he argued, these needs must be considered when designing housing areas within mining areas.¹⁹⁷ The survey also highlighted that miners and their wives preferred semi-detached houses with large gardens, with single storey houses most popular. They did not, conversely, approve of flatted housing.¹⁹⁸ This was most likely due to associations with overcrowding and squalid conditions of most inner-city tenement housing at the time. The result of this was the large proportion of housing areas built in Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy designed with two-storey, semi-detached housing as predominant features. As a result, extra attention had to be paid to the urban-infill areas in places such as Burntisland and Dysart, to

¹⁹⁴ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage.'

¹⁹⁵ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

ensure that they were an attractive and satisfactory environment for the population of the region.

1.5. Conclusions

The growth of Council housing development across the period discussed in this chapter cannot be underestimated. Over the course of half a century, Scotland transformed from a nation of private development to one with a focus on local authority-built housing. By the late 1960s, 80% of the housing built each year was by local Councils.¹⁹⁹ Between 1920 and 1978, the public sector in Scotland built 1,062,744 homes, compared to a total of just 319,500 by the private sector.²⁰⁰ Across this period, local authorities shifted in approach from rapid expansion to hit housing targets in the 1920s, to slum clearance 'decrowding' schemes in the 1930s, and back to large scale expansion of housing stocks in the 1940s.²⁰¹

It was in the context of the formative years of Council housing development in the 1930s and 1940s that Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson began their careers. As we will see in Chapter 3, Wheeler's first experiences as an architect came from his time working on vast estates of low-density cottage-style dwellings in the Stranraer area in the late 1930s. Similarly, Frank Sproson's early career would likely have exposed him to many of the impacts of the inter-war policies discussed in this chapter. It was during this period in their careers that Wheeler and Sproson were first faced with the form of low-density housing development that they went on to counter as a practice.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 297.

²⁰⁰ Robertson and Serpa, 'Social Housing in Scotland,' p. 44.

²⁰¹ Rodger, 'Introduction,' p. 5.

²⁰² 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 31.

By the time Mears' 1948 *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland* had begun to affect the Fife, Wheeler and Sproson had both begun work in the region. The *Survey and Plan* lay somewhere between the *Clyde Valley Regional Plan* and the *Bruce Plan* in approach, proposing population dispersal, the creation of New Towns and redevelopment in the region's existing developments. This combination of methods is representative of the approach the practice adopted from its creation. As will be discussed in Section 3, the practice was best known for their historic burgh redevelopment work, but part of their work was also focused on schemes in New Towns such as Glenrothes, Livingston and Cumbernauld. Firstly, however, Chapter 2 will continue to explore the decades prior to the formation of the practice, examining the 'modern-vernacular' approach to architectural design they would go on to adopt.

Chapter 2: Modern-Vernacular Architecture

2.1. Introduction

The debates over how best to manage the enormous demand for housing construction in Scotland in the post-war era, discussed in Chapter 1, were largely dominated by the ambitious central belt schemes for urban redevelopment, peripheral estates, and new towns. There was, however, also a growing popularity for heritage based innovative housing development in small and medium scale historic burghs across the country. This chapter will begin by outlining the field of architectural conservation, focusing on the outcomes of the movement in twentieth century Scotland. Particular attention will be paid in the first portion of the chapter to the work of the 'father of town planning', Patrick Geddes, and his 'conservative surgery' approach to urban redevelopment.

The second half of this chapter will concentrate on the practical applications of Geddes' theories by Scottish architects and planners. A traditionally based Scottish architecture dominated by the ideas of the Saltire Society and its followers will then be examined. We will finally discuss the outcome of the resultant Modern-Vernacular approach to architecture across Scotland and beyond. In doing so, we can begin to understand the atmosphere which Wheeler & Sproson stepped into with the formation of their practice in 1954, and the chapter thus sets the scene for the detailed discussion of the practice's work which follows in the subsequent sections.

2.2. The Conservation Movement

The history of the conservation movement is a long and complex one which has evolved over the past century and seen the rise and fall of its various trends and methods. Attitudes to architectural conservation vary primarily between returning a building to its original state through restoration, and artificially maintaining a building in its present state through preservation.¹ In Scotland, various societies have shaped approaches to historic building conservation. The following section will explore organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland, a body with which Wheeler & Sproson were heavily involved for much of the history of the practice.

Early Attempts at Conservation

The conservation movement first began slowly, developing over a period of centuries. The practice of repair and restoration can be traced back to ancient times, as 'symbolic' monuments required occasional maintenance. With the coming of Christianity, some Roman temples were converted into churches, for example, rather than simply being lost.² 'Heritage' was first consciously recognised during the Renaissance, when interest in classical buildings led to their resultant restoration.³ It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that an established theory of conservation first developed across Italy, France, and the United

¹ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

² P. Larkham, *Conservation and the City* (London, 1996), p. 33.

³ A. Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation* (Oxford, 2008), p. 17.

Kingdom. During this time, the theory applied almost universally to the restoration of monuments.⁴

The 18th century 'Grand Tour', part of young gentlemen's education, not only popularised collecting antiquities but also generated interest in the protection of medieval monuments in the United Kingdom. At the same time, monuments were being placed in the context of the picturesque; this was particularly seen with ruins (whether real or fabricated) being integrated into landscaping schemes.⁵ In the 19th century, the word 'restoration' was synonymous with reordering and reconstructing monuments, often with little evidence, to what was thought to be the original design or simply to create an assumed 'symmetry'.⁶ The resultant work paid little respect to authenticity or architectural evidence.

By the end of the 19th century, there was a trend of clearing areas around important monuments to situate them in parkland. In Paris, Haussman's reordering of the city not only swept grand boulevards through dense urban areas, but also cleared much of the cluster of urban fabric from around the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Originally the Cathedral would have been set close in amongst lower buildings, designed to be viewed over rooftops and down side streets.⁷

⁴ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 17.

⁵ Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement*, p. 48.

⁶ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 17.

⁷ Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement*, p. 88.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Many architects continued to adopt the concepts of 'rebuilding' into the 19th century. This practice 'restored [buildings] to a specific time in [their] history' and would often include the addition of features that the architects thought 'may have been used' at the time.⁸ By the latter half of the century, there was the emergence of a rapidly growing 'anti-restoration' movement, as an opposition to these approaches. Resistance to such ongoing restoration practices were consolidated in England through the creation in 1877 of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, with William Morris as its honorary secretary.⁹ Morris argued that restoring and copying destroyed authenticity. His theory was that the best treatment for an ancient building would be to do as little as possible to keep it in sound condition. To this day, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is still considered a highly regarded conservation body.¹⁰

John Ruskin, another prominent Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings member, advocated maintaining buildings within their settings, rather than being isolated in a landscaped park. He supported repairing over stylistically replacing and dating new work. He argued that the beauty of real heritage lay in the genuine monument, not modern replicas. He also recognised how valuable historic cities were as collective groups of buildings, streets and spaces. He feared the character of old towns was being lost through modern development and street widening schemes.¹¹

⁸ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 18.

⁹ Larkham, *Conservation and the City*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 19.

¹¹ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

The National Trust for Scotland

It was not until 1882 that the first official legislation was passed dedicated to the protection of architecture with the first British Ancient Monuments Act.¹² In England, the National Trust was established just a decade later and began its crusade to preserve a significant number of historic buildings. From the offset, the English National Trust consulted the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings for recommendations on how to conduct their preservation work.¹³

In the interwar period, Scotland saw several small to medium scale preservation schemes, the most prominent of which was the work the Fourth Marquess of Bute completed in the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, including what is now the official residence of the First Minister.¹⁴ This growth in conservation projects coincided with the creation of the Scotland's own National Trust in 1931. The National Trust for Scotland had begun pioneering work restoring smaller houses in burghs across Scotland from the outset, and like their English counterparts, were also inspired by the methods of The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.¹⁵ It became responsible for saving some of the best examples of 16th and 17th century houses in Scotland. Acting as a restoring owner, it let properties to local tenants in collaboration with local authorities.¹⁶ The restoration work done at Culross for the Trust by Ian Lindsay was applauded

¹² Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 19.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 423.

¹⁵ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Ibid.

by key figures such as Frank Mears, who appreciated how it ‘combin[ed] preservation with social usefulness’ through the improvement of housing (see Figure 2.1).¹⁷

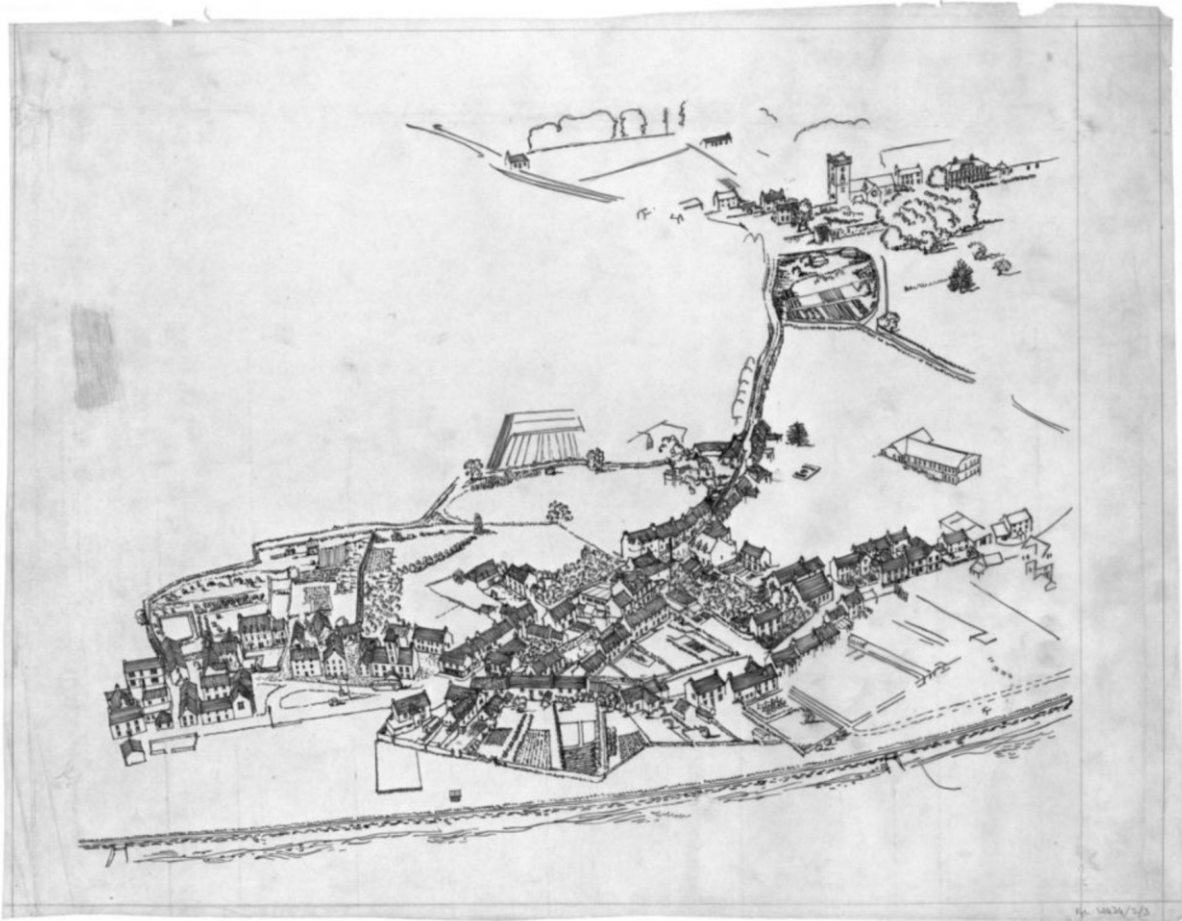


Figure 2.1. Aerial perspective of Culross by Ian Lindsay for the National Trust for Scotland. Dated between 1950 and 1959, the drawing demonstrates the attention the Trust and Lindsay paid to the surrounding environment when conducting their work.

However, the 1930s was a challenging time for conservationists, with the 1935 Housing (Scotland) Act heavily criticised for putting a ‘premium on destruction’.¹⁸ Lord Bute made a widely reported speech the following year praising the quality of Scots domestic buildings, suggesting that they be protected so that local residents could continue to enjoy them. As a result, he requested that Ian Lindsay produce an inventory of historic houses in Scottish towns,

¹⁷ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 198-199; Mears, *Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 147.

¹⁸ Rodger, ‘Appendix,’ p. 240.

to be made over the next four years. In the lists, sequences and groups were particularly noted. However, these lists were never delivered to town councils as intended due to the start of the Second World War.¹⁹ It was not until 1947 that they were developed into a state-sponsored programme. By then, the focus of the lists shifted to historically significant buildings and those by known architects.²⁰

The Little Houses Improvement Scheme

The post-war period saw a growing interest in heritage. The nationalistic feelings brought about by the two World Wars and the economic value associated with cultural tourism combined to create an emphasis on conservation in Europe not seen before.²¹ At a time when slum clearances were posing a threat to the small traditional burgh house, conservation campaigners lobbied the newly formed National Trust for Scotland to take action to safeguard them. However, there was a belief amongst local authorities that they should be solely responsible for all rented housing. Some authorities even went to the extreme of suggesting that all houses in a burgh or city should be owned by the local authority.²² This notion, coupled with existing policies of excessive rent control and high rates resulted in properties deteriorating beyond repair and facing demolition. In the 1950s some housing associations tried to take on existing older housing to be restored for reuse. These projects were regularly held back, though, due to many local authorities seeing them as rivals.²³

¹⁹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 20.

²² Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, pp. 77-78.

²³ Ibid.

In response to this, the National Trust for Scotland formed its most influential programme during the 1960s.²⁴ The Little Houses Improvement Scheme was created to protect historic burgh housing from this new wave of demolitions. Although the Little Houses scheme can be seen to be a progression from the 1930s projects, it also marked a shift in the cultural ethos of the Trust. In line with recent changes in housing legislation and the attitudes of many Councils discussed above, the project aimed to restore threatened small traditional houses for sale to potential purchasers, rather than for lease to local residents as seen in the 1930s.²⁵ The project's aim was therefore to 'restore houses of character for re-sale' across Scotland.²⁶ The profit from the resale of these properties allowed the Trust to raise funds to continue purchasing houses on a revolving basis. The Little Houses project became a defining moment in the survival of the historic townscape of many Scottish burghs, in particular those in the East Neuk of Fife.²⁷ As we will see in Chapter 3, Wheeler & Sproson would go on to become one of the Little Houses Improvement Scheme's most active practices, restoring eight historic houses for the Trust across the 1960s and 70s.

By the 1970s, commentators such as Helmut Petzsch noted that conservation of historic buildings was growing in popularity, with 'the best of the old [...] being refurbished under restoration schemes.'²⁸ According to Peter Willis, conservation had 'increasingly [...] become part and parcel of any architect's professional activity.'²⁹ However, despite this gradual

²⁴ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

²⁷ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 201.

²⁸ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 120.

²⁹ Willis, *New Architecture in Scotland*, p. 5.

advancement in building conservation, in the 1950s and 1960s many of Europe's run-down town centres were seen as an obstacle to planners. As we discovered in Chapter 1, ambitious vision for new transport networks, urban renewal, and commercial development, became a threat to historic urban fabrics. In some areas, 'regeneration' schemes adopted a *tabula rasa* approach of wiping clean historic street layouts and opted for the wholesale replacement of historic urban cores to a completely new layout and scale.³⁰ For many advocates of the modern movement, historic buildings and historic character played little importance in their desire for utopian environments.³¹

2.3. The 'Conservative Surgery' Approach

An alternative approach to *tabula rasa* clearance had emerged half a century earlier. Patrick Geddes was a Scottish polymath who was born in Aberdeenshire in 1854 and whose interests defy categorisation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Geddes is best known for his conception of regional planning, though he was also a highly esteemed botanist and sociologist. Throughout his career, Geddes developed a keen interest in urban life and the planning of city environments in a way that improved living conditions and enhanced communities.³² Geddes began his education in biology, and throughout the remainder of his career viewed each of his professions through this lens. In particular, he used his knowledge of evolution to provide a unique outlook on other fields of study.³³ This allowed him to recognise that social processes and spatial form were related, and as a result he saw town planning as a means of applying

³⁰ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 21.

³¹ Ibid.

³² N. Rogers, *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford, 2013).

³³ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

sociological insights into urban development.³⁴ After working in Edinburgh, Geddes identified a key planning problem: the need to rejuvenate and renovate historic urban centres.³⁵

A Scientific Approach

As Geddes' work turned increasingly towards sociology, he began to view the subject through the examination of life in cities. He saw a similarity between the evolutionary process of all organisms, and the spiritual and cultural development of humans and urban environments.³⁶ The very title of his most famous work, *Cities in Evolution*, demonstrates his captivation with the subject. His theory was that just as organisms cannot stagnate if they are to be successful in evolution, historically important buildings must also continue to have a useful function to survive.³⁷ To Geddes conservation could not simply be about the building alone, but instead required a thorough examination of all aspects of the city.³⁸

In order to prevent stagnation, Geddes proposed that redevelopment schemes should be place-sensitive in nature.³⁹ His concept of conservation was a holistic one, encompassing all built heritage as part of a broad vision of 'civic evolution'.⁴⁰ Originating in the mid-1880s, his 'conservative surgery' approach recommended that the most effective way to develop a successful city was through a combination of conservation of historic buildings, with modern

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, p. 157.

³⁶ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

⁴⁰ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

and facsimile reconstruction of 19th century slum areas (see Figure 2.2).⁴¹ The ‘conservative surgery’ approach considered the importance of the physical social and symbolic landscape of place in the urban environment.⁴²

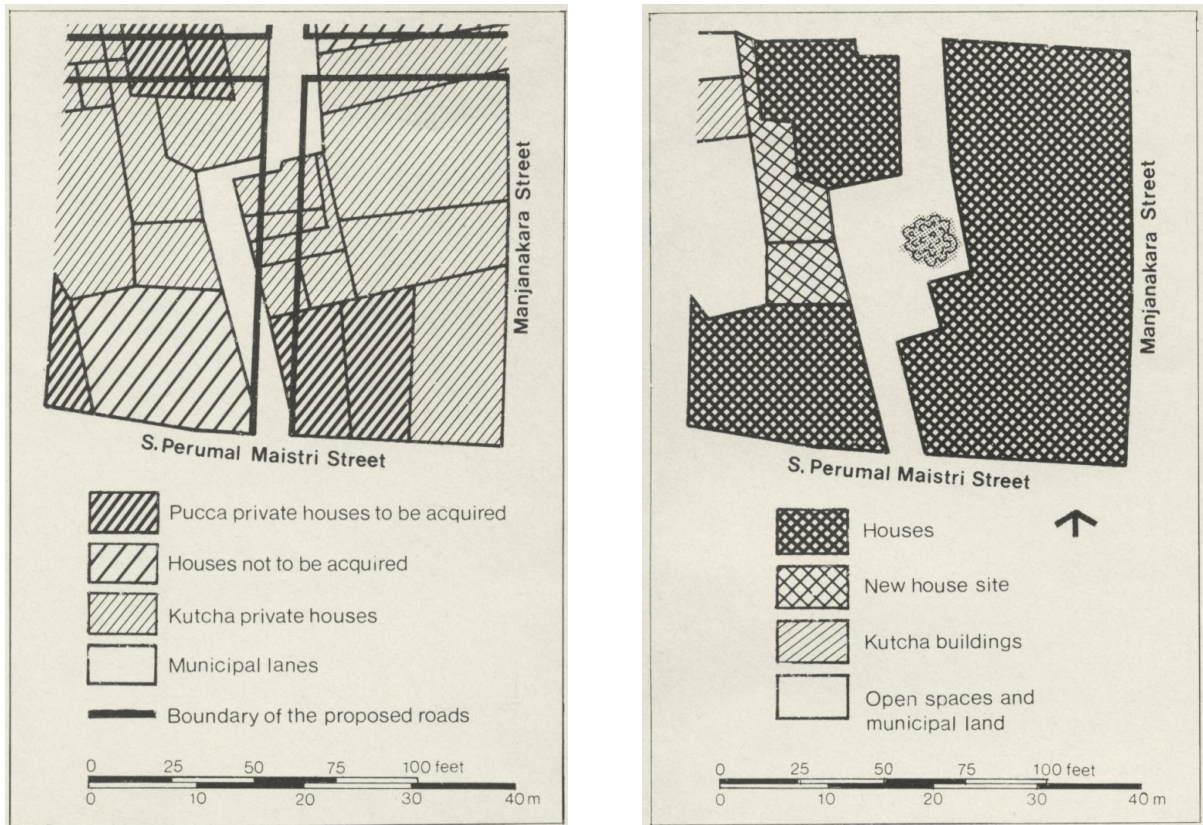


Figure 2.2. Geddes’ ‘Conservative Surgery’ approach is demonstrated best in this 1915 proposal for the city of Madurai in India, shown in these drawings. While most of the existing houses were retained, others were removed to be replaced by new housing or to widen the street and create a public square.

⁴¹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

⁴² Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

Sensitivity to the Existing Environment

Geddes was determined that to maintain this cultural urban landscape, the existing street network should be maintained as far as possible. He saw the older Paris-Berlin-American school of thought as a step backwards and instead suggested that new routes be kept to the minimum.⁴³ This would be done by targeting areas of slum properties for clearance and safeguarding more historically significant buildings. Not only did Geddes consider the creation of gridiron plans as being expensive, but he recognised that complete demolition merely moved the problems on to other areas and potentially worsened the situation.⁴⁴

Geddes suggested that buildings be conserved not simply because they were old or beautiful. Instead, they were to be selected for retention based on their value as a living, physical representation of the culture of cities as they currently existed.⁴⁵ He also suggested that historic buildings be kept as inspiration for future developments. During his work in Edinburgh, Geddes adopted a process of purchase, improvement, imaginative restoration, extension and occasionally rebuilding on a group of eight properties in the Old Town.⁴⁶ Described by Colin McWilliam as a 'practical master of townscape', Geddes recognised the significance that overhanging stories, wood and plaster played in Edinburgh's historic fabric during a time of where support for masonry was widespread.⁴⁷

⁴³ Hysler-Rubin, *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Criticism of the Approach

Although his 'conservative surgery' approach was a broadly positive tool for the protection of historic architecture, critics have described his actions as 'selective clearance' as planners were able to remove buildings they did not want and only keep ones they did.⁴⁸ Despite these controversies, the 'conservative surgery' approach offered a more sensitive solution to the norm of the time. It materially improved the condition of areas, whilst simultaneously providing for the aesthetic, religious, civic, historic, economic, and political needs of the settlement.⁴⁹

Although Geddes' work is known globally today, and he has been dubbed 'the father of town planning', he struggled to gain recognition during his lifetime.⁵⁰ During his early career, his proposals were met with criticism from the planning elite of the time. For one of his earliest plans for Dunfermline, the press was perplexed by his imagination and enthusiasm and even his colleagues were left baffled. Although Ebenezer Howard was reportedly impressed by the plan and commented that every public library should receive a copy, he suggested that it was more inspirational than it was practical.⁵¹ In 1910, Patrick Abercrombie described the RIBA Town Planning Conference as Geddes' first emergence into the public after having 'long been subterraneously at work.'⁵²

⁴⁸ Hysler-Rubin, *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning*, p. 76.

⁴⁹ Haworth, 'Patrick Geddes' Concept of Conservative Surgery,' pp. 37-42.

⁵⁰ Hysler-Rubin, *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning*, p. 118.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁵² *Ibid*.

A Gradual Rise to Prominence

In the late 1880s Geddes proposed that his 'conservative surgery' approach be utilised for the renewal of Edinburgh's Old Town area.⁵³ This was partially adopted by the Council's sanitary improvement scheme in 1893. However, it was not until a scheme by Ebenezer MacRae in the early 1920s that Geddes' ideas received a more closely related adaptation. MacRae's plans for the Grassmarket and Canongate areas proposed a variety of infill developments to replace the most dilapidated buildings.⁵⁴ Although it was initially met with hostility from central government due to the planned replacement tenements exceeding height regulations set out by the Ballantyne Report, the scheme was finally approved.⁵⁵ To this day, MacRae's infill work remains recognised as an example of sensitive intervention within the historic heart of Edinburgh.⁵⁶

In the decades that followed MacRae's scheme, a new generation of architects saw an urgent need to counter the dominant *tabula rasa* approaches seen across the United Kingdom. They envisaged new housing work as a design opportunity to harmonise old and new in the overall planned ensemble.⁵⁷ By 1932 Geddes' work had begun to gain real prominence. In the 1930s and 1940s, his son Arthur Geddes published several papers on his father's work calling for planning professionals to follow his recommendations.⁵⁸ To coincide with the publication of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, Arthur Geddes, together with Jaqueline Tyrwhitt of the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction, published an edited edition of

⁵³ Rosenberg, *Scotland's Homes Fit for Heroes*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 232.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

Geddes' *Town Planning in India*.⁵⁹ The volume focused on several of Geddes' planning principals, including 'conservative surgery', diagnostic surveying and managing overcrowding. 'Conservative surgery' offered an ideal solution for architects, whereby they could weed out the worst of the slum tenements to allow for increased sunlight and airflow, whilst the best of the existing buildings were kept and restored.

Geddes' work proved to be a significant contribution to the ideas that shaped South East Scotland after the Second World War. While planners such as Frank Mears adapted his large-scale regional planning theories, it was a generation of architects who embraced his 'conservative surgery' approach as a means of rejuvenating areas whilst allowing them to experiment with restoration work and sensitive new development. As we will discover in Chapter 6 Wheeler & Sproson were amongst this group, embracing a similar sympathetic approach to development at Burntisland and Dysart, with areas of clearance and new development, alongside restoration and reconstruction.

2.4. The Scottish Traditionalists' Approaches

In Scotland, the 1920s and 1930s stands out as a period in which a variety of approaches to Modern architecture began to emerge. Two of the most prominent examples of these views were the views of a rapidly modernising Traditionalist community, and those of an emerging young generation of architects inspired by Continental Modernism. Both groups were keen to tackle the wider issues of housing and replanning in the country at the time. The Continental

⁵⁹ J. Tyrwhitt, *Patrick Geddes in India* (London, 1947).

Modernists aimed to ‘facilitate the march of progress,’ both through the adoption of innovative material and construction, but also through the planned development of community.⁶⁰ The Traditionalists’ vision, on the other hand, centred on ‘organic’ and ‘national’ concepts of fostering established community, closely linked to the ideas of earlier figures, such as Patrick Geddes.⁶¹

Inter-war Traditionalism

Two main forms of Traditionalist architecture emerged in the inter-war period. The first was that of a Traditionalist Classicism which was most commonly seen in public buildings. These buildings tended to embrace neoclassical horizontality and calmness, mixed with asymmetrical elements.⁶² Reginald Fairlie’s National Library of Scotland (commenced 1937 and completed after the war) exemplifies this through its low relief façade and restrained decorative elements.⁶³ Equally, Kirkcaldy’s Town Hall, by David Carr and William Frederick Howard (similarly commenced in 1937 and completed post-war), demonstrates a composed use of flat roofing, linear detailing and asymmetry in its design.⁶⁴ Carr argued that he was interested in designing a building which reflected both the classicist ideas of the period, but also be suitable for the community and aesthetics of the town.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 426.

⁶¹ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 167.

⁶² Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 411.

⁶³ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Reginald Francis Joseph Fairlie (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200253); Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 62.

⁶⁴ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Kirkcaldy Town Hall, (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/building_full.php?id=203830).

⁶⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 410.

The second type of Traditionalist architecture to develop in the 1920s and 30s was one centred on domestic buildings, including small churches. Architects favoured what Glendinning refers to as ‘an elemental, harled simplicity.’⁶⁶ This ‘elemental’ design was often referred to as ‘organic’ or ‘functional’ by advocates such as Robert Hurd. In 1935, Ian Lindsay noted that the turrets of old tower houses were ‘not crudely stuck on the corners but grow out, and form an organic part of the building.’⁶⁷ This form of domestic architecture could be seen best in the gradual redevelopment of Edinburgh’s Old Town (discussed above and in later chapters), and in smaller burghs.

This domestic Traditionalism manifested itself in two main forms. Spurred on by a search for a ‘national’ pattern of small detached rural or suburban cottage, which had taken hold across Europe in the inter-war years, the first form proposed the utmost ‘simplicity of statement’ in its design.⁶⁸ These cottages were designed to oppose the growing estates of bungalows emerging in the period. Examples of this work can be seen in the cottage developments by L. G. Thompson and Frank Mears for the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland, as well as in the work of others, such as Robert Matthew. Mears’ future partner, H. A. Rendell Govan saw these houses as ‘a true development of local traditions to suit modern planning.’⁶⁹ Working in parallel to this was a growth in linked groups of dwellings, primarily located in small burghs, as opposed to rural communities as the cottages were. With aims of countering the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ M. Glendinning and A. MacKechnie, *Scotch Baronial: Architecture and National Identity in Scotland* (London, 2019), p. 238; Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 410.

⁶⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 421.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

sprawl of established settlements, these groupings of homes focused on creating tight, enclosed environments, in and around existing urban fabric.

Although different in approach, the proponents of these two Traditionalist methods of civic Classicism and domestic simplicity united in their opposition to the emerging Cosmopolitan rhetoric of the period, something which was paralleled across Europe. Although modernising in their own way, the Traditionalists were hostile to the new ideas of international Continental Modernism, which had begun to take hold in Scotland in at the time. They saw it as being in direct opposition to the kind of ‘wholesome’ architecture they promoted, something described by Hurd as being a ‘sound modern tradition’ which was rooted in the nation.⁷⁰

Continental Modernism of the 1930s

While the Traditionalists aimed to preserve ‘national’ community through the reconstruction of existing areas in a way that blended aesthetics with social aims, Continental Modernism argued for a ‘sweeping rationalist and socialist utopianism’ to help rebuild the nation.⁷¹ Rather than being an approach based on stylistic motifs, the proponents of the movement in Scotland had begun to understand it as something which could solve the social problems of the period. T. Warnett Kennedy (discussed further in Chapter 3) summarised this best in a 1938 lecture where he argued that Modernism was not about ‘something white, long and horizontal’, nor about flat roofs, corner windows or glass brick walls.⁷² Instead, he saw modern architecture as

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 410.

⁷¹ Glendinning, et al, A History of Scottish Architecture, p. 426

⁷² C. McKean, ‘The Thirties North Of The Border,’ *Thirties Society Journal*, vol. 5 (1985) pp.32-40; Glendinning, et al, A History of Scottish Architecture, p. 426

being was one that was an 'organic understanding of the needs of a new problem, and their solutions in the simplest terms.'⁷³

These two contradictory approaches, however, tended to manifest themselves in differing environments, with the Continental Modernists focusing their attentions on designing vast municipal schemes for decaying industrial cities, primarily in the west, whilst the Traditionalists most commonly worked in smaller developments in eastern small historic burghs. The housing schemes created by the Continental Modernists were seen by Traditionalists as fragmenting and alienating compared to their 'warm and friendly' work in the burghs.⁷⁴ Reflecting in 1961, burgh conservation activist Moultrie R Kelsall feared that children brought up in a typical modern housing schemes would lack the deeper sense of social continuity brought about by a closer relationship with the stone and lime of historic buildings.⁷⁵

The Blending of Ideas

By the late 1930s, however, many architects had begun to create designs which blended both Continental Modernism and Traditionalist ideas. This can be seen through the axial layouts by MacRae at his rubble and harl Piershill (1937-38) and the 1937-9 Carnegie schemes at Port Glasgow, which tallied with Hurd's 'love of democracy and free mixing between the people of different classes' by creating a 'light and fresh and open' conception of a tenement.⁷⁶ Moving into the 1940s and 1950s, it became increasingly uncommon for architects to adopt both

⁷³ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 426

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 421

⁷⁵ Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement*, p. 262.

⁷⁶ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 427.

Modernist and Traditionalist ideologies, dependant on location and building type. This can be seen best through William Hardie Kininmonth's creation of two dramatically contrasting schemes within the same year. In 1954 he designed both a Traditionalist Classicism examination building for the University of Edinburgh and the starkly cantilevered concrete skeleton of Renfrew Airport Terminal.⁷⁷ Kininmonth saw the two buildings as being appropriate to their respective settings, with one in an open field, while the other was at the heart of a historic city.⁷⁸

This divide between the two methods was further broken down in this early post-war period due to a combination of the international rise and dominance of Modern Movement principles and it becoming the default approach of the rapidly expanding public sector in Scotland. While Modernism remained varied, Traditionalists gradually began to adopt elements of its ideology. Although there were still some architects refusing to alter their views, many Traditionalists, such as Leslie Graham Thomson (renamed MacDougall in 1953) recognised by 1955 that 'the battle is won and Modernism is accepted as the order of the day!'⁷⁹ As Modernist concepts gradually filtered into Traditionalism, solutions to housing in particular were proposed that were just as 'comprehensive and up-to-date' as Modern Functionalism, but they did this whilst also merging the Modernist ideas of 'planned community' with their own of a classless society.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, William Hardie Kininmonth, (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=202942).

⁷⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 414

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 433.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

The concept of the 'Scottish Vernacular' became increasingly popular amongst architects of the period. By 1949 the National Buildings Record Council for Scotland were producing measured drawings of 'interesting old buildings, including groups and street frontages.'⁸¹ The aim was to produce a guidebook on 'what may be called 'vernacular' buildings of Scotland.'⁸² This kind of picturesque urban pattern of design was inspired primarily by historic buildings in small burghs in Eastern Scotland.⁸³ Scots medieval towns were seen in 1951 by St Andrews preservationist Ronald Cant as being paragons of 'functional...human community.'⁸⁴

In his *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland*, Frank Mears explained how up until the twentieth century, the primary building material used in Scottish buildings was stone. This was used in a 'particularly native way, with results unlike those found in any other country.'⁸⁵ He cited several books from the period, such as *The Shrines and Homes of Scotland* by John Stirling Maxwell and *The Stones of Scotland* by George Scott Moncrieff, as examples of texts which highlight that 'we have a great building tradition' which was in danger of being lost.⁸⁶ Instead, he suggests that the architecture of the past be at the forefront of architects' minds when designing the new Scotland.

Inspired by this newfound interest in 16th and 17th century burgh architecture, Traditionalist architects proposed a new kind of architecture that combined vernacular forms and materials into their modern work. Beyond their social advantages, traditional building materials also

⁸¹ Mears, *Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 148.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 148.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

benefited from ‘excellent weathering properties’ according to Petzsch, and their ‘pleasing appearance [...] made them much sought after.’⁸⁷

2.5. The Saltire Society

In response to this growing vernacular approach to architecture, the Saltire Society was formed in 1936 to promote an idealistic ‘golden age’ of Scottish culture and heritage.⁸⁸ The Society was home to some of the most prominent Scottish architects and planners of the twentieth century. Involved from the foundation of the organisation, Frank Mears helped shape the ideology of the society. Alongside Robert Hurd, Mears was later responsible for the National Trust for Scotland led restoration of Gladstone’s Land on Edinburgh’s Royal Mile for the Saltire Society’s offices (see Figure 2.3).⁸⁹ This set the organisation both geographically and intellectually in an area of Edinburgh once dominated by Patrick Geddes.⁹⁰ As a result, the Society’s choice in headquarters underlines the close connections it had to its associated organisations and their appreciation for Scottish culture and traditional architecture. Others, such as Alan Reiach and Robert Matthew, who were central to crafting early housing policy in Scotland, were also heavily involved in the Saltire Society from its early days.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 129.

⁸⁸ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ P. Lewis, ‘Past and Future: The Last Seventy Years of the Saltire Housing Awards,’ *Saltire 1937-2007: Seventy Years of The Saltire Housing Design Awards* (2007).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 434.



Figure 2.3. The Saltire Society's office at Gladstone's Land on Edinburgh's Lawnmarket shown here was restored by Frank Mears in 1934. Image taken 1956.

Building Scotland

The aspirations of the Saltire Society were demonstrated in its 1941 book *Building Scotland* by Robert Hurd and Alan Reiach.⁹² It attacked the design of most new buildings, arguing that they were not 'sturdy, simple or charming.'⁹³ Equally, Hurd and Reich also criticised the Victorian

⁹² Hurd and Reiach, *Building Scotland*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

age, condemning its 'Balmorality' and individualism.⁹⁴ They proposed remedying this by compromising between the modern and the traditional. This would be done by blending the contemporary ideas of the time with the solid design of the past. The aim was to create a 'deeper' or 'sane' modernism inspired by 16th and 17th century Scots architecture to dissolve class division and help restore the 'organic unity of the nation.'⁹⁵

Despite its nationalist ideology, *Building Scotland* was outward looking, finding 'good examples' of architecture from other countries. It argued that the 'chaos and ugliness' was inflicted on the urban environment in the past, suggesting that Scotland had been isolated and had ignored lessons from neighbouring nations. The Society were strongly influenced by the 1930 Stockholm exhibition which showed a combination of Swedish craft traditions and modern planning principles which compromised between innovation and tradition.⁹⁶ The Society aimed for Scottish Modern-Vernacular to be equally recognised internationally.⁹⁷

Building Scotland advocated the 'sturdiness, simplicity and charm' of the past, which it claimed was suited to the Scottish environment. The book proposed that the use of 'modern construction, clean lines and plenty of light' alongside traditional forms and materials, could 'sympathetically' restore Scottish built environments without reverting to the 'dreary archaisms' caused by slavishly copying past architectural styles.⁹⁸ The book proposed:

⁹⁴ I. Begg and P. Lewis, 'Saltire at 70: Building Scotland,' *Saltire 1937-2007: Seventy Years of The Saltire Housing Design Awards* (2007); Coleman, 'Building Scotland, Building Solidarity,' pp. 873-906.

⁹⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 434.

⁹⁶ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

⁹⁷ Lewis, 'Past and Future.'

⁹⁸ Hurd. and Reich, *Building Scotland*.

‘Careful, not merely symmetrical grouping, a nice balance of wall and window spacing, the slope of roof, the texture of materials, simplicity and cheerfulness of colour- these are some of the points to be noted in the buildings of the older burghs and villages. The homely virtues of good harling, whitewash, Scottish slate and red pantiles rebuke the squalor, vulgarity and trashy "smartness" of much building that has recently sprung up.’⁹⁹

Building Scotland argued that its historic burghs, once lively centres of commerce and leisure, having their vitality sapped from them due to a loss of population to the rapidly growing cities.¹⁰⁰ In order to remedy this decline, the book suggested that a sustained effort should be made to bring about a ‘more healthy distribution of industry and population’ to the regions, leading to a renewed vitality in the burghs. In line with the previously discussed proposals Frank Mears went on to produce 8 years later in his *Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland*, *Building Scotland* suggested the creation of New Towns to aid the dispersal of population.

One of the larger issues tackled by *Building Scotland* was that of housing. It argued that much of the housing in Scotland at the time was in poor condition and overcrowded, claiming that ‘bad housing creates bad citizens, it breeds ill health and warped minds.’¹⁰¹ In order to negate this, the book suggests that lessons be learned from the experience of ‘our forefathers’, but also from those abroad ‘whose modern experiments hold many lessons for us to-day.’¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Suggesting carefully chosen sites that are spaciouly laid out, harmonious building materials and the use of 'cheerful' colours, the book aimed to 'break away from the rut of dreich monotony and mediocrity' of the past.¹⁰³ However, this was to be achieved within the existing high-density urban approach characteristic of Scottish towns, with low-density suburbia heavily criticised within the publication. What resulted was a new 'Modern-Vernacular' architecture, influenced by the Geddesian 'conservative surgery' concept of renewal, leading to the 'fusion' of modernity and tradition.¹⁰⁴

Published twenty years after *Building Scotland*, Stuart Harris and Moultrie Kelsall's Saltire Society sponsored *A Future for the Past* demonstrated the continued steadfast stance the Society took against *tabula rasa* approaches over the decades following its creation. The publication expressed concern over excessive slum clearance that had occurred since the Society's formation, considering it as an act of vandalism and an attack on social cohesion.¹⁰⁵ Most notably, it criticised the number of historic buildings which had been neglected across the previous twenty years, to a point where restoration was no longer feasible.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the Society proposed a mixture of in-character housing infill following a Modern-Vernacular approach, and monument reconstructions to counter the dominant destructive approaches of the time.¹⁰⁷ The book offered an alternative approach for local authorities, explaining how converting existing properties into housing was a cost-effective method and was often cheaper than clearance and reconstruction.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, 'Past and Future'; Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ S. Harris and M. Kelsall, *A Future for the Past* (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

¹⁰⁸ Harris and Kelsall, *A Future for the Past*, p. 6.

This approach has remained a dominant characteristic of the Saltire Society since its formation. Although the outlook of the Society shifted over time dependant on the ambitions of those involved and the wider public mood, the Society's leadership were always able to depend on a broad pool of individuals in support of the Geddesian tradition of the civic survey, regional planning and 'conservative surgery'.¹⁰⁹ Across the decades, the Society became known for its claims of 'Londonitis', 'remote-control government' and 'the Anglicisation of the Scottish way of life.'¹¹⁰ Despite the natural debate which this would bring, the Saltire Society has always been viewed as a progressive organisation and began with the support of a young generation of ex-servicemen who wanted to see a better world.¹¹¹

The Saltire Awards

The first Saltire Society Housing Award took place in 1937 to encourage a new housing design rooted in national traditions.¹¹² After a brief pause during the war years, the awards were brought back in 1948 with the full support of the Governmental Department of Health for Scotland and the Scottish Ministry responsible for housing and planning.¹¹³ The panel were interested in new architecture which modernised the nation whilst also taking time to preserve

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, 'Past and Future.'

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

¹¹³ Lewis, 'Past and Future.'

its past.¹¹⁴ The aim of the award was to celebrate projects which consisted of architectural groups including both new building and at least one restored building of architectural merit.¹¹⁵

However, as this style of housing became increasingly difficult to design in a housing crisis, the Society gave awards to some tower block developments using standardised system in the 1960s. Most of the awards for such standardised systems went to recognised architects with links to the Society, such as Robert Matthew and Basil Spence.¹¹⁶ However, in a 1967 awards speech, Matthew raised concerns about standardised building, stating that buildings were being built with no relation to their surroundings.¹¹⁷ He thought that industrial processes were moving too fast, and that problems arising were ignored by the fast production process. Despite this, the vast majority of Saltire Award winning schemes went to Modern-Vernacular buildings, with the bulk dedicated to tenement block style housing.¹¹⁸ The Saltire Awards will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, as we examine the recognition Wheeler & Sproson gained for their work.

Criticism of the Modern-Vernacular Approach

Much of the academic criticism of Modern-Vernacular architecture appears to come, not from those who opposed its sensitivity to the historic environment, but instead from those who

¹¹⁴ R. Jaques, 'Ninties Memories: The Adventures of a Reluctant Saltire Panel Member,' *Saltire 1937-2007: Seventy Years of The Saltire Housing Design Awards* (2007).

¹¹⁵ 'Saltire Society Awards for Reconstruction Schemes,' *Official Architecture and Planning*, vol. 21, no. 4, p. 172.

¹¹⁶ 'Postscript' in R. Rutherford (ed.), *Saltire Awards for Housing Design 1937-1997* (1998); Lewis, 'Past and Future.'

¹¹⁷ Lewis, 'Past and Future.'

¹¹⁸ 'The Saltire Society: Sixty Years of the Housing Design Awards,' in R. Rutherford (ed.), *Saltire Awards for Housing Design 1937-1997* (1998)

questioned the suitability of certain aspects of their design. In 1975 Colin McWilliam wrote of the 'quite alien features' in some developments. In particular, he criticised elements such as the low front garden walls at Spence's Dunbar housing (discussed further below), which were implemented despite having no relation to the vernacular or the modern of the local area (see Figure 2.4).¹¹⁹ He argued that this led to a 'substantial fussiness', which he claimed was often emphasised in such schemes in an attempt to create an almost 'fake' vernacular.



Figure 2.4. The low front garden walls at Spence's Dunbar development, seen here, were viewed by McWilliam as unsuitable for the character of the area. Image taken in 1952.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, in his 1996 article 'A Scottish Modernism 1933-1939', Charles McKean accused Scottish Traditionalists such as Hurd, Spence and Mears of 'hijacking' what he saw as a continental import and rebranding it as a reawakening and modernising of

¹¹⁹ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 204-205.

an 'Indigenous native tradition.'¹²⁰ However, Saltire Society publications expressed from their very first pages that they took inspiration from abroad. In *Building Scotland*, every point made is accompanied by an example of best practice from Europe (see Figure 2.5). It could be argued, instead, that although the Traditionalists were keen to root their architecture in the materials and forms of historic Scotland, they did not shy away from their admiration for European and even American approaches.

Library, Waukesha, Wis., U.S.A.



Church, Apelvik, Stockholm



Figure 2.5. Examples of European and American architecture in the Saltire Society's *Building Scotland* publication.

2.6. The Modern-Vernacular Approach in Action

The Modern-Vernacular approach resulted in a series of schemes which varied dramatically in methodology. The spectrum of work undertaken ranged from primarily Traditionalist housing through to more Modernist schemes and included job types such as preservation-based projects and more openly 'contemporary' new or infill developments.¹²¹ Although little studied

¹²⁰ C. McKean, 'A Scottish Modernism 1933-1939,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 40 (1996), p. 167.

¹²¹ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 7.

in the United Kingdom, variations in this approach occurred globally, with examples seen from the British areas of East Lothian and Norwich, to places farther afield such as Porto and San Francisco. The following section will explore some examples of Modern-Vernacular architecture from the period leading up to the mid-1950s, when Wheeler & Sproson began operations.

Modern-Vernacular in Scotland

In the early years of the Saltire Society, a small collection of architects made advances in the development of the Modern-Vernacular approach. One of the first major examples of such schemes to take place in Scotland was Frank Mears' Broad Street scheme in Stirling (1938-1955).¹²² The scheme contained two 17th century inspired blocks with rubble facades and ashlar margins. It was of a notably lower density than the original settlement. This created what Colin McWilliam described as a 'shadow of the bustling, congested town centre.'¹²³

In a smaller, but equally historic settlement, Basil Spence worked on his Dunbar development in 1934 and 1956 (mentioned above), designed to accommodate fishermen and their families. The resultant architecture made use of local red sandstone reclaimed from the old harbour walls to tie various sections of the buildings to the surrounding setting (see Figure 2.6). Certain walls were finished with colour-washed harl, and cheerful colours were also used on the doors, ironwork, and windows.¹²⁴ Pantiles were applied on pitched roofs and helped to relate the scheme to much of the surrounding historic burgh architecture. The second phase of the

¹²² McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 204.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 434.

Dunbar development was awarded the Saltire Society Award for Good Design in 1951 for its role in giving what Hurd described as an ‘inspiring lead’ to other towns.¹²⁵ Writing about the Dunbar Development, T. W. West declared in 1975 that ‘further redevelopment is proceeding successfully along similar lines showing how good architecture tends to stimulate more of the same kind.’¹²⁶ Spence’s practice went on to explore similar ideas in their development in Edinburgh’s Newhaven area, discussed further in Chapter 7.



Figure 2.6. Perspective drawing of Spences’ fisherman’s cottages in Dunbar, showing two phases of the development. Image from 1950.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ West, *A History of Architecture in Scotland*, pp. 185-187.

Another significant example of this approach was the extensive plan to redevelop large areas of Edinburgh's Old Town, starting in the early 1950s. Robert Hurd, an architect heavily involved in the Saltire Society, was responsible for a project to redevelop part of Edinburgh's Royal Mile through a Gedesian inspired 'conservative surgery' scheme. Starting in 1952 and extending to 1969, the vast development project at the Canongate area of the street was led by several of the most prominent architects of the time.¹²⁷ Robert Hurd, Ian Begg, Ian G Lindsay and Basil Spence were all involved in the project, using a variety of approaches to tackle the complex site. The Canongate project adapted the historic aesthetic of the area in various ways, with it becoming less traditional as the scheme progressed. The development is seen as a valid continuation of the pioneering work of Geddes in the area.¹²⁸ Phases of the scheme involved the Tolbooth Area Redevelopment (1953-8), Morocco Land (1956-7) and Chessel's Court (1958-66).¹²⁹

Similar town centre housing redevelopments following the Modern-Vernacular approach began elsewhere across the 1950s. Work was carried out in towns such as Stonehaven (by the Burgh Architects in the 1950s) and Thurso (by Sinclair McDonald & Son between the 1950s and the 1970s).¹³⁰ One of the most prominent schemes of the period was at Lerwick, where Moira & Moira worked on a series of small phases, which began with their 1948 Town Plan.¹³¹ The scheme turned once run-down lanes into pedestrian 'precincts', with each house designed to

¹²⁷ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

¹²⁸ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 204.

¹²⁹ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 204-205; Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

¹³¹ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Moira & Moira
(http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=401083).

appear unique.¹³² Equally significant was East Lothian's Planning Officer, Frank P. Tindall's scheme at Haddington which infused old-burgh revitalisation with modern principals of community-building and industrial growth. Beginning in the early 1950s, the scheme included a 'conservative surgery' infill at St. Anne's Place by J. A. W. Grant (see Figure 2.7) and Mitchell's Close by Campbell & Arnott.¹³³



Figure 2.7. St' Anne's Place Haddington demonstrates 'conservative' surgery infill by J. A. W. Grant, as part of Frank P. Tindall's scheme for the town.

The English Take on Modern-Vernacular

Outside of Scotland, the Modern-Vernacular approach was developing in different countries, with diverse influences creating unique locally inspired work. In England, architects such as Sir Frederick Gibberd became recognised for their creation of a softer, more traditionally English

¹³² Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 436.

¹³³ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 204-205; Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3- 48.

form of modern architecture and planning, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.¹³⁴ This English 'Townscape' approach, called for by the *Architectural Review* in 1947, was intended to 'realign modernism with the picturesque.'¹³⁵ Sharing similarities with the artistic 'New Romanticism' movement from a generation before, it suggested the collaging of forms and materials.¹³⁶ During and after the War, Gibberd represented a romantic and sensitive attitude to landscape, use of external spaces and building form.¹³⁷ In the 1940s, Gibberd became interested in the aesthetics of the English market town and of Georgian streets. He believed that the Modern Movement had allowed architects to consider the visual, as well as the functional qualities of colour, materials, and texture.¹³⁸ In 1947 Gibberd prepared the original Master Plan for Harlow which demonstrated his growing interest in 'visual planning'. Its housing was predominantly composed of low terraces of two-storey housing, constructed in various colours of brick and plater, topped with pantiled roofs, and set within a landscaped parkland.

Similarly, Tayler and Green's work in Norfolk villages in the post-war period demonstrate an inventive usage of sympathetic Modern-Vernacular in England which respected the cultural identity of the settlements it was introduced to.¹³⁹ Examples of their work include their 1947-1949 Windmill Green and their 1949-1951 Woodyard Square (see Figure 2.8).¹⁴⁰ Tayler and Green's housing made extensive use of local forms and materials in a similar approach to the

¹³⁴ Hui Lan Manley, *Frederick Gibberd*, p. 1-4.

¹³⁵ Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, p. 270.

¹³⁶ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, p. 115.

¹³⁷ A. Powers, *Modern: The Modern Movement in Britain*, (London, 2005), p. 116.

¹³⁸ Hui Lan Manley, *Frederick Gibberd*, pp. 1-4.

¹³⁹ Harwood and Powers, *Tayler and Green Architects*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 88-93.

work seen a decade later at Burntisland and Dysart. Pantiles, colour-wash and features such as ‘through passages’, similar to Fife’s pends, were used.¹⁴¹ Instead of the dense urban layouts seen in the Scottish Burghs, Tayler and Green responded to a rural form of architecture seen in East Anglia, with low terraced housing predominant in their work. They were able to interpret local architecture and design modern housing that attempted to reflect the *genius loci* without directly reproducing local details.¹⁴²



Figure 2.8. Tayler and Green’s Woodyard Square in Woodton, Norfolk, 1947-1949.

International Variations

This approach of blending traditional and modern forms and materials was not unique to the United Kingdom. In Finland, Alvar Aalto was combining new technologies with traditional

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² I. Nairn, ‘Rural Housing: Post-War Work by Tayler and Green’, *Architectural Review*, vol. 124, no.741 (1958), p. 226.

architecture in the 1930s, with many of his buildings rooted in concepts of nature.¹⁴³ Aalto was someone whose work Wheeler 'particularly liked.'¹⁴⁴ Aalto work ranged from purist modernism to traditional Finnish vernacular.¹⁴⁵ In particular, he was interested in the vernacular use of wood across the country, and incorporated it into many of his buildings.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in Portugal architects such as Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza Vieira began forming their distinctive regionalist architecture in the mid-1950s (see Figure 2.9). Like the approach of architects such as Wheeler & Sproson in Scotland, they adopted a mixture of renovation and new construction. According to William J. R. Curtis in his *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Távora's and Siza's works 'represented an attempt 'to cut through the prevailing eclecticism and provincialism of Portuguese architecture, and to return to local roots.'¹⁴⁷ While Távora sought to interpret vernacular 'for its general principles and types', Siza drew on 'peasant architecture', and its 'social pattern and sensitivity to both landscape and light.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ U. Passe, 'Atmospheres of Space: The Development of Alvar Aalto 'S Free-Flow Section as a Climate Device,' *Arq*, vol. 12, no.3-4 (2008), pp. 295-311.

¹⁴⁴ 'Building a New Scotland', p. 30.

¹⁴⁵ J. Wilson, 'What Is It Like 30 Years Later?' An Assessment of Alvar Aalto's Work,' *RSA Journal*, vol. 143, no.5463 (1995), pp. 52-2.

¹⁴⁶ T. Isohauta, 'The diversity of timber in Alvar Aalto's architecture: forests, shelter and safety,' *Architectural Research Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 3-4 (2013), pp. 269-230.

¹⁴⁷ R. Costa Agarez, 'A Self-Conscious Architectural Historiography: Notes From (Post)Modern Portugal,' *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 25, no. 8 (2020), pp. 1089-1114; W. J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London, 1996), pp. 482-484.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



Figure 2.9. The Boa Nova Tea House, Matosinhos, Portugal. It was designed in 1956 by Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza Vieira, making use of local white plastered masonry walls and pantiles, alongside red African ‘Afizelia’ wood in the cladding of the walls.

Beyond Europe, a similar form of architecture was developing across the first half of the twentieth century. In Mexico, a form of Modern-Vernacular work was being created by Luis Barragán, such as his 1945 Jardines del Pedregal and his own 1948 house and studio (see Figure 2.10). As Paz explains, Barragán’s work was ‘rooted in the Mexican village with its streets, limited by towering walls, that in turn lead to plazas and fountains.’¹⁴⁹ He goes on to state that, ‘the art of Barragán is an example of how to employ our popular tradition with intelligence.’¹⁵⁰ This regionally influenced form of architecture was also being explored further north in the Bay Area of California. In 1947 Lewis Mumford claimed that a ‘Bay Regional Style’ existed which

¹⁴⁹ O. Paz, ‘Enclosures and Coexistence: The Use of Tradition,’ *Artes de México*, vol. 23 (1994), p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

presented a regional alternative to the International Style.¹⁵¹ Through the article, Mumford nominated William Wurster as the most significant representative of this. His Gregory Farmhouse stands as the most significant example of his work to demonstrate his inclusion of regional influences and vernacular form.¹⁵²



Figure 2.10. Built in 1948, the Casa Estudio Luis Barragán in Mexico City, demonstrates the architect's intention to integrate vernacular elements into his work. Traditional rough plaster and use of timber can be seen throughout the building.

What is clear, however, is that this combination of the modern and the vernacular was not unique to Scotland and is part of a much larger shift in approach taking place globally across the first half of the twentieth century. However, each of these examples formed a unique adaptation of the approach, based on local traditions and materials. The cases that emerged

¹⁵¹ J. Parra-Martinez and J. Crosse, 'Grace Morley, The San Francisco Museum of Art and The Early Environmental Agenda of the Bay Region (193x-194x),' *Feminismo/s (Universidad de Alicante)*, vol. 32 (2018), pp. 101-134.

¹⁵² J. Castle, 'Vernacular, Regional and Modern – Lewis Mumford's Bay Regional Style and the Architecture of William Wurster,' PhD. Thesis, *University of New South Wales* (2006), Abstract.

in Scotland, such as those by Spence, Hurd (and later by Wheeler & Sproson), were distinctly 'Scottish' in appearance and feel. While in Mexico traditional bold colours were adopted, and in Finland wood was prominently used as had been done for centuries, the Scots versions reflected a 16th and 17th century interpretation of the nation's architecture.

2.7. Conclusion

As we have seen, by the mid-1950s when Wheeler & Sproson began practising, an approach of combining the modern and the vernacular had begun to gain momentum within architecture. This drive towards a more sensitive form of development was spurred on through the activities of organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, The National Trust for Scotland and the Saltire Society, and the impacts of governmental housing policy. Examples of 'Modern-Vernacular' work can be seen across all parts of Scotland, in cities, towns and villages of all shapes and sizes. But each area adopted a varying, unique and locally based approach, through the use of distinctive forms and materials. In Fife, 'Modern-Vernacular' work was primarily inspired by a small coastal area to the south of the region. As Wheeler put it in 1995, from the very start of the practice, they had become 'very interested in the traditional architecture of Fife, especially villages in the East Neuk.'¹⁵³

We have also explored how the 'Modern-Vernacular' approach adopted by such Traditionalists varied in method but generally centred on the ideas of 'conservative surgery', restoration, preservation, and integration of traditional and vernacular elements into new architecture. In

¹⁵³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

many other countries this approach manifested itself in the form of low density ‘suburban’ housing discussed in Chapter 1. In Scotland, however, a dense, urban form of modernism developed as a continuation of the Scots tenement tradition that came before it. This was most prominent in Scotland’s cities and small, but densely built historic burghs.

This section has demonstrated the events and ideas that shaped architecture and planning up to Wheeler & Sproson’s formation in 1954, which will now be explored in the following chapters. As we will see, the practice forged strong connections to the organisations discussed in this chapter, with Wheeler joining the Saltire Society Awards Panel in 1951 and even becoming Chairman of the Society in 1972.¹⁵⁴ The impact these organisations and early examples had on the practice helped to shape their views on architecture and planning over the following decades. Now that we have explored the context of public housing provision and the ideas of Modern-Vernacular architecture, Section 2 will explore the background to Wheeler & Sproson and two of their best known housing developments in detail. Section 3 will then assess these sites and examine them within the context of the practice’s own work and that of their contemporaries. It will also explain how the practice went on to become one of the most influential and leading contributors to “Modern-Vernacular” architecture in Scotland.

¹⁵⁴ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

SECTION 2: WHEELER & SPROSON, BURNTISLAND AND DYSART

Chapter 3: Wheeler & Sproson

3.1. Introduction

Established in 1954, Wheeler & Sproson dominated site-sensitive redevelopment of historic burghs, transforming large areas of south-eastern Scotland in the following decades. Across the 53 years it operated, the practice would go on to win 39 Saltire Society and Civic Trust awards and commendations.¹ Although the practice title provides Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson (see Figure 3.1) with equal billing, there is unfortunately a disproportionate amount of information available on the two architects. While there are a small number of interviews, newspaper articles and journal papers available to provide insight into Wheeler's views and experiences, far less is available on Sproson. However, in this chapter Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson's education and early careers will be explored to develop an understanding of their experiences and formative influences. We will then examine the formation of the practice, its first job and the type of work they went on to do. We will finally investigate the working environment of the practice, primarily through the memories of former practice partner, Bill McLeod.

¹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.



Figure 3.1. Anthony Wheeler (left) and Frank Sproson (right).

3.2. Wheeler and Sproson's Education and Training

Anthony Wheeler was born in 1919 and raised in Stranraer in the Dumfries and Galloway region to the south-west of Scotland. Interested in pursuing a career in architecture, Wheeler began work at a local architect and surveyor, Alexander Maclean Goudie, in July 1936.² Wheeler described it as a 'small rural practice' that only had one or two assistants at any one time.³ The practice was busy working on three separate schemes during the year that Wheeler worked for them. The first was a villa at Drummuie, Portpatrick which commenced in 1936, followed

² *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, (Sir) Harry Anthony Wheeler (or simply Sir Anthony Wheeler) (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400442).

³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

by two small housing schemes in Stranraer at the Rephad area containing 44 homes and at Dick's Hill containing 50 homes (see Figure 3.2).⁴ Both housing schemes consisted primarily of cottage style four and five apartment blocks. The developments contained common inter-war 'four-in-a-block' housing, with two flats on the ground floor and two flats above.⁵ They were harled, with slate hipped roofs and were surrounded by large gardens. Although early in his career as an architect, the work Wheeler did in his year in Stranraer paved a way towards a career which was largely dominated by innovative housing development work. It was from here that Wheeler decided to attend the Glasgow School of Art and continue to develop the skills he had acquired in his time at Alexander Maclean Goudie.



Figure 3.2. Dick's Hill development by Alexander Maclean Goudie, built 1937.

⁴ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Basic Biographical Details: Alexander Maclean Goudie (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=201484).

⁵ C. McKean, *Scotland in the Thirties* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 137-182.

Wheeler began studying on a part-time basis at Glasgow School of Art in September 1937, whilst he also apprenticed at an eminent Glasgow practice, Lennox & MacMath.⁶ In his early years at Glasgow School of Art, Wheeler was encouraged by T. Warrett Kennedy, who he referred to as a 'dynamic figure' within the school.⁷ Kennedy was taken into partnership by Jack Coia in 1938 after having worked as an Assistant for him for 8 years.⁸ During his time teaching Wheeler, Kennedy was involved in several of the buildings for the 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition, including the Palace of Industries North and the RC Chapel and Pavilion, which he undoubtedly would have discussed with his students through his hands on classes.⁹

Glasgow School of Art was very much influenced by the Beaux Arts movement at the time when Wheeler studied there, having sent a deputation to Paris in 1904 to reshape architectural education in Glasgow.¹⁰ As a result, Wheeler referred to his education there as being 'very classical' in nature, 'not really related to the Modern Movement.'¹¹ The Beaux Arts movement centred itself on the principles of French Neoclassicism, but also incorporated Gothic, and Renaissance elements. The Beaux Arts teaching method focused on a strict, competitive and hierarchical structure through the 'Ecole', private 'ateliers', and the 'Salon.' The 'Ecole' was the traditional study of classical paintings and architecture, the private 'ateliers' were

⁶ S. Alasdair, 'Obituary: Sir Anthony Wheeler, architect,' *The Scotsman* (28 September 2013), (<https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/obituary-sir-anthony-wheeler-architect-1549363>); B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler OBE PPRIAS PRSA: 7 November 1919 – 19 December 2013,' *RIAS Quarterly*, iss. 17 (2014), pp. 96-97.

⁷ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁸ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Basic Biographical Details: T. Warnett Kennedy (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200545).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ MacKechnie, et al., *Building a Nation*, p.95.

¹¹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

where a 'Master' would directly mentor students and the 'Salon' was where students would compete for their work to be displayed to the public and for various scholarships on offer.¹²

Wheeler thrived within this environment and succeeded in winning 'The Junior Travel Scholarship' in August 1939, through which he was able to travel to France during the period leading up to the war.¹³ He particularly spent time in Paris, where he was able to experience the Parisian atmosphere up close. Unfortunately, as war broke out, Wheeler was forced to return to Scotland early and was later conscripted into the army.¹⁴

After undertaking military service in France, Holland, Belgium and Germany during the war, Wheeler was able to go back to his studies at Glasgow School of Art in September 1946, after spending several months in Italy as part of the school's John Keppie Travelling Scholarship.¹⁵ During this second period at Glasgow School of Art, he was taught by Professor William J Smith, who Wheeler referred to as the teacher who influenced him the most in his time there.¹⁶ Smith, who became Professor of Architecture at Glasgow School of Art in 1942, was himself once mentored by one of the greats of the institution. Smith is considered the last person who was personally mentored by Charles Rennie Mackintosh before his death.¹⁷ Smith's family have spoken of the 'great pride' he had for Mackintosh, despite only briefly being taught by him.¹⁸

¹² J. P. Carlhian, 'The Ecole des Beaux-Arts: Modes and Manners,' *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1984), pp. 7-17.

¹³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97.

¹⁶ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹⁷ C. Williams, "'He bought his chairs for £1": The Incredible Story of Professor 'Willie' Smith, Mackintosh's Last Ever Student,' *Glasgow Live* (16 February 2018), (<https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/history/mackintosh-glasgow-design-chairs-student-14299061>).

¹⁸ Ibid.

Smith spoke of his anger at Mackintosh's lack of recognition at the time and was determined to 'give back to the architectural community the passion that Mackintosh had given to him.'¹⁹

This passion for architecture was undoubtedly passed down to Wheeler during the years Smith taught him. Many elements of Mackintosh's form of picturesque modernism can be seen in Wheeler's work. This includes using traditional materials and vernacular forms in modern buildings which were clearly of their time. Through Smith's mentorship and his location within one of Mackintosh's most iconic buildings, it is possible that much of the inspiration behind Wheeler's later work stemmed from his time studying in this Arts and Crafts inspired environment.

It is argued by Charles McKean that in the 1930s, Scottish housing architects were quite evenly divided between those inspired by a more European style, and those influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement.²⁰ In branches of the movement, key advocates such as Philip Webb, like Mackintosh before him, supported the use of vernacular forms and materials to create a more picturesque composition.²¹ Despite Wheeler's insistence that his education was primarily classically based, it is the Arts and Crafts element of his training and education which is most clearly present in his later work.²²

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ McKean, *Scotland in the Thirties*, p. 145.

²¹ R. Addison, 'Philip Webb: Pioneer of Arts & Crafts Architecture,' *Architecture Australia*, vol. 95, no. 1 (2006), p. 45.

²² Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

A less obvious display of Wheeler's education in his later career can be seen to stem from his fascination with Renaissance architecture, and in particular Brunelleschi, during his years as a student. A particularly successful student during his studies, Wheeler was referred to as the 'most outstanding student' of his year and received a number of awards. These included the Glasgow School of Art's Bellahouston Travelling Scholarship, the RIBA's Grissell Gold Medal and Neale Bursary, and the RIAS's Rowand Anderson Studentship.²³ After graduating in June 1948 and being admitted to the ARIBA in December of the same year, Wheeler contemplated using one of these awards for a study trip to Denmark but was persuaded by his professor to instead go to Rome and Florence to pursue his interest in the Renaissance.²⁴

In his later years, Wheeler admitted that his professor was right to advise this and noted that 'to grasp the architectural flowering of the early Renaissance was terribly important to a young architect.'²⁵ In particular, he commented that he was much inspired by Brunelleschi, and that he 'felt you had to absorb the lessons of the early Renaissance.'²⁶ Brunelleschi's influence on Wheeler's later work is clear. It was not so much in the aesthetic appearance of his work, but in the way that rather than ignoring the city, like Brunelleschi he took it as his starting point.²⁷

Between 1420 and 1446, Brunelleschi single-handedly developed a new form of architecture and marked a turning point in the history of architecture and urban design alike.²⁸ He was

²³ B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97.

²⁴ B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97; Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ G. Fanelli, *Brunelleschi* (Florence, 1980), pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Ibid.

skilled in his capability to combine historical and modern architectural, aesthetic and engineering principals.²⁹ These approaches can clearly be seen as defining element throughout Wheeler's career, where he endeavoured to create modern architecture that was sympathetic to the historic setting of Fife's burghs. Brunelleschi's approach suited the Scottish Traditionalist movement's desires to draw inspiration from tradition without slavishly replicating period styles.³⁰

Frank Sproson experienced a similar education and training to Wheeler, with his time studying architecture interrupted by the Second World War. Like Wheeler, Sproson was also born in 1919, but was raised in Congleton in Cheshire.³¹ In 1938 at the age of 18, Sproson was articled to Walter Marsh, a local architect who operated in the Congleton area.³² Little is known about Walter Marsh, but Sproson's time working at his offices was his first experience working in architecture and led to him applying to study at Burslem School of Art part-time the following year, in 1939.³³ Like Wheeler, Frank Sproson had his architectural training disrupted by the war. Sproson acted as a territorial during peacetime, and as a result was one of the first to be sent to France at the outbreak of war as part of the North Staffordshire Royal Engineers 2nd Battalion. Sproson was evacuated from Dunkirk in June 1940, before being stationed back in the United Kingdom.³⁴ It was during this time that Sproson met his future wife Jean Alexander in

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Reiach and Hurd, *Building Scotland*.

³¹ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Alyth in 1942. Sproson was then sent to North Africa in 1943 as part of the campaign in Tunisia.³⁵

Upon the end of the war, Sproson returned to Scotland, picking up his studies again at the School of Architecture at Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen in 1946.³⁶ During his holiday months in 1946 and 1947, Sproson worked as an architectural assistant with Tarbolton & Ochterlony in Edinburgh.³⁷ Sproson worked at the practice during a turbulent time, with both of its leads dying during the years he worked there.³⁸ However, as a practice that did much work for the Episcopal Church, it is likely that Sproson formed beneficial connections that would lead to the significant number of religious jobs Wheeler & Sproson did in later years, including churches in Galashiels, Kirkcaldy, Cowdenbeath and Bathgate.³⁹ At Aberdeen, Sproson also studied life-drawing under the direction of Alberto Morrocco from 1946-8, completing his diploma the following year. During his time at Aberdeen, he shared 'digs' with Morrocco, who continued to remain a friend of Sproson, and later Wheeler, in the years that followed.⁴⁰ Morrocco was invited to paint a mural for Wheeler & Sproson's St Columba's Parish Church in Glenrothes between 1958 and 1961 (see Figure 3.3).⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid.; North Staffordshire Regiment, *Second World War* (<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/north-staffordshire-regiment-prince-waless>).

³⁶ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

³⁷ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Tarbolton & Ochterlony (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200702).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid; Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

⁴⁰ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁴¹ St Columba's Parish Church of Scotland, *The Building* (<https://www.st-columbas.com/the-building/>); Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.



Figure 3.3. Alberto Morrocco's mural for Wheeler & Sproson's St. Columba's Church in Glenrothes.

In 1948 Sproson was elected a student member of the RIBA, which indicates that he had passed his intermediate exams.⁴² During his final session, from 1948-49, he worked at the Fife County Council Planning Department as an architectural assistant, familiarising him for the first time with the region he would dedicate the remainder of his career to.⁴³ In June 1950, Sproson passed his final exams and had secured a position as a junior architect at the Glenrothes Development Corporation the following month.⁴⁴ He was elected ARIBA in December 1950, proposed by E F Davies, John Donald Mills and James Shearer.⁴⁵ By the end of their academic careers, both Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson had demonstrated their unrelenting ambition to improve and develop their skills. Through their hard work at university, Wheeler and Sproson laid the foundations for what was to become successful careers in architecture and town planning.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid; *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Frank Sproson (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400443).

⁴⁴ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁴⁵ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Frank Sproson.

3.3. Wheeler and Sproson's Early Careers

Wheeler's first job out of university was as Assistant City Architect in Oxford in 1948, a position which he remained in for a year. Whilst working in Oxford, Wheeler would undoubtedly have been involved with, or at least aware of, the work of Thomas Sharp on his historical town analysis of Oxford of 1948, 'Oxford Replanned.' In this document, Sharp proposed 'radical surgery' in order to preserve the best of the city. He selected poor quality buildings, many already due for demolition before the war, and suggested using their sites to build a shopping district which was similar in a sympathetic yet modern aesthetic and similar scale to adjacent historical areas.⁴⁶ Although some significant buildings such as the Frewie Hall would be demolished through the scheme, he deemed it a worthwhile loss in order to protect buildings of 'greater historical importance.'⁴⁷ This sympathetic approach to urban planning helped to reinforce Wheeler's approach and tied in with his appreciation of Brunelleschi and the lessons of the Arts and Crafts movement.

After a year in Oxford, Wheeler managed to secure another travelling scholarship which enabled him to travel to Switzerland in 1949.⁴⁸ Although a fantastic opportunity for a young architect, in the interviews with Wheeler later in his life, he never referred to this trip as being particularly inspirational to him. After returning from the trip he was invited by Professor Smith to take up a position in London at the office of Baker and Scott.⁴⁹ During his time at the practice, he was involved in the rebuilding at Convocation Hall in Church House, Westminster.⁵⁰ Wheeler

⁴⁶ Sharp, *Oxford Replanned*, pp. 144-151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.119.

⁴⁸ B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97.

⁴⁹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

found that he did not enjoy working at the practice, considering their work to be too classical, and left after only a year.⁵¹ It was at about this time in his career, however, that Wheeler obtained a RIBA Diploma in Town Planning and was retrospectively awarded a B.Arch from the University of Sheffield.⁵²

For Wheeler's next move, he chose to return to Scotland to take up position of Senior Architect at the Glenrothes Development Corporation in late 1949.⁵³ By the time of his arrival, the initial layout plan for Glenrothes had already been set by the Chief Architect and Chief Planning Officer of the Department of Health.⁵⁴ This layout was designed under the principles of the 'neighbourhood unit' model. This model, supported by leading figures such as Patrick Abercrombie and Robert Matthew, proposed grouping mixed communities of varied age and social class round a community building such as a primary school or community hall.⁵⁵ These communities would then be located around a larger community centre of shopping centres and high schools and again around a town centre with industry and a retail. In 1995, Wheeler spoke about how he was 'eager to become involved in the social architecture of the New Towns' so jumped at the opportunity to oversee municipal housing in an experimental settlement such as this.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97.

⁵³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁵⁴ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes', p. 69.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

Glenrothes New Town had first been proposed in Frank Mears' 'Regional Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland.' With an estimated 45,000 people expected to move into the Fife region, Mears put forward a proposal for the construction of new homes and Industry between Leslie and Markinch to house 30,000 people.⁵⁷ Due to a decline in the production capacity of the coal fields of Central Scotland, Mears stated that it was of 'national necessity' that the coal fields of the Forth Basin be expanded to cope with demands.⁵⁸ In order to manage these demands, Mears proposed that 'advantage should be taken of the facilities afforded by the New Towns Act.'⁵⁹ The site was approved by the Secretary of State for Scotland in July 1948.⁶⁰

Wheeler's main focus in his role at Glenrothes was the planning and design of the Woodside neighbourhood, which consisted of housing and a small shopping centre. Wheeler had insisted on a shopping centre being included in the scheme, considering it a vital part of a successful neighbourhood.⁶¹ The shopping centre was what Wheeler described as 'a little village hall grouping round a square' and included barrel vaulted community centre and flat roofed 3 storey blocks with a covered arcade of shops below constructed using 'lots of concrete.'⁶²

The surrounding housing area exhibits several traits which are similar to the work of Sharp. The neighbourhood was divided out into vehicle free areas with terraces of two to four houses set

⁵⁷ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*. p. 81.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ A. Wood, *40 Years New: Glenrothes, 1948-1988* (Unknown, 1989), p. 49.

⁶¹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁶² *Ibid.*

in green environments with pedestrian routes connecting blocks. In 1995, Wheeler described Woodside as having 'a villagy small scale atmosphere.'⁶³ In Sharp's 'The Anatomy of the Village', which was published just two years prior to Wheeler's interaction with Sharp in Oxford, he criticised wide spread detached housing in favour of terraces which overlooked landscaped squares and the ability for residents to walk without crossing arterial routes.⁶⁴ Although Woodside was only built after Wheeler had left the Glenrothes Development Corporation, he described how it was 'one of [his] most satisfying jobs.'⁶⁵ It was at Glenrothes Development Corporation where Wheeler first met Sproson. For a brief period in 1950 both architects shared an office before Sproson moved on to a role at the Fife County Education Architect's Department.⁶⁶ Sproson remained in this role for several years, acting as senior assistant for the new school department. It was in this role that he designed phase one of the 1954-57 Auchmuty High School in Glenrothes (see Figure 3.4) and assisted with the 1958 Kirkcaldy High School.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁶⁶ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁶⁷ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.



Figure 3.4. Frank Sproson at the Auchmuty High School site (1957), bottom row, second from left.

3.4. The Formation of Wheeler & Sproson

After realising that he was 'dissatisfied by the ponderous machinery of the New Town organisation', Wheeler left Glenrothes Development Corporation in 1952 to take up position of Senior Lecturer at Dundee School of Architecture, part of the then Dundee Institute of Art and Technology.⁶⁸ At the same time as he began teaching, Wheeler established his own private practice as H. Anthony Wheeler.⁶⁹ Having become drawn to the architecture and ambitious aims for redevelopment in the Fife region during his previous years at Glenrothes, he opted to position the practice at Sailor's Walk in Kirkcaldy. Wheeler saw the benefits of Fife as an area to base his practice, with the 1946 *Fife Looks Ahead* and the previously mentioned *Regional*

⁶⁸ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 70.

⁶⁹ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 75.

Survey and Plan for Central and South East Scotland creating opportunities for the young practice.⁷⁰ With twenty-five burghs, Fife's Council lacked the capacity to implement the plan and meet the housing demand themselves without the resources to design and manage the development of housing projects. With few other practices designing housing in the region, Wheeler found himself regularly winning contracts and competing with national developers such as Wimpey.⁷¹

The first job taken on by the practice was a small housing development known as The Bowery in Leslie, a settlement just half a mile from the boundary of Glenrothes. The project was completed between 1952 and 1955.⁷² Wheeler had first become involved in Leslie through his Glenrothes connections, stating that 'one of my staff persuaded someone to give me a job in Leslie.'⁷³ As part of Wheeler's involvement in Leslie, the practice was also asked by the local authorities to prepare a development plan for the burgh.⁷⁴

The development at The Bowery was built on a 'waste land at the back of the long, narrow plots which make up the centres of many old Scottish burghs.'⁷⁵ It consisted of 50 dwellings, which were built in single and two storey cottages, as well as two blocks of three storey flats (see Figure 3.5).⁷⁶ These were harled with pantile roofs, and areas of rubble facing. The

⁷⁰ C. J. Cousland, *Fife Looks Ahead: A Regional Survey of The County* (Edinburgh, 1946); Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, p. 81.

⁷¹ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁷² B. McLeod, 'Sir Anthony Wheeler,' pp. 96-97; Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 75.

⁷³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ 'Saltire Society Housing Awards,' *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 126, no. 3260 (1957), p. 275.

⁷⁶ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 111.

development was designed as a cul-de-sac of long pitched roof terraces with mostly private front and back gardens surrounding a communal 'courtyard' with parking and grass areas.⁷⁷ Although the development contained only one entry point for vehicles, an additional pedestrian route traversed the development along an existing right of way. This passageway cut through the buildings through two pends, one through a set of single storey cottages and the second through the development's central three-storey flatted block. Although making attempts to fit in to the historic character of the burgh through the use of traditional materials and scale, the development was clearly modern, using concrete external staircases, modern fenestration and flat roofed store-rooms at the front of each cottage.

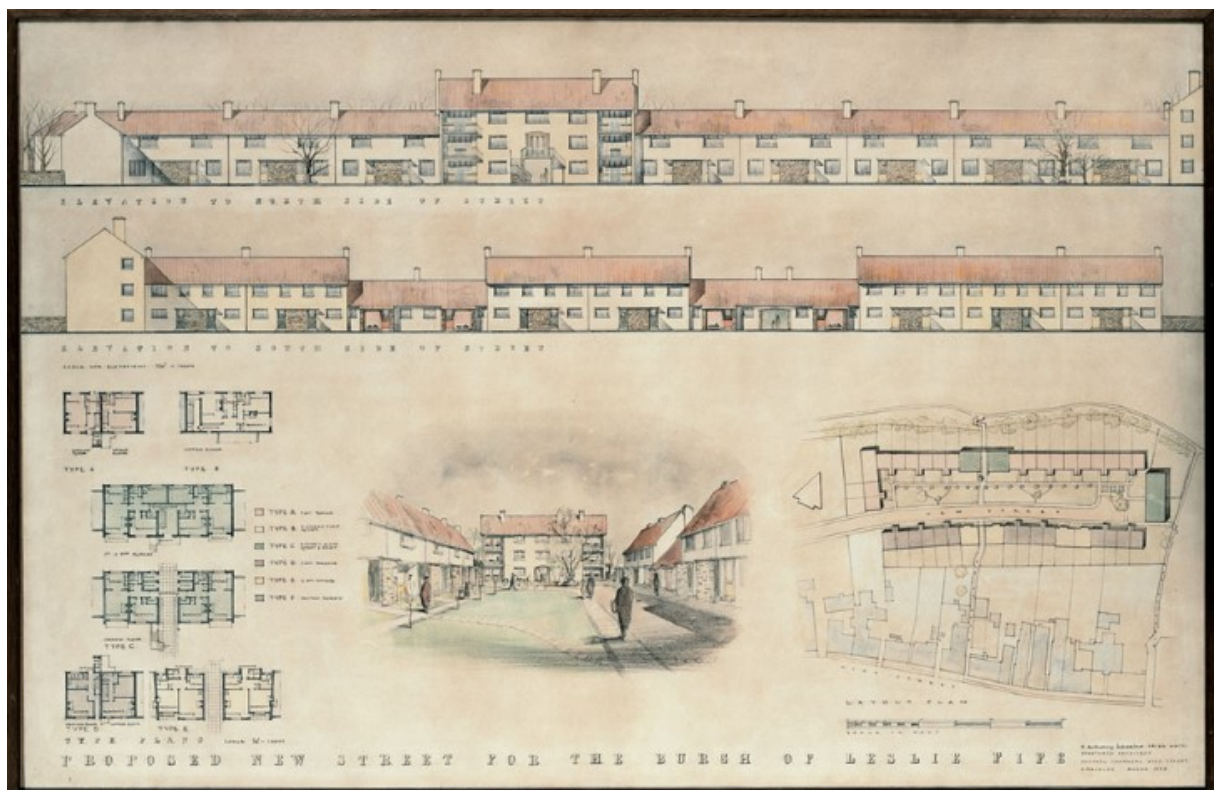


Figure 3.5. Wheeler & Sproson's The Bowery in Leslie.

⁷⁷ 'Saltire Award: Housing Scheme that Makes Most of Sunshine,' *Manchester Guardian* (13 August 1957), p. 3.

Despite Wheeler's dislike of its name, The Bowery was a successful first venture for the practice, winning the 1956 Saltire Society Award for Good Housing.⁷⁸ It was in towards the end of this contract, in 1954, that Wheeler decided to take on a partner to help him with the running of the practice. Chief Planning Officer for Fife, Maurice Taylor, recommended Frank Sproson to Wheeler as a potential partner after his experience working with him at the Fife County Architects Department in 1948-9.⁷⁹ Their work at The Bowery began a long career for the practice in the development of small-to-medium scale housing schemes in the historic burghs of Fife, particularly in areas blighted by historic mine underworking.⁸⁰

In the following decades Wheeler & Sproson developed a modernist yet place-sensitive approach to historic burgh housing focused largely on the redevelopment of difficult slum clearance sites.⁸¹ Whilst this often involved the demolition of 19th century housing, Wheeler & Sproson regularly fought for the protection of significant 17th century townhouses, conserving them and basing the layout of the new housing around them.⁸² One of their more prominent roles was as job architects for seven of the National Trust for Scotland's Little Houses Improvement Scheme sites.⁸³ The purpose of the scheme was to restore significant historic properties which had been neglected, for resale on a revolving fund basis.⁸⁴ Wheeler spoke of his enthusiasm at joining the National Trust for Scotland in the 1960s. Wheeler enjoyed the creativity and flexibility which he found within the Little Houses projects, and through his

⁷⁸ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning; Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 76.

⁷⁹ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁸⁰ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 75.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 40.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

eagerness, quickly began to dominate the scheme.⁸⁵ Some of the jobs the practice took on as part of the Little Houses scheme were at Crail, Pittenweem and Anstruther.⁸⁶ Through the project, Wheeler & Sproson became increasingly interested in the traditional architecture of Fife, and in particular the villages in the East Neuk area.⁸⁷ The scheme allowed them to work directly with historic buildings on a regular basis and further fortified their interest in integrating 17th century vernacular Scottish forms and materials into their own modern developments.⁸⁸

The practice was mostly known for their more public and institutional based work for local authorities, housing associations, health boards, universities, and religious bodies. Out of the estimated 1,430 jobs completed by the practice, 480 of their jobs were for such organisations.⁸⁹ Although 34% of their work may not seem particularly significant, it is worth noting that of all the projects the practice worked on, it was these which were generally the largest in scale, the longest running and most the notable jobs. The impact the practice had on south Fife in particular, is astonishing, with almost every burgh being noticeably altered to some degree or other, primarily through housing schemes and health service infrastructure. Prominent developments include much of the Victoria Hospital in Kirkcaldy, a large housing development at Buckhaven and a students' union at the University of St. Andrews.

⁸⁵ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 74; Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁸⁸ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 114.

⁸⁹ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

3.5. Life at the Practice

Wheeler & Sproson's office at Sailor's Walk was a rather unusual choice as a workplace for a young practice, but its historic nature tied in closely with Wheeler and Sproson's interests in vernacular architecture and acted as a constant reminder of the practice's determination to design with the historic environment in mind (see Figure 3.6). Arguably the oldest building in Kirkcaldy, Sailor's Walk was chosen by the National Trust for Scotland as a significant site for redevelopment after it had been under threat of demolition in the 1940s.⁹⁰ With additional funding provided by the Historic Buildings Council and a public appeal, Wheeler & Sproson was chosen as the architects who would lead the restoration and would subsequently acquire part of the building for their offices.⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland*, Sailors Walk, 443-449, High Street, Kirkcaldy (<https://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/915984>).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 3.6. Wheeler & Sproson's Offices at Sailor's Walk, Kirkcaldy, taken shortly after its 1954 to 1959 restoration.

According to Wheeler, he acted as chief designer within the office, stating that he was 'the leader and decided how things should be done.'⁹² Wheeler was a 'talented draughtsman', with close connections to the arts throughout his life.⁹³ He regularly exhibited work at the Scottish Society of Architect Artists, becoming an honorary fellow of the society in August 2012.⁹⁴ Wheeler served on the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland from 1967, he served as president of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, and from 1983 to 1990 he also served as president of the Royal Scottish Academy.⁹⁵ As is traditional, Wheeler's portrait was painted at the end of his term in office as president of the Royal Scottish Academy. A friend of

⁹² Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁹³ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Anthony Wheeler.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the practice for many years, as has previously been mentioned, Wheeler picked Alberto Morrocco to paint his portrait (see Figure 3.7).⁹⁶

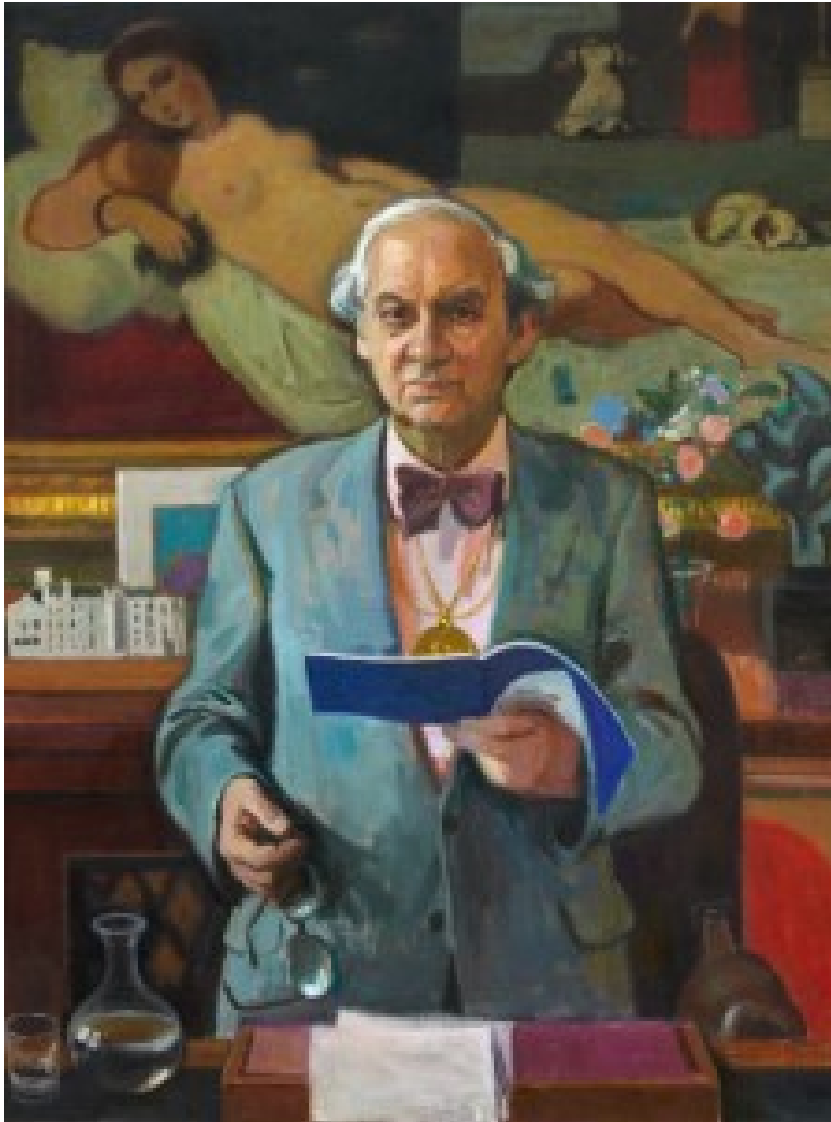


Figure 3.7. Portrait of Anthony Wheeler by Alberto Morrocco painted at the end of Wheeler’s term as President of the Royal Scottish Academy.

Wheeler described Sproson as a ‘sensitive guy’ who did most of the administration work for the practice, something which Wheeler ‘didn’t find exactly to [his] taste.’⁹⁷ Sproson’s skills in this respect allowed him to manage the firm’s success as a business and run a productive

⁹⁶ Blondes Fine Arts, *Alberto Morrocco and his Mural Paintings* (<http://www.blondesfineart.com/blondes-blog/2016/4/21/alberto-morrocco-and-his-mural-paintings>).

⁹⁷ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

office.⁹⁸ He was responsible for 'office administration and finance, contract procedures and management, the preparation of contract document, specifications etc.'⁹⁹ However, Sproson was not solely a manager, with his talents in the technical aspects of complex projects regularly coming into play.¹⁰⁰ Like Wheeler, he was also gifted artist. According to Sproson's son Robert, his father was the figure behind for most of the detailed illustrations of the developments, while Wheeler was better known for his more abstract charcoal drawings.¹⁰¹ This working relationship was a highly successful one, leading to a '28-year partnership and lifelong friendship' between the two architects.¹⁰²

Wheeler and Sproson were not alone in running the practice however, with a large team spread across multiple offices by the 1970s. Sailor's Walk remained the Kirkcaldy base for the practice until their move across the town to Osborn House on East Fergus Place in 1988.¹⁰³ The practice also opened in Edinburgh office in approximately 1964, which changed location several times before settling in Hanover Street in 1976.¹⁰⁴ By the mid-1970s the practice had a staff of 45 across its two offices.¹⁰⁵ Over the years the practice promoted staff to partners, such as Bill McLeod, who we will hear about further below, and Alan J Clark, who went on to open his own Kirkcaldy based practice in 1982.¹⁰⁶ Other partners included Donald McInnes, Andrew

⁹⁸ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

⁹⁹ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Frank Sproson.

¹⁰⁰ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97; Bill McLeod, interviewed by K. Breen, 13 October 2020.

¹⁰¹ Personal communication with Frank Sproson's son, Robert Sproson at 'New Life in an Old Town' Exhibition Opening (27 September 2019).

¹⁰² Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.; Bill McLeod, interviewed by K. Breen.

¹⁰³ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Wheeler & Sproson
(http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400444).

¹⁰⁴ 'Practice Announcements,' *The Architect's Journal*, vol. 163, no. 10 (1976), p. 476.

¹⁰⁵ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97; *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Frank Sproson.

¹⁰⁶ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Alan J Clark
(http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=407752).

Glen Weir, A Johnson, and P J McCormick.¹⁰⁷ The work of architectural practices was also heavily reliant on assistants. Prominent examples of people who worked for Wheeler & Sproson over the years includes Richard Mercer Blaikie who went into private practice in 1975 and eventually formed Blaikie Johnston Withers in 1990, Jo Parry-Geddes who is now a Senior Architect at Mills Architects and Mike Brennan, now Director at JMP Architects.¹⁰⁸

In 2020, an interview was conducted with former partner, Bill McLeod, as part of the research for this thesis. This interview has provided an invaluable insight into the experiences of one of its most significant and longest serving employees. McLeod spoke with pride of Wheeler & Sproson throughout his interview, explaining how he was ‘a “single practice architect’ from [his] year-out to [his] retiral as Consultant”’¹⁰⁹ Trained at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design from 1961, McLeod was part of the first class to take a year out between 3rd and 4th years to work in the field. Students were allocated out by the Head of School primarily based on proximity to their hometowns. In McLeod’s case, his hometown was Anstruther, so was sent to work at Wheeler & Sproson’s Kirkcaldy office between 1964 and 1965, a placement he ‘would always be grateful for.’¹¹⁰

Upon joining Wheeler & Sproson, McLeod was ‘apprehensive’, but found that he ‘enjoyed the atmosphere and the work experience so much that [he] returned for the summer vacation

¹⁰⁷ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Wheeler & Sproson.

¹⁰⁸ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Richard Mercer Blaikie (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400190); *LinkedIn*, Jo Parry-Geddes (<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/jo-parry-geddes-82583844>); *LinkedIn*, Mike Brennan (<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/mike-brennan-18a71b174>).

¹⁰⁹ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

between 4th and 5th year.’¹¹¹ When he graduated in 1967, McLeod moved down to Edinburgh to enrol in a part-time post-graduate degree in Town and Country Planning at Edinburgh College of Art. By this point Wheeler & Sproson had opened an office in the city, allowing for McLeod to again return to working for the practice. By 1973 McLeod had become an Associate before being appointed Partner in 1975. He recalls working on many of Wheeler & Sproson’s most prominent projects over the years, including Edinburgh College of Art’s Hunter Building, the Grangemouth Central Area Redevelopment and Agnes Blackadder Halls for the University of St Andrews. McLeod took over as Senior Partner from Wheeler when he retired in 1986, before retiring himself in 2000.¹¹²

In the interview, McLeod shared the everyday working environment he experienced at the practice from his first day in 1964 to his retirement. He recollected how the office had a friendly and enthusiastic environment, where ‘everyone, from partners downwards, made [him] feel at home.’¹¹³ He particularly appreciated the dedicated approach to work he witnessed from his early years onwards.¹¹⁴ He described Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson as ‘very much hands on’, appearing in the studios and regularly ‘going from drawing board to drawing board’ to offer support and advice.¹¹⁵ When the Edinburgh office opened, this supportive environment followed, with Wheeler regularly travelling across the water from Kirkcaldy to remain informed and offer his guidance. Wheeler eventually moved to Edinburgh, with his new

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

house in the Dean Village area of the city being completed in 1974.¹¹⁶ By 1982 when Sproson retired, the Edinburgh office had already assumed the role of headquarters in terms of ‘incoming projects and ultimately administration.’¹¹⁷ Anthony Wheeler remained a partner at Wheeler & Sproson until 1986 and remained as a consultant until the practice closed in 2005.¹¹⁸

3.6. Conclusion

Across the 53-years the practice operated, the team worked on a vast range of developments that concentrated across the Fife and Lothians regions.¹¹⁹ As we will see throughout our discussions of Burntisland and Dysart, the work of the practice primarily followed the ‘Modern-Vernacular’ approach discussed in Chapter 2. Wheeler was initially drawn to Fife for the location of his offices in the early 1950s as, having worked in Glenrothes, he was aware that the region was an area of development and considered the prospects to be optimistic for an emerging practice.¹²⁰ In particular, it was the fabric of the region’s burghs which was the biggest draw for Wheeler. He saw these settlements as ‘essentially urban in character’ and was interested in their high-density urban patterns.¹²¹ The area was an ideal canvas on which he could experiment with his own brand of place-sensitive yet modern redevelopment.

¹¹⁶ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Edinburgh Dean Village: 3 Hawthornbank Lane Hawthornbank House (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/136828/edinburgh-dean-village-3-hawthornbank-lane-hawthornbank-house>).

¹¹⁷ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen; *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Wheeler & Sproson.

¹¹⁸ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 111.

¹¹⁹ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Wheeler & Sproson.

¹²⁰ ‘Building a New Scotland,’ p. 30.

¹²¹ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 70.

As a result, it was unsurprising that in the mid to late 1950s, Wheeler & Sproson enthusiastically took on contracts for the redevelopment of two of Fife's historic burghs. It was the 1955-1975 Burntisland and the 1958-1977 Dysart redevelopment projects which solidified Wheeler & Sproson's relatively high density and quasi-vernacular take on historic burgh intervention, which Wheeler referred to as 'modern restoration.'¹²² Both projects were multi-phase development which used an 'urban ensemble' approach to combine the old and the new, with areas of new development, restoration and reconstruction.¹²³ Burntisland and Dysart are two of the towns that Wheeler & Sproson made most of an impact on, having worked on over 60 jobs in the two burghs across the history of the practice. The following two chapters will examine these urban infill developments in detail, with Chapter 4 focusing on the practice's first urban infill scheme at Burntisland and Chapter 5 dedicated to their most award-winning development, at Dysart.

¹²² Ibid. pp. 70 -77.

¹²³ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Burntisland

4.1. Introduction

In 1954, Wheeler & Sproson took on their second ever job as a practice, having made a name for themselves in the local area for their development at The Bowery in Leslie. This job was a small alteration project at Burntisland’s police station. Although minor in scale, the scheme was a first step in a twenty-year relationship between the practice and the town of Burntisland. Burntisland was a substantial historic burgh, positioned five miles across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh (see Figure 4.1). With expansion of industry in the area in the 1950s, the town was in need of an extended and improved housing stock. Several areas of the settlement were developed by other architects, but no practice impacted the settlement more than Wheeler & Sproson.



Figure 4.1. Burntisland is located to the north of Edinburgh in the Fife region of Scotland.

Across the course of twenty years, several areas of the town were transformed by the practice, as can be seen in Figure 4.2. Wheeler & Sproson worked on 43 jobs in Burntisland between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s.¹ Thirty-two of these were related to housing development, including 'greenfield' sites such as the 1958-62 Coltburndale Development (see Figure 4.3) and the 1956 Melville Gardens estate, as well as the restoration of Rossend Castle for Link Housing Association in 1970.² There were also 11 other jobs relating to retail, leisure, and the emergency services. Out of the 43 jobs, twenty-two were for Burntisland Town Council.³ Most significant, however, are the sixteen jobs in the central area of the development studied in this thesis. The central area was selected due to its symbolism as the practice's first urban infill scheme, which is representative of much of their work to follow over the next 60 years. Burntisland's central area was also better covered by critics and the architectural press than their peripheral schemes, offering better opportunity for analysis. However, as will become apparent throughout this chapter, reporting on the development by local newspapers becomes increasingly rare as the years passed. This is most likely due to the development work becoming normal and less of a novelty to report on. The following discussion will introduce the development of Burntisland through a descriptive chronological account, with the rationale behind its design explored in greater detail alongside both Dysart and their other work in Section 3 of the thesis.

¹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 33-48.

² Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

³ Ibid.

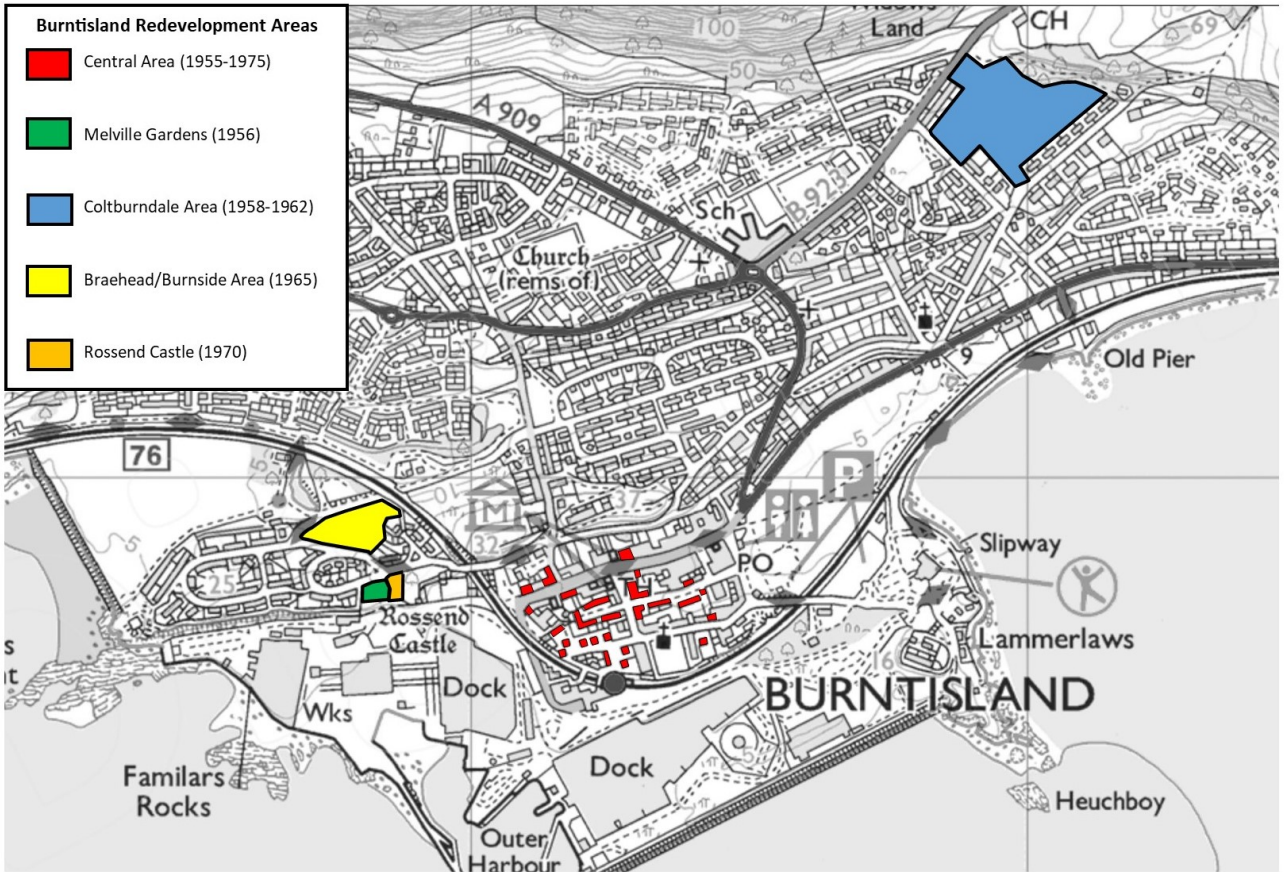


Figure 4.2. Burntisland housing areas developed by Wheeler & Sproson between 1955 and 1975.



Figure 4.3. Coltburndale flats by Wheeler & Sproson. Constructed 1958-1962.

4.2. History of Burntisland

Burntisland is a small town on the southern coastline of the Fife region of Scotland. It has a long and rich history, which in part, led to its complex development history. In the 12th Century the area around Burntisland was owned by the Monks of Dunfermline, who owned the harbour.⁴ At this point the town was known as Wester Kinghorn. The settlement was positioned adjacent to Rossend Castle, which was sold to James V by the abbots of Dunfermline Abbey in 1541, at which point it was granted royal burgh status. The town gained independence from Kinghorn in 1586 and renamed Burntisland after an island in the harbour where fisherman's huts were burned.⁵ The town quickly developed as a seaport, and its primary industry became shipbuilding. In 1844 the town also benefited from a new pier that formed a ferry link to Granton, near Edinburgh.⁶ After the arrival of the railway in 1847, Burntisland gained the first roll on roll off rail ferry in the world, allowing trains to run from Edinburgh to the north and east. This service ran until 1890 when the Forth Rail Bridge opened.⁷

The heart of Burntisland was once an area where the rich merchant classes built their homes.⁸ As a result, the town possessed many fine examples of Scottish domestic architecture from the 16th and 17th centuries.⁹ After the departure of the ferry, however, the town primarily became a struggling herring and coal port. According to an article published in the *Fife Free Press* in

⁴ *Burntisland Heritage Trust*, Miscellaneous History (<https://www.burntisland.net/history.htm>).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 'New Life in an Old Town,' p. 12.

⁹ Ibid.

1956, over the first half of the twentieth century the central core of the town fell into 'a state of disrepair and dreariness', with dark and narrow streets of neglected properties.¹⁰ Despite its areas of dereliction, however, Burntisland was a vibrant and growing burgh that desperately required new and improved housing areas. It was to the credit of its active council that housing became its primary focus in the period after the war.¹¹

Like many other local authorities, Burntisland had begun to erect housing after the end of the First World War. The first of these to be completed and occupied were at the Rossend area, now renamed Broomhill Avenue, which were completed in 1921.¹² From 1921 to 1954, the number of municipal homes in the town rose to 768.¹³ This number included 50 pre-fab houses which were built at the Dollar Road area in the years immediately after the Second World War and traditionally built housing at Piper Crescent, Church Street and Church Grove.¹⁴

Despite these improvements in housing numbers, the council was heavily criticised by the newly elected housing convener Councillor J. Nicol in December 1953 for the complete cessation of house building in the period between October 1951 and November 1952.¹⁵ He stated that ever growing waiting lists were badly affected by this delay in housing construction. He argued however, that the Labour Group of which he was member, had welcomed the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage."'

¹² 'Burntisland Municipal House Building: A Comprehensive Review,' *Fife Free Press* (24 July 1954), p. 9.

¹³ 'Burntisland Municipal House Building,' p. 9; 'His Majesty's Stationary Office: Housing Return for Scotland 30th June 1950, Secretary of State for Scotland,' *Department of Health for Scotland Edinburgh His Majesty's Stationary Office 1950* (30 June 1950), Appendix.

¹⁴ 'Burntisland Municipal House Building,' p. 9.

¹⁵ 'Burntisland Housing Record Created,' *Fife Free Press* (5 December 1953), p. 13.

opportunity in 1952 of taking responsibility for housing in Burntisland and swore to prove their efficiency in housing completion. This promise was kept, and by March 1954 Nicol stated that 'houses were being built faster in Burntisland than at any other period in the entire history of the town.'¹⁶ Whereas only 8 homes had been constructed in 1952, 1953 saw 98 municipal homes completed and by the beginning of 1954 plans had been drawn up for a further 150 homes to be completed by the end of the year.¹⁷

By mid-1954, 192 non-traditional, 122 traditional and 50 prefabricated homes had been built in the Grange area and the town had begun to run out of any other viable space for development. Surrounded on three sides by steep hills, the only remaining land that had not been allocated for housing lay above the level of the town's water supply reservoir and would have been uneconomical to supply with water.¹⁸ Despite these issues, in July 1954 the Council had reported a waiting list of 408 applicants with a demand for 79 four apartment flats, 255 three apartment flats, 54 two apartment flats and 20 one apartment flats.¹⁹

Although there were some sites already planned to help tackle the waiting list, such as at Wheeler & Sproson's Coltsburndales Land and the nearby Broomhill Crescent for the Council and Windows Land for the Scottish Special Housing Association, the Council was still in need of development land.²⁰ The only option that remained was to look to the dilapidated central area

¹⁶ 'Sub-Standard Houses for the Future: Burntisland Labour Party Discussion,' *Fife Free Press* (27 March 1954), p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' *Fife Free Press* (1 May 1954), p. 13.

¹⁹ 'Burntisland Municipal House Building,' p. 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

of the settlement. This area has been long disputed by the Labour and Conservative parties in Burntisland, with the Conservatives allowing landlords to continue to gather rent in properties that Labour argued were uninhabitable and required demolition.²¹ It was to these sites that the Labour run Council finally looked to by the mid-1950s. In June of 1952, the Secretary of State for Scotland approved a Labour Council led proposal for the central area of Burntisland to be redeveloped over a period twenty years.²²

4.3. The Burntisland Redevelopment Project

In May 1954 the Deputy Planning Officer for Fife, Mr Stuart B. Hart, developed these plans further and suggested that the area surrounding Somerville Street should be selected as the first phase of the development.²³ The scheme would involve the demolition of most of the existing 19th century tenements on along the street, but the 16th and 17th century houses on the southern side would be retained and converted into Council housing.²⁴ After being appointed by the local Council in 1955, the initial Somerville Street job would become Wheeler & Sproson's third job as a practice, and their first urban infill redevelopment project. It was referred to in office documentation as the 'Redevelopment at Somerville Street/High Street, Burntisland.'²⁵ This preliminary work in Burntisland began in 1955 and set off a series of 16 jobs that the practice designed within the central area of Burntisland from the 1955 to 1975. Their work had an enormous impact on the burgh and takes up large areas of the settlement.

²¹ 'Sub-Standard Houses for the Future,' p. 12.

²² 'Re-Development of Somerville Street, Burntisland,' *Fife Free Press* (7 April 1956), p. 8.

²³ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p. 13.

²⁴ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage."'

²⁵ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

Figure 4.4 shows the extent of Wheeler & Sproson's work at Burntisland town centre, with each contract, or 'job', itemised and indicated on the map. This has been produced using the 'Job List' of Wheeler & Sproson's work, which contains the names, numbers, and associated information of all 1394 jobs completed by the practice.²⁶ An additional job has been added to the Burntisland Redevelopment Project Map (listed as number 16), which does not appear on the 'Job List' but is referenced in several documents within the Wheeler & Sproson Collection. This 'Unknown' site will be discussed below.

The Burntisland Redevelopment Project was a complex tapestry of jobs done at differing times, spread across the town centre area. As a result, a geographical approach will be adopted, which allows for adjacent developments to be discussed together. The redevelopment jobs completed by Wheeler & Sproson in Burntisland loosely fall into five geographical areas. This includes the Somerville Square area, the Kirkgate/High Street jobs, the sites around South/East Somerville Street, the two jobs at West Leven Street and the High Street/ Harbour Place area. Each section will be discussed in turn and contain a dedicated map indicating which blocks and jobs will be explored.

²⁶ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

Burntisland Redevelopment Project



1) Somerville Street/High Street

Job: 51
Dates: 1955—1957



2) Somerville Street, Phase 2

Job: 53
Dates: 1956—1958



3) Somerville Street (30-33)

Job: 71
Dates: 1956



4) Somerville Street (14-28)

Job: 77
Dates: 1955—1956



5) High Street/Lothian Street

Job: 178
Dates: 1959—1961



6) Leven Street East

Job: 259
Dates: 1961—1962



7) Somerville Street/Kirkgate

Job: 280
Dates: 1962—1965



8) High Street (41)

Job: 368
Dates: 1965—1966



9) West Leven Street, Phase 1

Job: 415
Dates: 1967—1970



10) Kirkgate/High Street

Job: 491
Dates: 1968—1970



11) High Street (139/147)

Job: 526
Dates: 1970—1972



12) The Parsonage

Job: 527
Dates: 1971-72



13) West Leven Street, Phase 2

Job: 575
Dates: 1972—1973



14) High Street (163-173)

Job: 583
Dates: 1971—1972



15) Harbour Place (1-2)

Job: 672
Dates: 1974—1975



16) Unknown Wheeler & Sproson development that occurred between 1961 and 1969

Figure 4.4. Burntisland Redevelopment Project with individual job numbers and date ranges shown. Dates are provided based on the first and last dates indicated within Wheeler & Sproson Collection archival material.

4.4. Somerville Square Developments

The first of these five categories to be discussed is the group of developments on Somerville Square (see Figure 4.5). This includes the large multipart ‘Somerville Street/ High Street’ development (Job 51), and the two restoration projects on the southern side of Somerville Square (Jobs 71 and 77).

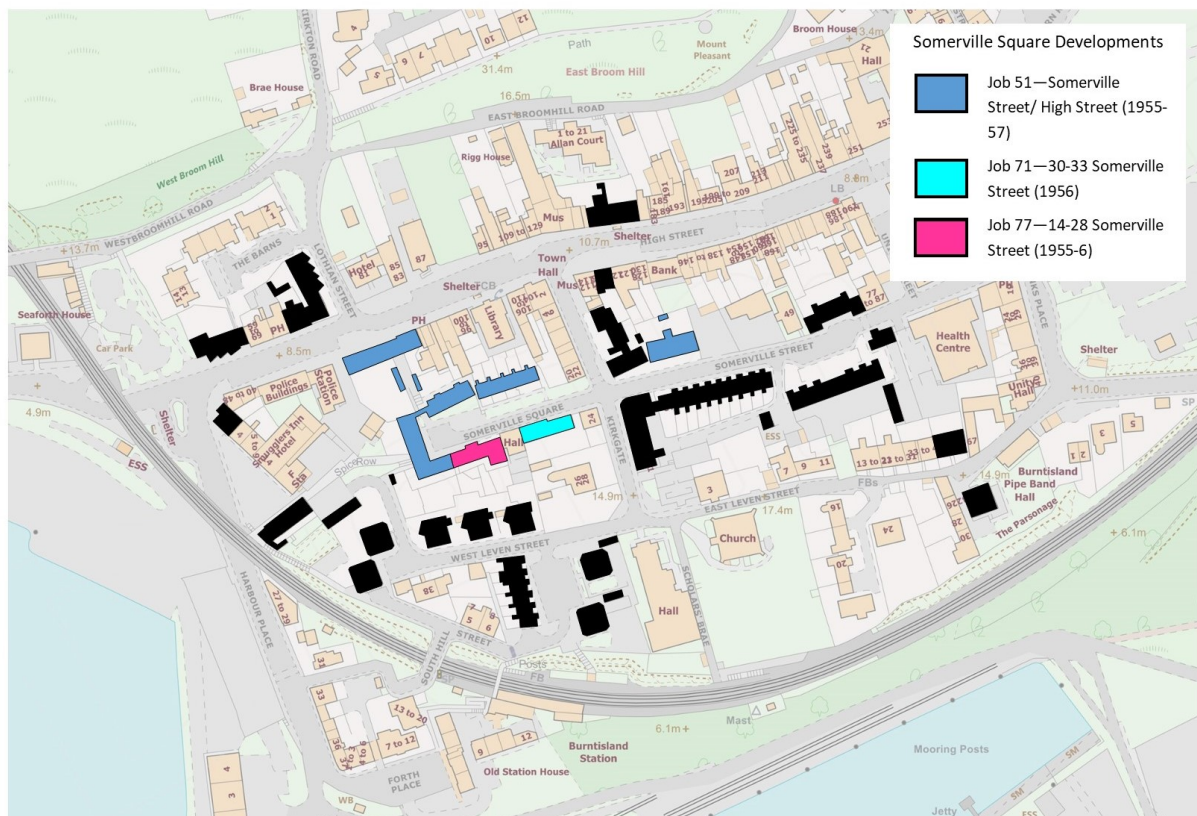


Figure 4.5. Map highlighting the Somerville Square area of Burntisland Town Centre, containing Jobs 51, 71 and 77. Remainder of development shown in black.

Job 51 – Somerville Street/ High Street

On the 2nd of June 1952, the first step towards the redevelopment of Burntisland came when a motion submitted by Councillor Robert M. Livingstone to ‘to prepare for the modernisation

and rebuilding of the centre part of the town', was unanimously agreed on.²⁷ By July 1952, Burntisland Town Council had submitted proposals to the Planning Authority and a plan prepared by the Burgh Surveyor of the area suitable for redevelopment.²⁸ A survey of the area was then made which allowed for a draft development plan for Burntisland to be issued by the Planning Authority in January 1953.²⁹ After a public enquiry on the redevelopment, the site was declared a 'clearance area', allowing compulsory purchase orders to be made, and the council was then able to acquire and clear sites.³⁰ The plan was envisaged to take place over a period of twenty years, split up into various phases of redevelopment.³¹

The plan proposed the Somerville Street area as the first five-year phase for redevelopment.³² It suggested that Somerville Street was the ideal area for the first phase as it was 'of bad layout and obsolete development.'³³ In particular, it suggested the clearance of derelict properties on the south-western part of Somerville Street at Black's Close and of 27-35 High Street, and proposed the erection of new houses to replace them.³⁴ When asked why Somerville Street had been chosen as the first area for redevelopment, Deputy Planning Officer for Fife, Mr Stuart Hart, stated that it was 'the most pressing area', the one that was in most need.³⁵ Their

²⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Official Opening of the Somerville Street – High Street Housing Redevelopment forming the First Stage of the Rebuilding of the Central Areas of the Original Burgh, Friday 22nd November 1957,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

²⁸ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p .13.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ 'Official Opening of the Somerville Street,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p .13.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ 'Official Opening of the Somerville Street,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

³⁵ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p .13.

ambition was to transform this area of mostly derelict properties into an area with 'the maximum number of homes' for the people of Burntisland.³⁶

In January 1955, the Council unanimously agreed to Ballie John Nicol's proposal that all old buildings on Somerville Street should be photographed before were demolished and then again when new buildings were completed.³⁷ Although Nicol acknowledged that the photographs were not of great purpose at the time but thought that they would be an 'intriguing reference' for future generations. Whether this was out of respect of the old or desire to prove the necessity of the new once completed, is not clear. Unfortunately these images appear to have been lost over time.

The housing photographed in this project was described by Mr George Steadman Riddell, Deputy M.O.H for Fife, as being severely dilapidated.³⁸ He cited defects related to the roofs, chimney heads, plasterwork, floors, stairways, lavatory and washhouse accommodation and pointed out that the houses lacked bathrooms, larders, sculleries and hot water systems. Many of the houses were also reportedly suffering from dampness.³⁹ Many of these houses had been subject to demolition orders in 1934 and 1938, but had laid derelict since the war.⁴⁰ This included 11, 13, 19 and 23 Somerville Street, which comprised eight houses that were in

³⁶ 'New Life in an Old Town,' p. 12.

³⁷ 'Old Buildings to be Photographed,' *Fife Free Press* (1 January 1955), p. 10.

³⁸ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p. 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

ruinous condition. He recommended that numbers 15, 17 and 21 should also be demolished as soon as possible for the protection of public health and safety.⁴¹

The only objector to Compulsory Purchase Order No. 1 was Miss Taylor, a schoolteacher who owned and leased a tenement block at 9 Somerville Street.⁴² The Council viewed 9 Somerville Street to be 'grossly neglected and was unfit for human habitation.'⁴³ This block is an ideal case study in demonstrating the conditions and issues which affected much of the housing on the street. The tenement consisted of six houses, including two of two apartments on the ground floor, one of three apartments and one of two apartments on the second floor, and two single apartments in the attic level.⁴⁴ At this time, they were occupied by four families of two, one of three, and one of six.

Expert witness evidence at the hearing over the demolition of 9 Somerville Street in May 1954 argued that 'the fabric of the whole of the property showed evidence of gross neglect and lack of repair.'⁴⁵ This included defective chimney heads, defective woodwork in the windows, damaged guttering with missing sections, stonework which required pointing, a lack of sub-ventilation on parts of the ground floor, poor internal woodwork and defective fireplaces.⁴⁶ None of the houses had a scullery or effective larder, and although water was laid to sinks in the living-rooms or kitchens, the sinks themselves were unsatisfactory. For the six houses, only

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

two water closets were provided, both of which were in a very poor condition. The common washhouse was defective and had no fixed tubs. None of the houses had a bathroom or hot water system, and all homes, except one, showed signs of dampness.

Despite the numerous reported defects, Miss Taylor's father, Mr William Taylor, who acted as the factor for the property, argued that although it was over 100 years old, he had not received many complaints from the tenants, and was able to deal with those which he was contacted about.⁴⁷ He also stated that it had been standard practice that a proportion of the income from the property was spent on repairs.⁴⁸ Mr Taylor argued that difficulties had occurred, as low rents meant that little money was available for this purpose. This issue was commonplace in the properties in Somerville Street. At the hearing it was acknowledged that these properties were not neglected, but instead had suffered from the impacts of the Rents Restriction Act. This act limited the amount of rent that landlords could charge, and as a result, landlords across the country were struggling to afford repairs on their buildings.⁴⁹

At the hearing, it was agreed by a range of witnesses that the property could not be made habitable at reasonable expense, and that even if repairs were carried out, the property would fall short of housing standards of the time.⁵⁰ The limit of £500 allocated by the Council would not have covered the cost of repairs sufficiently to bring the property up to standard.⁵¹ Two architects were called to provide costings for the retention of the building. Mr Peter Sinclair,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

architect and Burgh Surveyor of Methil, Carnoustie and Buckhaven, suggested that at least £2,000 to £3,000 would have been necessary to bring the building up to standard.⁵² Mr George Deas, a Kirkcaldy based architect argued that the property could be made fit for human habitation for the cost of £300, but this would still not have allowed the property to meet housing standard.⁵³

The selection process for which properties the Council deemed important enough for retention is unclear. There is no reason given in any existing documentation as to why £500 was the chosen amount allocated for the restoration of this block, when more was spent on other historic properties which were retained. It is also debatable whether demolition and reconstruction was a more cost-effective method in cases such as this. The hearing does, however, provide a glimpse into the thoughts of the planners at the time. When asked whether the Planning Authority considered retaining existing buildings, Mr Hart responded that 'while it was not the Authority's policy to sweep away all properties in every case, it was preferable to clear the whole area.'⁵⁴ When probed further, Mr Hart admitted that 'it would be very difficult to arrive at a decent layout for years if you are to retain any of the buildings.'⁵⁵ He also acknowledged that from the initial preparation of the draft development plan, it had always been assumed that the area would be completely demolished. It is clear then that the local authorities had no intention of retaining any of the 19th century properties, even if the cost was more economical than reconstruction.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ 'Shortage of Housing Sites at Burntisland,' p .13.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

In the end, 9 Somerville Street was demolished, but it was agreed that rather than receiving part one of the Compulsory Purchase Order, which would only have provided the owner with the value of the land, Miss Taylor was instead offered part two, which paid her the value of the property.⁵⁶ This, however, was unusual on the street, with most owners only receiving part one. Once demolished, Ballie Nicol had hoped that 'in the very near future these monuments of bad health and frustration will be replaced by decent, healthy, inspiring homes.'⁵⁷

By April 1954, the Council had begun to receive brochures from non-traditional firms interested in working on the redevelopment. However, by the end of the year, Wheeler & Sproson were chosen as the architects for the scheme.⁵⁸ With their work at the Bowery already under way and having proven their ability to restore historic properties through the work they had begun on their office at Sailor's Walk that year, they were the ideal candidates for the job. In October 1955 Wheeler & Sproson had completed their design for the first phase of the development and Burntisland Council bought a model of the scheme from them for £45 (see Figure 4.6).⁵⁹ After a period of four months the redevelopment plans consisting of a £72,000 tender for the building of 139 traditional homes were finally approved by the Department of Health for Scotland.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ 'Burntisland Municipal House Building,' p. 9.

⁵⁸ 'Burntisland's 700th House Opened,' *Fife Free Press* (4 April 1954), p. 10.

⁵⁹ 'Model of Redevelopment Scheme,' *Fife Free Press* (15 October 1955), p. 15.

⁶⁰ 'Approval of £72,000 Housing Project,' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (18 February 1956), p. 9.

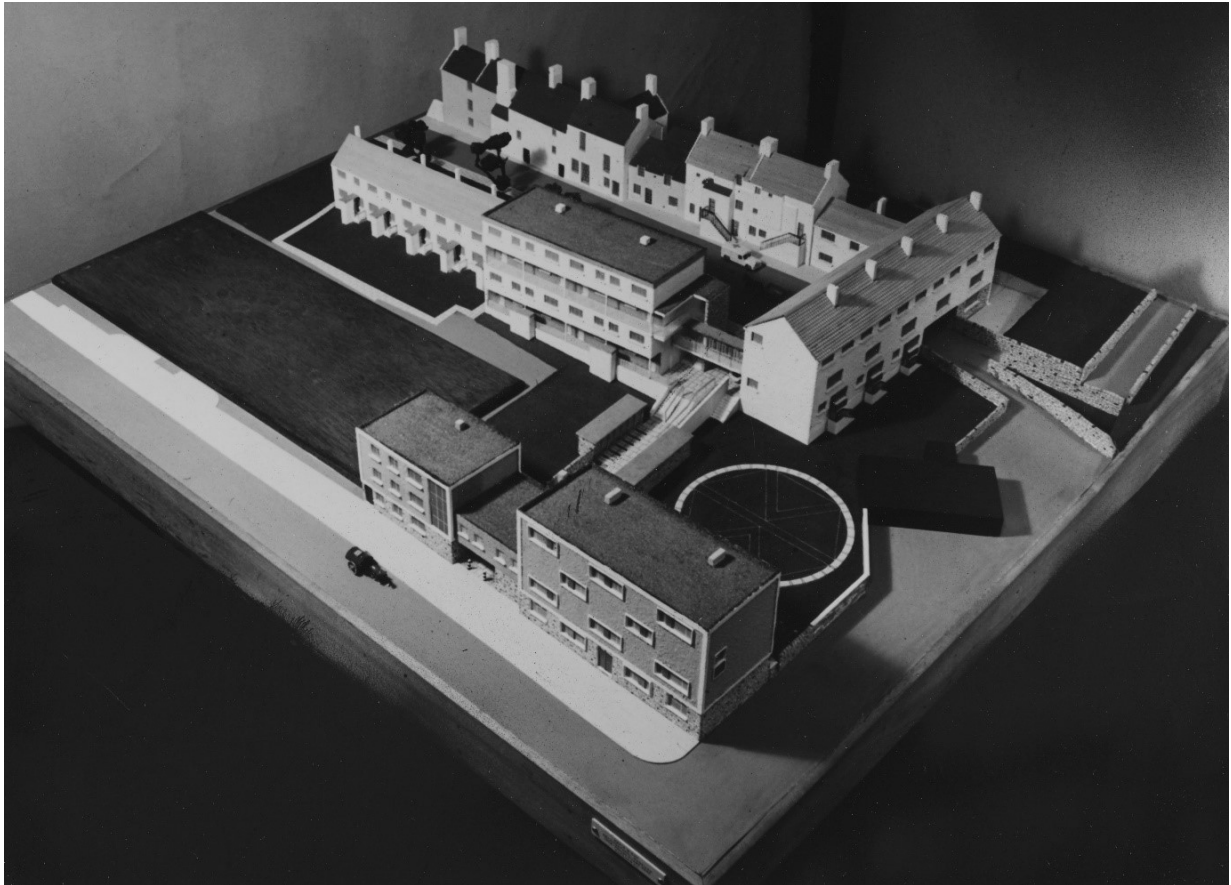


Figure 4.6. Model of the Somerville Street/ High Street Development (Job 51), September 1955.

Wheeler & Sproson's plans for Somerville Street/High Street centred around Wheeler's idea of 'going through a pend from the High Street using very modern building to link round to Somerville Street' (see Figure 4.7).⁶¹ The Council had originally intended to restore a twin-gabled 17th century building on the High Street section seen in Figure 4.8, they reluctantly had to demolish it after it was claimed that its level of dilapidation rendered its reconstruction too costly.⁶² In Somerville Street, Wheeler widened the road to allow light penetration from the north, and by doing so formed Somerville Square as a focal point of the development.⁶³ The square was bounded on the south by the restored properties (discussed below in Jobs 71 and

⁶¹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁶² 'New Life in an Old Town,' p. 12.

⁶³ Ibid.

77), on the west by a new block which was used to truncate the street, and to the north by a combination of housing and flats (as seen in Figure 4.9).⁶⁴ Wheeler was then able to plan in ‘visual interest’ across the development through the use of varied paving textures, cobbles, grass and the planting of trees and shrubs (see Figure 4.10).⁶⁵

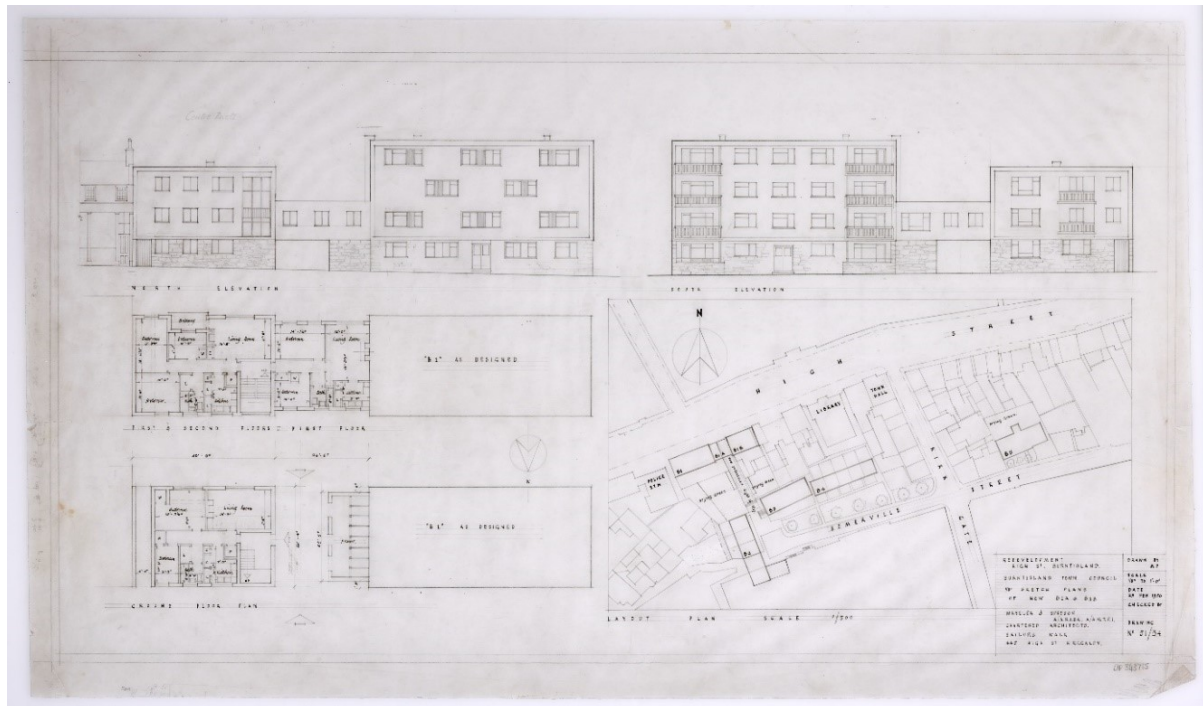


Figure 4.7. ‘Sketch Plans’ of Somerville Street/ High Street Development (Job 51), showing elevations and plans of High Street ‘B1’ blocks, 29th February 1956.

⁶⁴ ‘New Life in an Old Town,’ p. 12.

⁶⁵ Ibid; Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

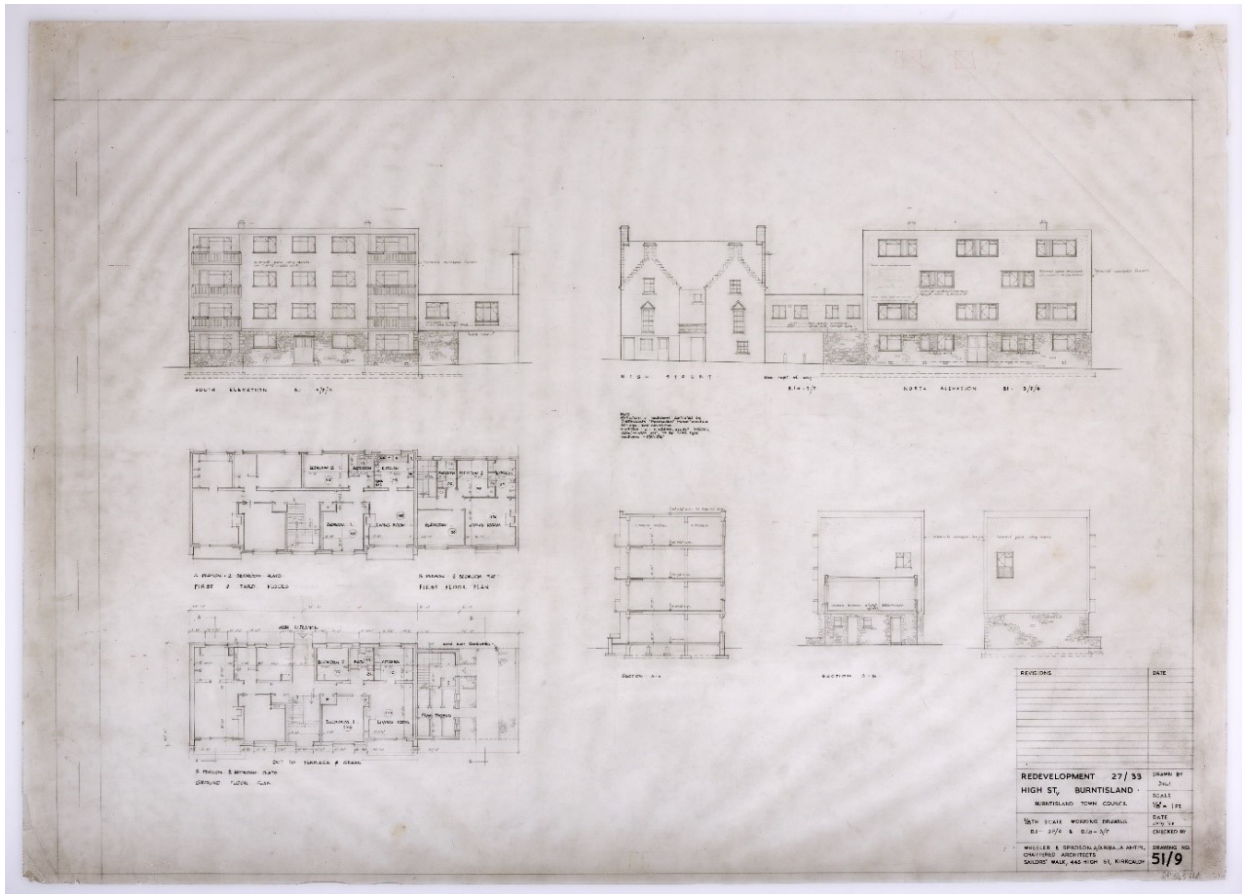


Figure 4.8. Wheeler & Sproson were unable to retain the twin gabled building on Burntisland's High Street shown here as part of the Somerville Street/ High Street Redevelopment (Job 51), July 1955.

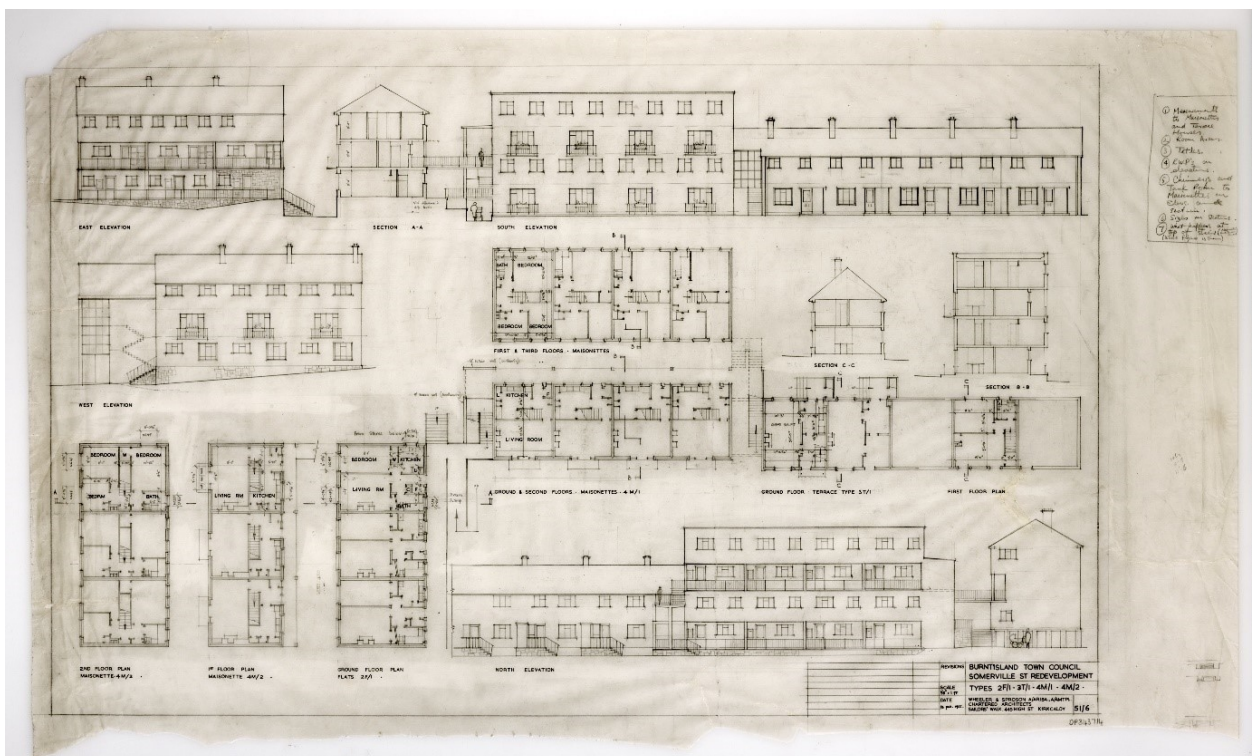


Figure 4.9. Elevations of the Somerville Square 'B2' blocks of the Somerville Street/ High Street Development (Job 51), 26 February 1955.

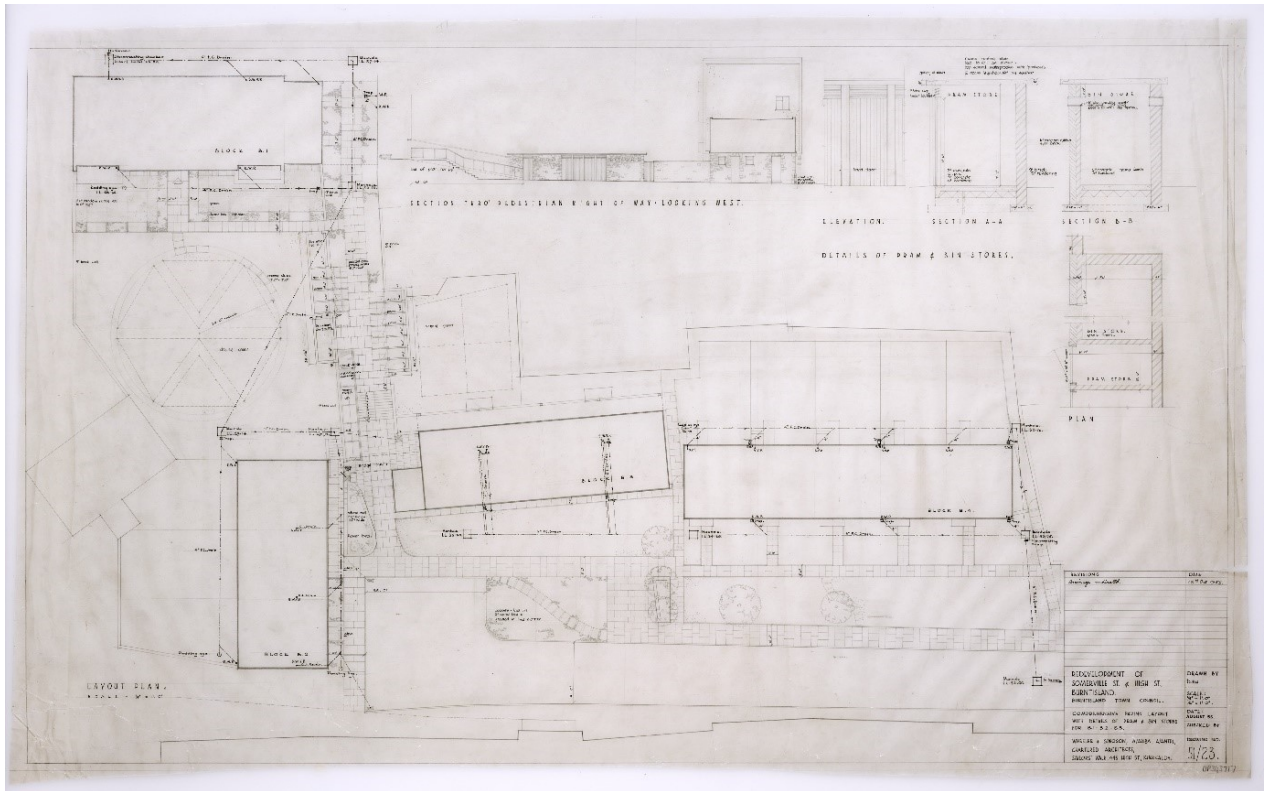


Figure 4.10. Comprehensive paving layout for the western side of the Somerville Street/High Street development (Job 51), August 1955.

Wheeler’s plan aimed to create a logical contrast in architectural form between the old and the new, while using architectural scale, colour, and materials that would be ‘common to both 20th and surrounding 17th century building.’⁶⁶ The blocks themselves varied from two to four storeys, with a combination of flat and gabled roofs with pantiles. A new two-storey terrace on the north of the square consisted of 5 houses and used alternating stone cladding and biscuit coloured harl to create a picturesque effect (see Figure 4.11). For each of the stone clad houses Wheeler & Sproson added a plain flat porch, while the simple harled blocks received a pitched porch topped with pantiles. The rest of the development consisted of three and four-storey flatted blocks. Three of the four blocks made use of reclaimed stone from the demolished buildings for their ground floor and coloured harl above in deep reds, biscuits and pale blues.

⁶⁶ 'New Life in an Old Town,' p. 12.



Figure 4.11. The terraced houses on Somerville Square (Block B4) used contrasting finishes to create a sense of individuality, undated.

There were also two connecting blocks in the development which linked the main blocks. A one storey connecting section sat at first floor level between the two main blocks on the High Street and formed a pend below, as seen in Figure 4.12. This was painted in a pale blue to highlight it against the deep reds of the blocks on either side, and to further clarify the pend below which led up to the main square above. The second connecting section in the development connected the south-western block to the restored buildings by a two-storey section, which stepped down a storey in height, clearly identifying the visual importance of the main blocks on either side. The south-western block was also unique in having an access

balcony, which ran along the length of the block and first floor level and crossed to the central block via a bridge over the passageway to the High Street.



Figure 4.12. High Street blocks (B1) linked by a first storey connecting section containing a two bedroom flat, over a pend and pram stores, undated.

Unfortunately, despite Wheeler's plan being completed, the delays brought about by the contested Compulsory Purchase Orders set the deadline for the start of construction back beyond the expected date. Councillors were concerned that their constituents who were on the housing waiting list would be affected by these interruptions expressed their 'extreme disappointment at the delay' and urged the Council to speed up the process.⁶⁷ The Council attempted to brush off these concerns by arguing that they still had work to do anyway before the Planning Officer could complete the redevelopment scheme plan.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ 'Somerville Street Redevelopment Scheme,' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (17 January 1953), p. 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite these delays and concerns caused by the public enquiry, demolition work was proceeded with and by February 1956 the contractors had arrived to commence rebuilding of the 'New Burntisland.'⁶⁹ It was not long, however, until complaints were being made about the standard of work exhibited by the contractors. By April, Ballie Nicol had slated the 'lackadaisical approach to work' shown by the contractors.⁷⁰ He argued that the attitude he experienced was prevalent across the country and urged that the Town Council investigate the matter in order to speed up house building work in Burntisland. Although he acknowledged that bad weather had led to delays with the Somerville Street/High Street development, 'better progress should have been made.'⁷¹ He also expressed concern that even though there were 26 workman and a foreman at work on the site, he was in doubt that any of the houses would be completed by the end of the next year.⁷²

The Somerville Street/High Street development officially opened on the 22nd November 1957 despite a rush to complete works in time (see Figure 4.13).⁷³ Painters were forced to work through the night in order to complete the work and as a result were painting on fresh layers before the base coats had fully dried.⁷⁴ Wheeler & Sproson had pointed out the unsatisfactory results this method would lead to at the time, but it was agreed to rush the works ahead of the opening. The paintwork rapidly began to deteriorate, with severe blistering and scaling in some

⁶⁹ 'Re-Development of Somerville Street, Burntisland,' p. 8.

⁷⁰ 'Burntisland Ballie Slaters Housing Contractors,' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (6 October 1956), p. 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ 'Official Opening of the Somerville Street,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁷⁴ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Burntisland Housing - Somerville St./ High St. Redevelopment (West),' Letter from A. Wheeler to G. MacLauchlan Esq, Town Clerk (14 May 1959), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

areas as a result of the high level of salt in the air. This led to a painter being employed to redo the railings on all blocks apart from 14-28 Somerville Street.⁷⁵



Figure 4.13. Opening of the Somerville Street/ High Street Development on the 22nd of November 1957.

In the end, despite its complications and delays, Phase 1 proved to be a successful addition to the town.⁷⁶ The development attracted several architectural critics such as Andor Gomme to review it for the *Architectural Review*, where he called it an ‘courageous scheme’ and praised the Council for selecting Wheeler & Sproson to design it.⁷⁷ In all, forty-seven houses were built

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 205.

⁷⁷ A. Gomme, ‘Counter Attack: New Among the Old,’ *The Architectural Review*, vol. 127, no.758 (1960), pp. 353-354.

a cost of £100,000 and an additional nine houses were restored on the south side of Somerville Street at a cost of £11,600.⁷⁸

Jobs 71 and 77 – Somerville Street Restoration Work

Burntisland was fortunate in being a rare example of a town where the Council became interested in retaining certain historic properties. Although there had been an initial stage where the Councillors had been keen to clear the entire area of the square, they were quickly encouraged by Wheeler & Sproson, the National Trust, the Ministry of Works, and the County Planning Officer, that the several of their properties were of value and decided to retain them.⁷⁹ By the completion of the project the Council were keen to highlight the 'fine' examples of Scottish domestic architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries that had been retained.⁸⁰

Two of the most prominent examples of this were the two 17th century properties at 30-33 Somerville Street (Job 71) for the James Harrow Trust and 14-18 Somerville Street (Job 77) for the Town Council (see Figure 4.14). The properties were positioned either side of a late 16th century hall that was converted to a Masonic Lodge in 1914.⁸¹ Wheeler & Sproson were to restore both properties and their interiors would be brought up to modern day housing standards.

⁷⁸ 'Re-Development of Somerville Street, Burntisland,' p. 8.

⁷⁹ Gomme, 'Counter Attack,' pp. 353-354.

⁸⁰ 'Official Opening of the Somerville Street,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁸¹ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Somerville Square, Masonic Lodge, Dunearn 400 (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22881>).



Figure 4.14. Somerville Street, showing both Job 71 (to the right) and Job 77 (to the left) with the 16th century Masonic Lodge between, undated.

One of the houses which was to be saved (Job 71) was once the home to Mary Somerville, the famous scholar, mathematician, and astronomer who was wife to Admiral Fairfax, and who became the namesake of both the street and of Somerville College at the University of Oxford.⁸² The Council were in touch with the Fairfax family, and in 1958 exchanged gifts to reinforce the connection. While Lieutenant Colonel J. Ramsay-Fairfax, a great grandson of Admiral Fairfax, presented a photograph of Mary Somerville and Admiral Fairfax to be hung in the Council chambers, the Council sent a photograph of the completed restoration of the house back, with the suggestion that it be hung in Somerville College.⁸³ It was perhaps the

⁸² Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁸³ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, '14/28 Somerville Street, Burntisland,' Letter from G. MacLauchlan Esq, Town Clerk to Wheeler & Sproson (12 June 1958), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

good fortune of this property that it had connections to a celebrated owner, as this connection was potentially one of the primary reasons for its retention, when other historic properties were not initially listed for retention.

Figure 4.15 demonstrates the relatively minor alterations that were required to make the buildings function as modern housing. Two doorways were transformed into windows, and one window was removed on Job 77. At Job 71 one window was widened on the first floor and a ground floor window was adapted to a door. The practice made a clear attempt to avoid breaking any new holes within the structure, and instead altered the function of openings that already existed. A painted ceiling recovered during the restoration of Job 71 was also removed to the National Library for protection.⁸⁴ Four flats were fit into the block at Job 77, including a two-storey maisonette. The development also contained a pram and coal store and a communal wash house within the basement area.

⁸⁴ *Historic Environment Scotland*, 30-33 (Inclusive Nos) Somerville Square (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22880>).

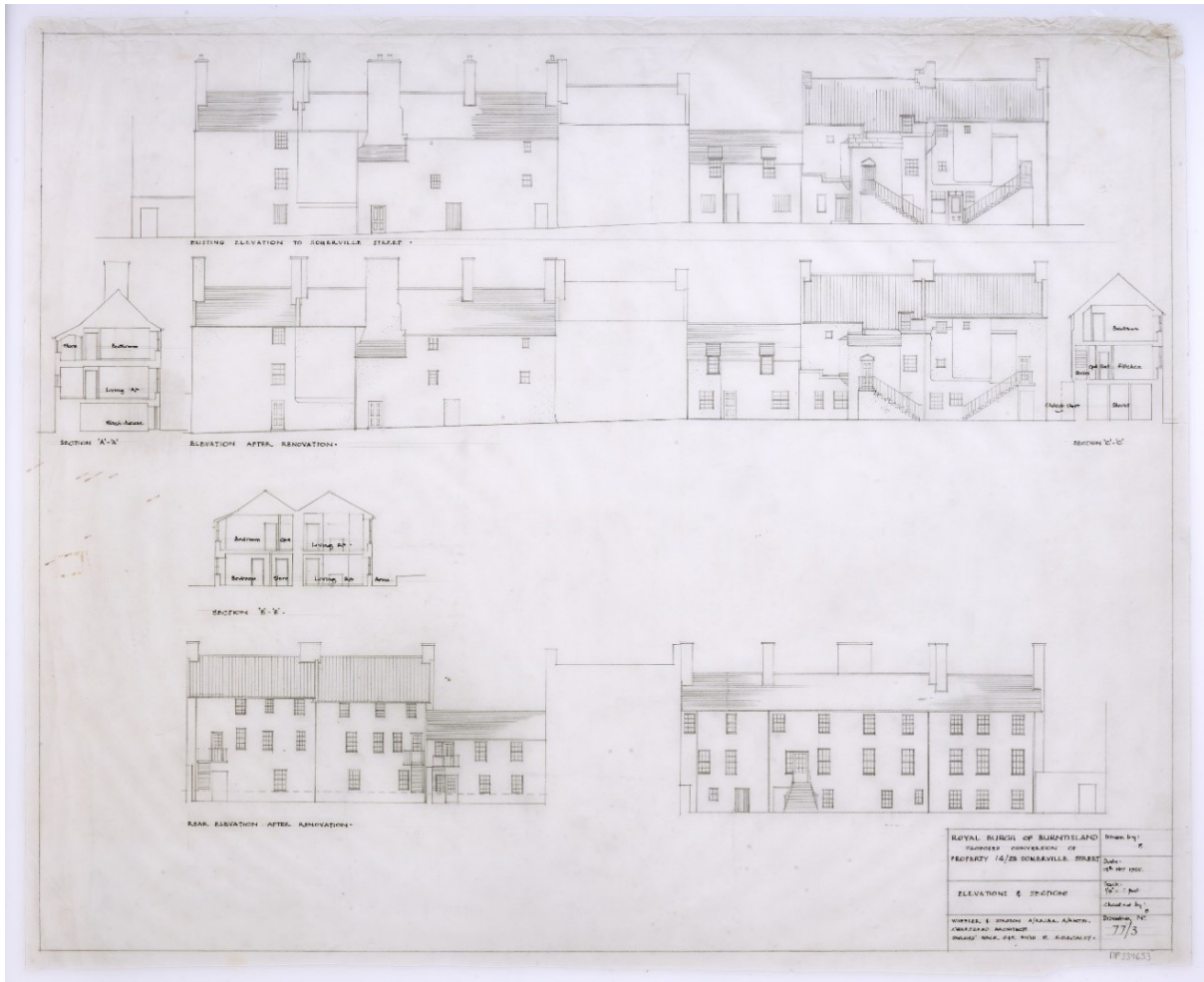


Figure 4.15. Elevations of both Job 77 on the top left-hand side, and Job 71 on the top right-hand side, 18 November 1955.

4.5. Kirkgate/ High Street Developments

The second area to be examined is the continued redevelopment of the Somerville Street area and the restoration jobs on the High Street (see Figure 4.16). The new contributions to the environment at Job 53 ‘Somerville Street Development Phase 2’, Job 491 ‘Housing Redevelopment at Kirkgate’, Job 526 ‘139-147 High Street’ and Job 583 ‘163-173 High Street’ will be discussed.

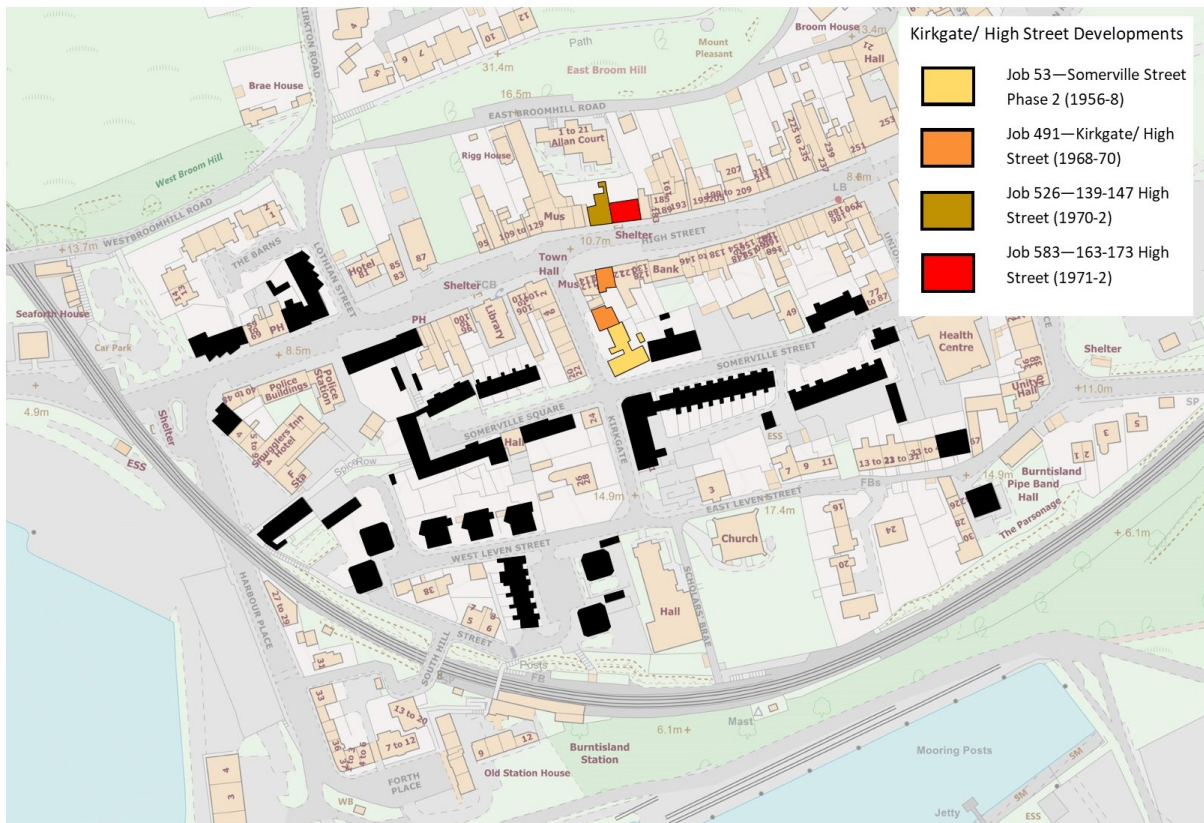


Figure 4.16. Map highlighting the Kirkgate/ High Street area of Burntisland Town Centre, containing Jobs 53, 491, 526 and 583. Remainder of development shown in black.

Job 53 – Somerville Street, Phase 2

The first of these jobs, number 53, was first announced by Ballie Nicol at a Council meeting in July 1956.⁸⁵ The housing sub-committee were called upon to investigate and report on the feasibility of redeveloping the area from 32 to 46 Somerville Street for housing purposes. The area contained several condemned houses and the town's maintenance yard, so was a suitable area for the second stage of the comprehensive redevelopment project.⁸⁶ The site which was proposed here covered the area which was eventually occupied by all three developments discussed in this section.

There were several businesses on these sites which posed a problem for the Council to relocate. The Sub-Committee were provided a period of 'four or five years' in which to find a new location for the town's yard.⁸⁷ A second property at 48/50 Somerville Street was owned by the Burntisland Shipping Company, who also required time to move.⁸⁸ A letter was also sent to Messrs Fison's (Fertilisation) Ltd in September 1956, asking them what their intentions were regarding a series of derelict properties from 10-18 High Street and houses in Lothian Street.⁸⁹ Schedules were then also drawn up for the demolition of condemned houses on the Kirkgate and along Somerville Street by the end of 1956.⁹⁰ Throughout 1957, the Council proceeded to relocate and clear the properties along this stretch of Somerville Street in preparation for further development.

⁸⁵ 'Phase II of Burntisland Development Plan: Council Decide to Go Ahead,' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (7 July 1956), p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ 'Redevelopment of Somerville Street,' *Fife Free Press* (15 September 1956), p. 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

In January 1958, Wheeler & Sproson wrote to Burntisland Council, surprised to have read in the press that a further development of Somerville Street had been proposed.⁹¹ In the letter, Wheeler & Sproson discuss how they would 'greatly welcome the opportunity of an informal discussion on this important subject' before any final decision was reached.⁹² It is clear that despite their work on Phase 1 having been completed just two months before, the Council had not been in touch with Wheeler & Sproson about the potential of continued work in the area. Within a couple of months, Wheeler & Sproson were successfully able to acquire the contract for the continued redevelopment of Somerville Street and were able to carry on the broader theme of their work in the town.

Despite the disconnected way in which the contract was acquired, they had begun to produce preliminary drawings for Job 53 as early as July 1958. Figures 4.17, 4.18 and 4.19 demonstrate the changing concepts the practice had for the site, with the blocks varying in height and layout several times before settling on the final three-storey flat roofed version. By using flat roofs, Wheeler & Sproson were able to retain the same height as originally planned whilst being able to add in additional accommodation. Initial plans for the scheme were for it to act as a hostel for single men working in the area, including a large kitchen and dining hall (as can be seen in Figure 4.17), but the final block simply contains three standard flats on each floor instead. The

⁹¹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Somerville Street/High Street Development, Burntisland,' Letter from Wheeler to G. MacLauchlan Esq, Town Clerk, Council Chambers, Burntisland (24 January 1958), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁹² *Ibid.*

drawings lay out the basic plan of the site, with a semi-enclosed square formed by stepping the central block which faced the Kirkgate back from the street line (see Figure 4.19).

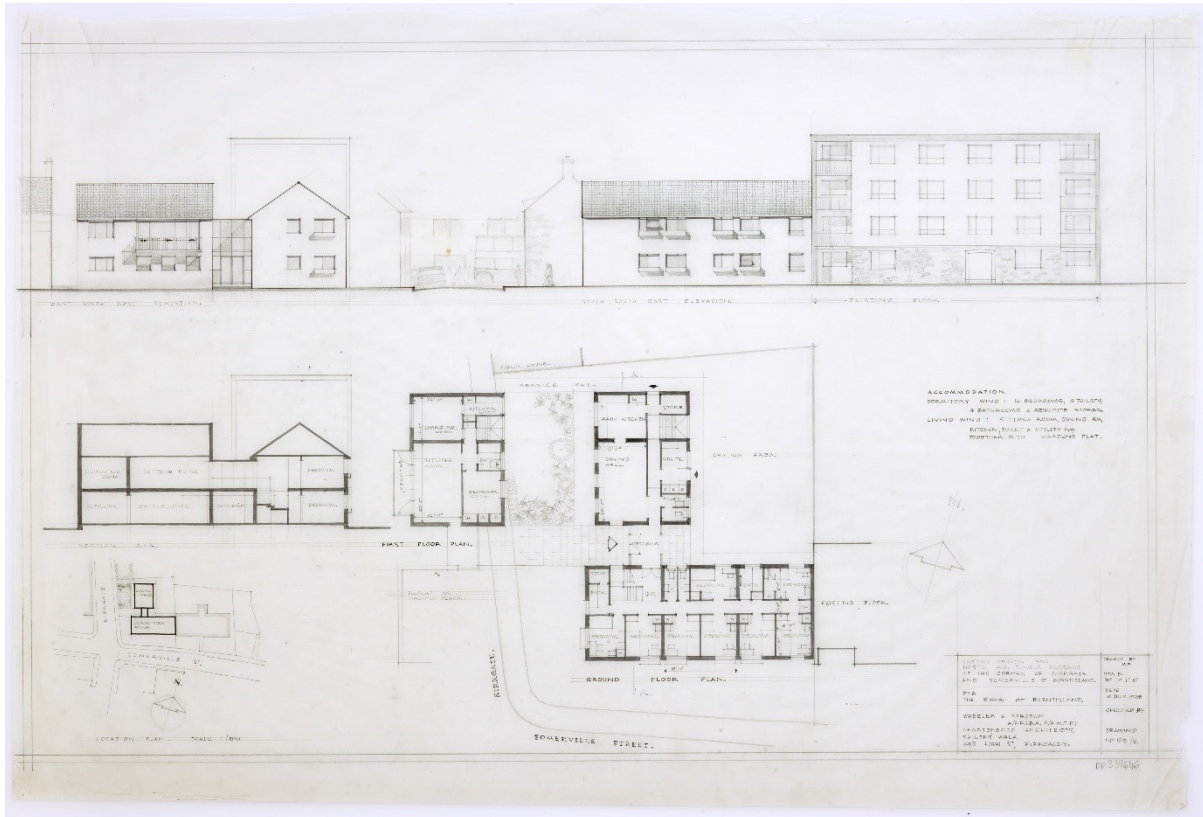


Figure 4.17. 'Sketch Design for Hostel for Single Persons at the Corner of Kirkgate and Somerville Street' (Job 53), 10th July 1958.

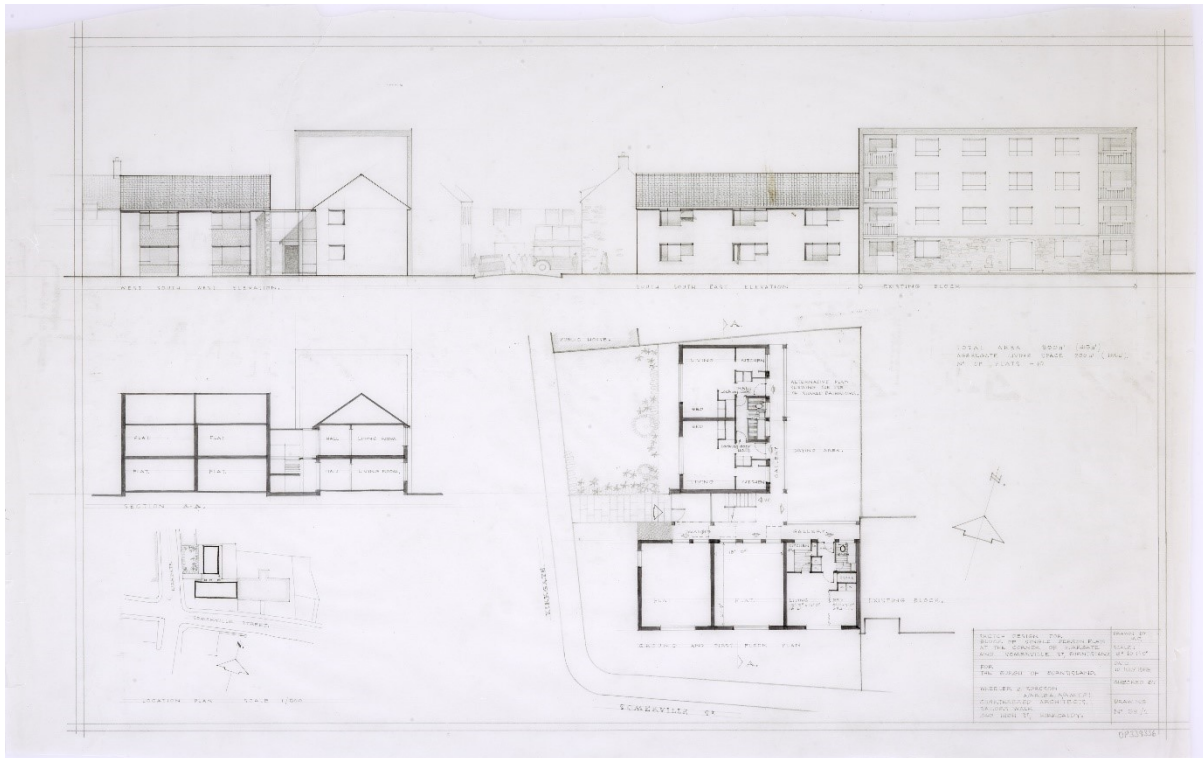


Figure 4.18. 'Sketch Design for Block of Single Person Flats at the Corner of Kirkgate and Somerville Street' (Job 53), 10th July 1958.

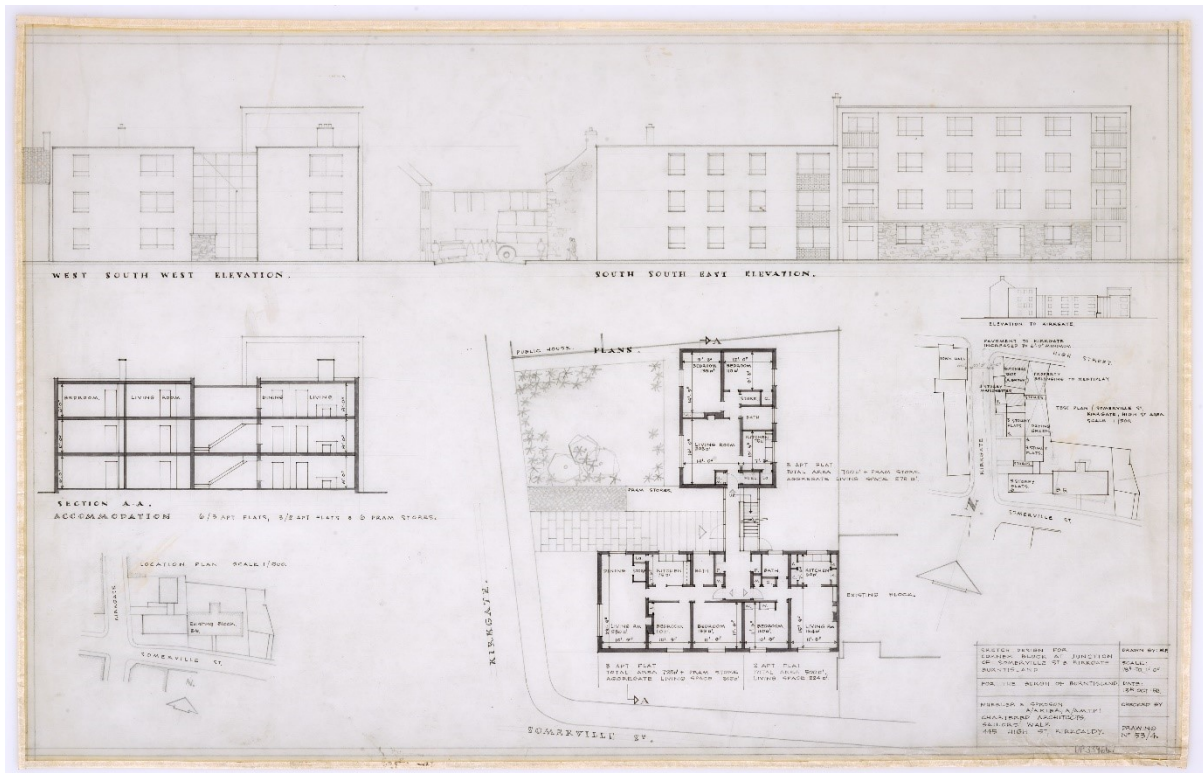


Figure 4.19. 'Sketch Design for Corner Block at Junction of Somerville Street and Kirkgate Street' (Job 53), 13th October 1958.

The October 1958 plan was primarily built as designed, with only small details changed. Compared to Phase 1 of Burntisland, Phase 2 was a more modern approach, using less stone and traditional features. Being located further away from the 17th century properties on Somerville Square, Wheeler & Sproson instead picked up on the surrounding 19th century buildings in his use of slate in some of the window recesses. While attempts were made to soften the landscaping of the area using cobbles and grass, the development has a more formal and structured feel to it than the gentler Phase 1. Whilst in Phase 1 planting was used to soften the sharper angles of the more distinctly modern blocks, planting is notably missing in Phase 2, presenting a more angular aesthetic to the site. The final drawing includes a plan of the area that indicates Burntisland Council had been able to acquire an additional site to the north of the original to raise the number of flats which they required on the site.

Job 491 – Kirkgate/ High Street

Job 491 consists of two blocks, with one adjoined with Job 53 facing on to the Kirkgate, and the second replacing a demolished block and positioned between two existing buildings on the High Street (see Figure 4.20). Drawings for Job 491 show a scheme that was designed between 1968 and 1970. There were several variations of the plan, with original plans from 1968 showing a long narrow block squeezed between the corner of the two streets and a butcher's shop (see Figure 4.21). However, by 1969 the decision had been made to demolish the Mentiplay Premises so the site could be used for housing and the road could be widened.⁹³

⁹³ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Proposed Kirkgate Development,' Letter from Town Clerk's Office Burntisland to Wheeler & Sproson (January 1969), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

Figure 4.22 shows the existing and proposed elevations, illustrating the building that was demolished.

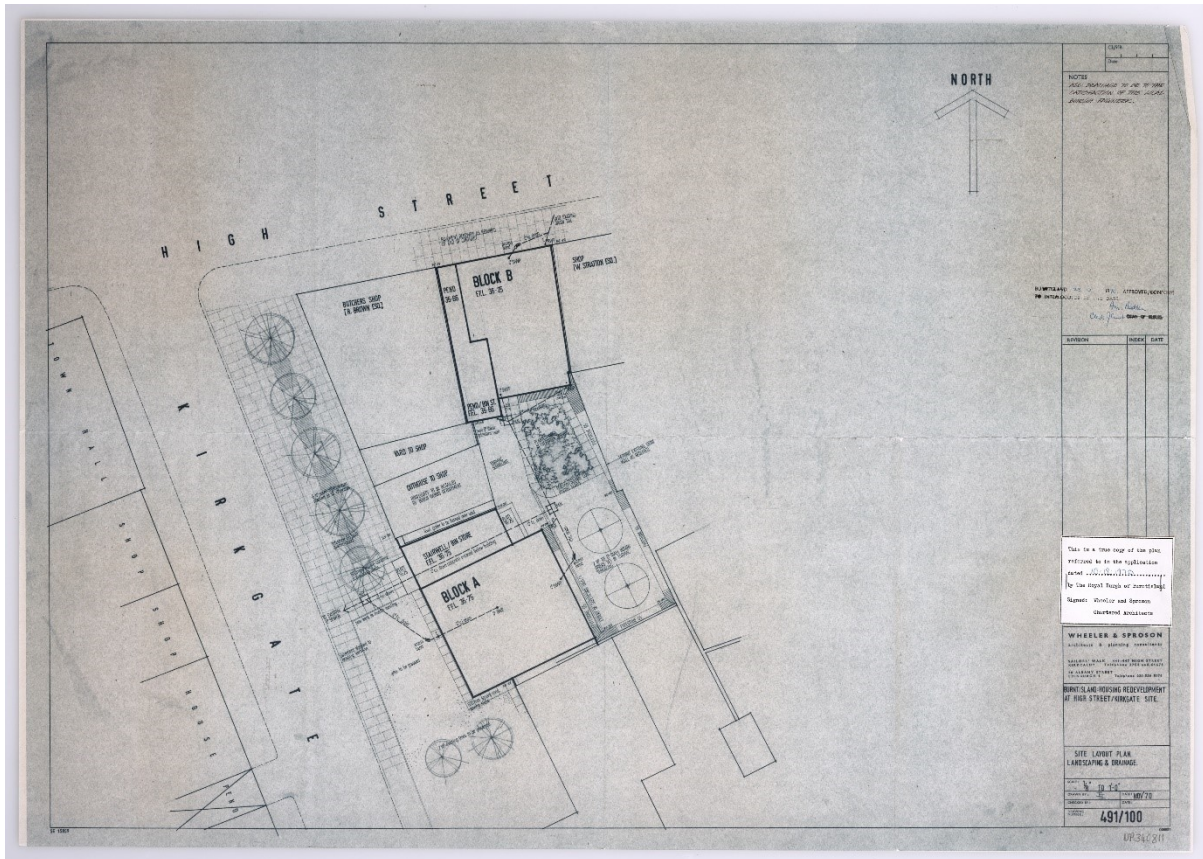


Figure 4.20. Final site layout for Kirkgate/High Street (Job 491), including landscaping and drainage, November 1970.

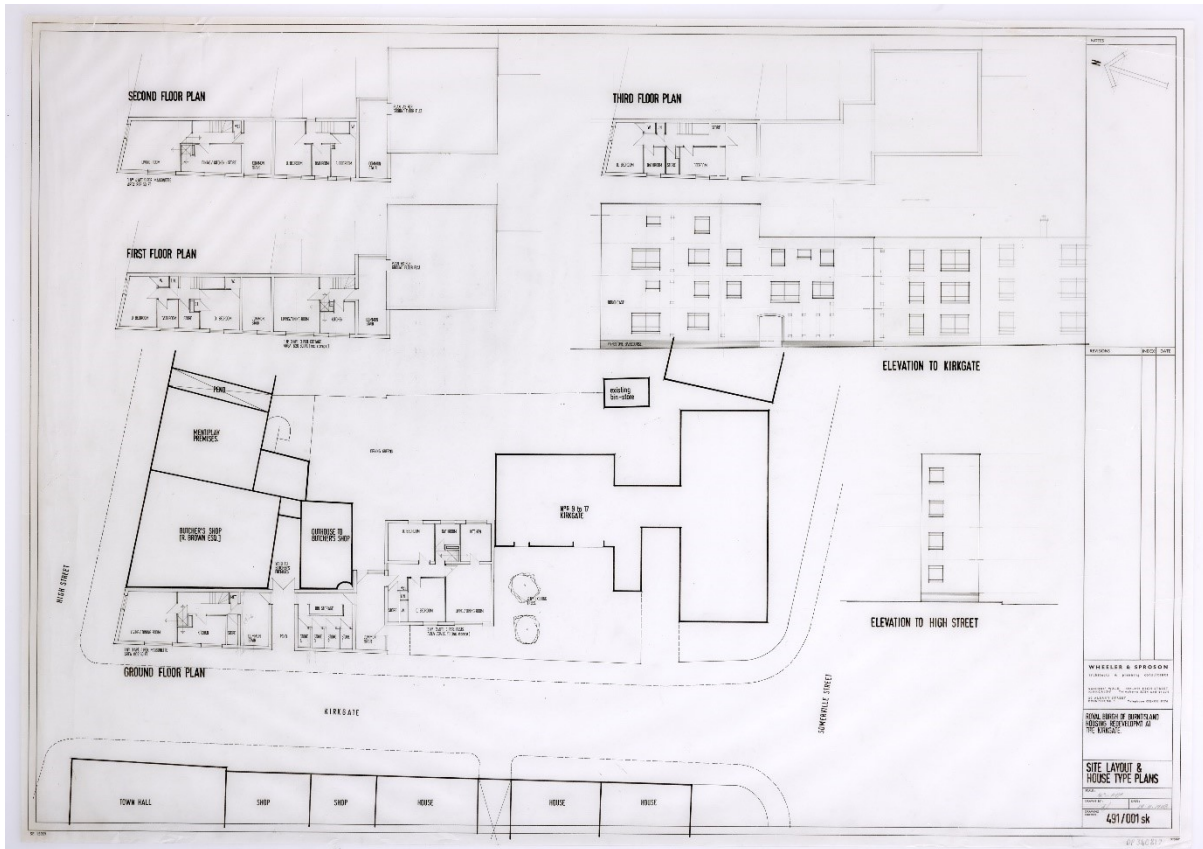


Figure 4.21. Site layout for Kirkgate/ High Street (Job 491) showing narrow corner block, November 1968.

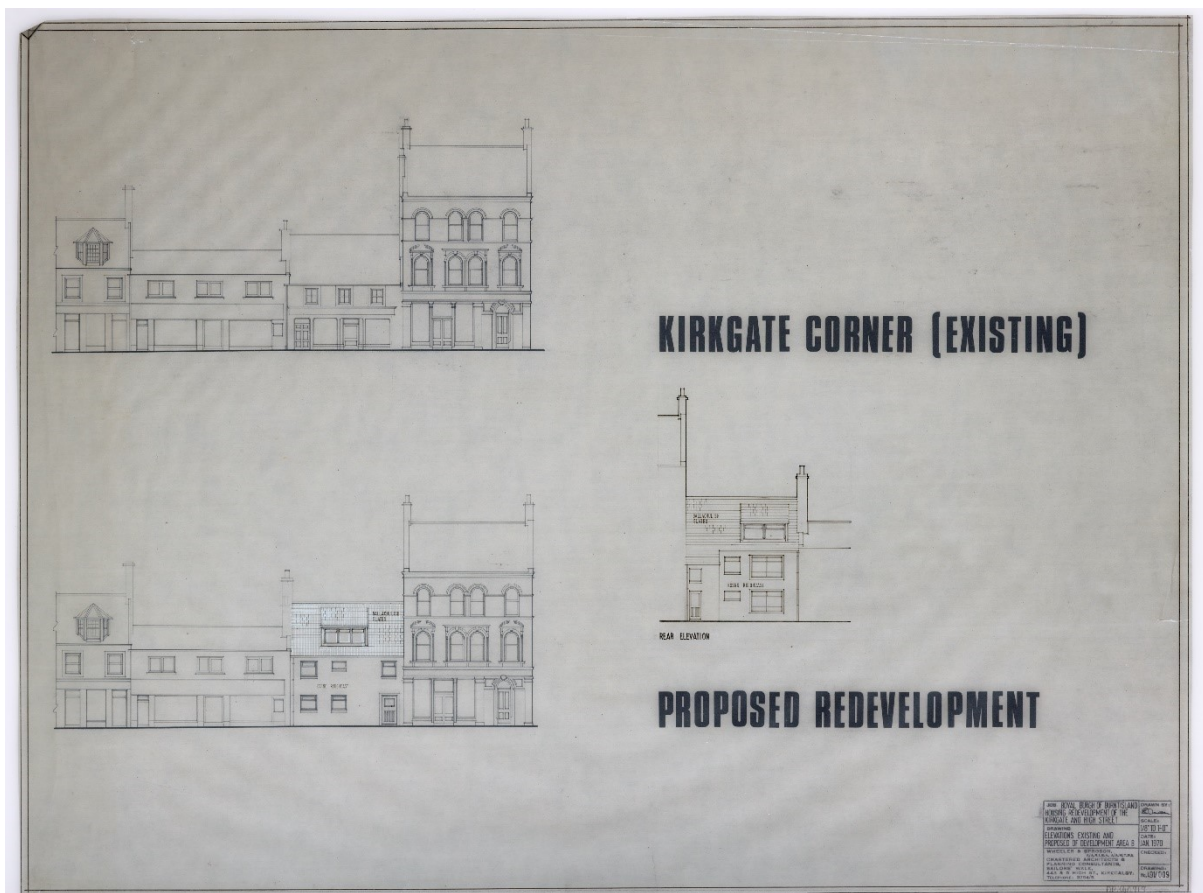


Figure 4.22. 'Elevations Existing and Proposed' of Kirkgate/ High Street (Job 491) High Street block, January 1970.

Jobs 526 and 583 – 139-147 and 163-173 High Street

Two adjoining late 19th century tenement blocks on the high street were restored by Wheeler & Sproson in Jobs 526 and 583 (see Figure 4.23).⁹⁴ Work on these two matching tenements took place between 1970 and 1973. The first drawing of the sites is a set of survey plans showing the existing layout of Job 526, which were completed in March 1970 (see Figure 4.24). Minimal work was done to the buildings to upgrade them to modern housing standards. As shown in Figure 4.25 and Figure 4.26, original dormers were removed and replaced with larger windows on front and rear that would allow for more efficient usage of the third floors. Rear access stairwells were also added to both buildings to create increased living space within the blocks. Included within the drawings for these two jobs is a rare example of a kitchen layout, showing space for washing machines, cookers and fridges (see Figure 4.27).

⁹⁴ *Historic Environment Scotland, 135-175 (Odd Nos) High Street* (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22797>).



Figure 4.23. Image of both Job 526 (139-147 High Street) and Job 583 (163-173 High Street) taken in approximately 1975 at the completion of works.

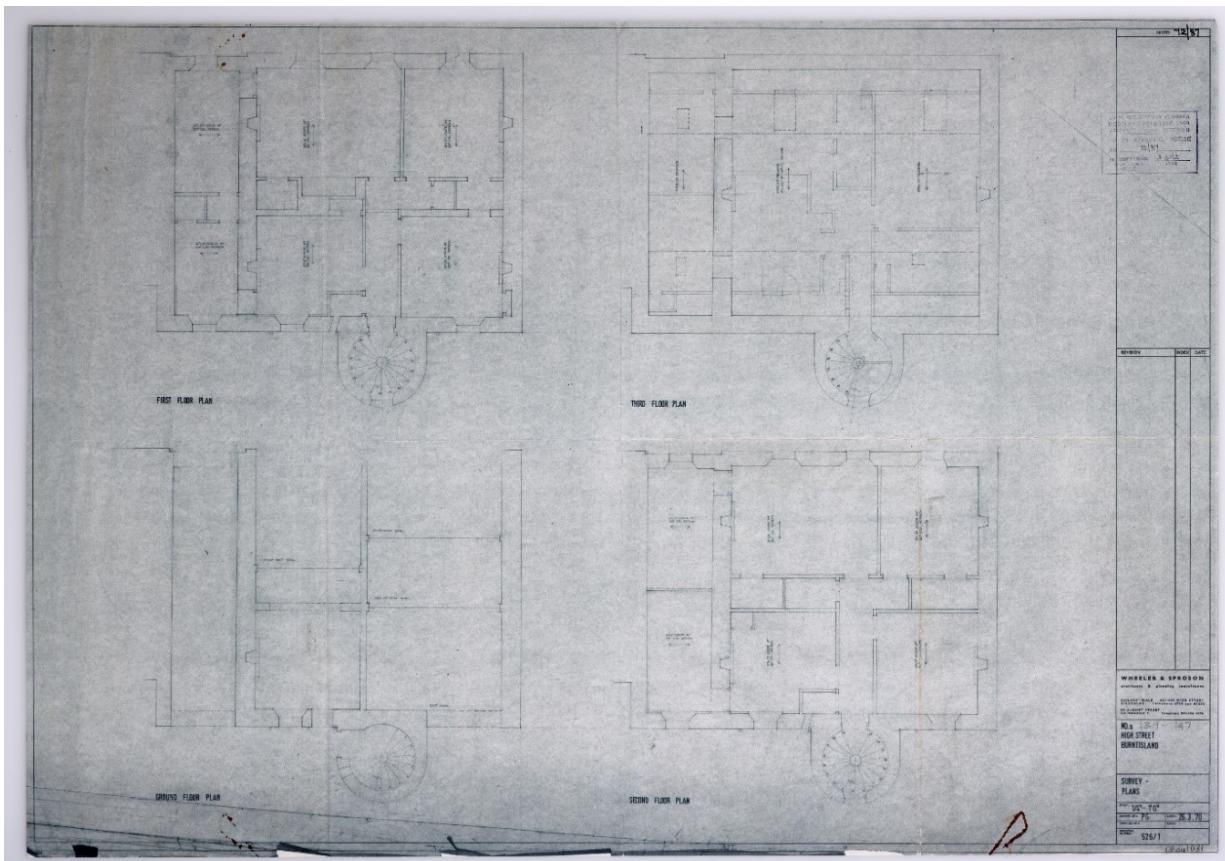


Figure 4.24. Survey floor plans for Job 526 (139/147 High Street), 26th of March 1970.



Figure 4.25. Elevations of Job 583 (163-173 High Street), Burntisland prior to development, 1st February 1972.

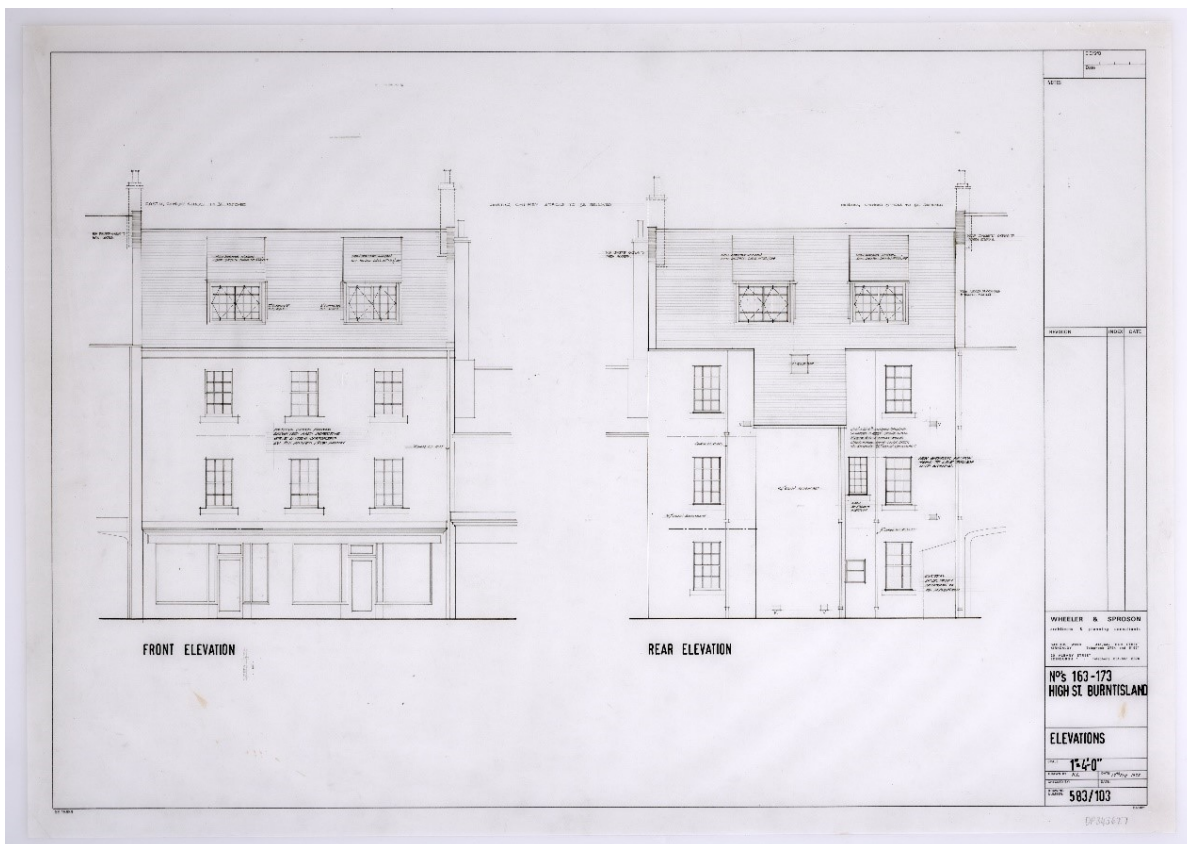


Figure 4.26. Elevations of 163-173 High Street, Burntisland (Job 583) showing plans for conversion, 17th February 1972.

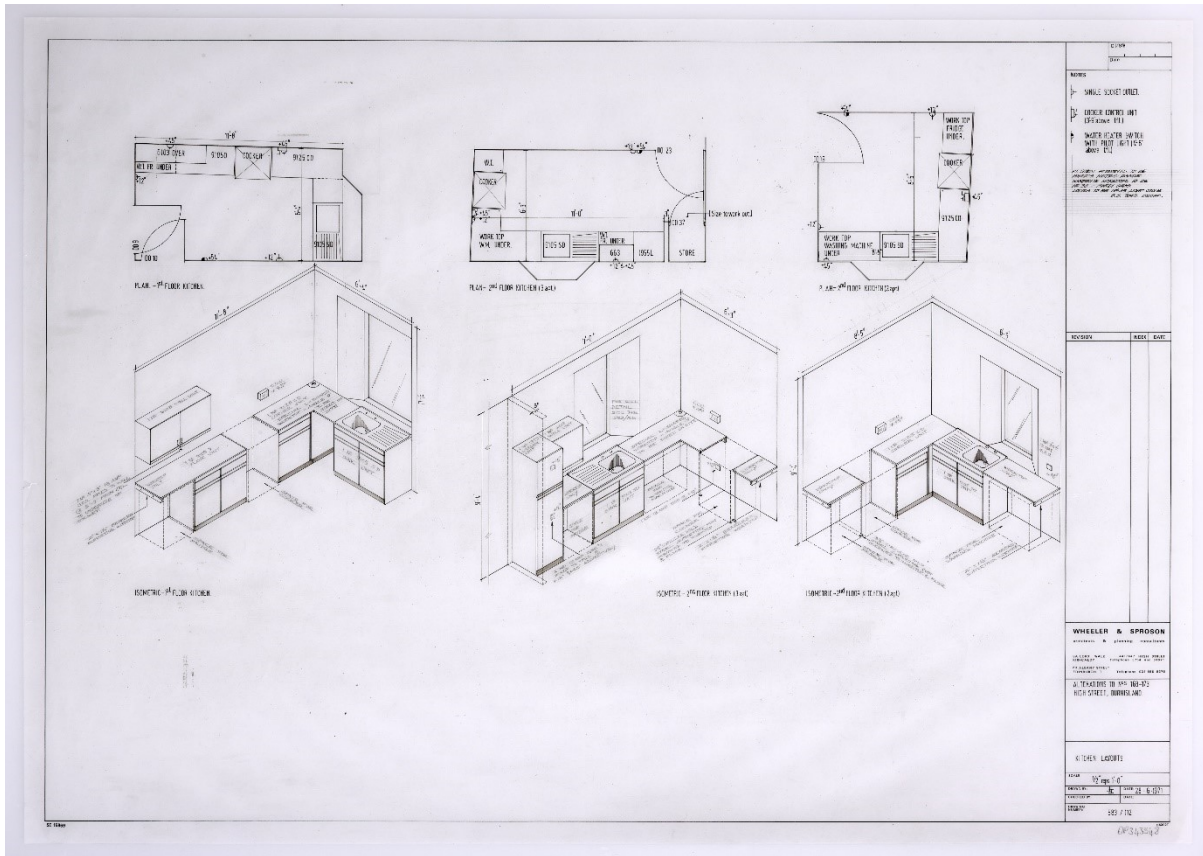


Figure 4.27. A rare surviving example of kitchen layouts for Job 583, from June 1971.

4.6. South/East Somerville Street Developments

The third area is to the south/east of Somerville Street and contains four separate developments by Wheeler & Sproson (see Figure 4.28). Three of these are restoration projects, at 'Leven Street East' (Job 259), 'Somerville Street/Kirkgate' (Job 280), and 'The Parsonage' (Job 527). This area also includes the previously mentioned unknown job that spans the length of the eastern half of Somerville Street, illustrated in green.



Figure 4.28. Map highlighting the South/East Somerville Street area of Burntisland Town Centre, containing Jobs 259, 280, 527 and an unknown job. Remainder of development shown in black.

Job 259 – Leven Street East

Job 259 was a restoration project where Wheeler & Sproson completed some interior alterations to two blocks of 19th century tenements on the eastern end of Leven Street. National Library of Scotland Ordnance Survey Maps from 1854 and 1894 indicate that the terrace of tenements was built at some point between 1854 and 1894, with the 1854 map showing an empty plot and the terrace appearing in the 1894 map.⁹⁵ The buildings are stone

⁹⁵ Ordnance Survey, 'Six-inch 1st edition, 1843-1882 - Fife, Sheet 36 (includes: Aberdour; Auchterderran; Auchtertool; Burntisland; Kinghorn) Survey date: 1854 Publication date: 1856,' *National Library of Scotland*; Ordnance Survey, 'Six-inch 2nd and later editions, 1892-1960 - Fife and Kinross Sheet XL.SW (includes: Aberdour; Burntisland) Publication date: 1896 Date revised: 1894,' *National Library of Scotland*.

built with mansard roofs, sunken basement floors and access bridges from street level to the first floor. The project was intended to integrate kitchens and bathrooms into the buildings and began in early 1961, with drawings being produced across the summer and construction taking place the following year. Wheeler & Sproson fit 14 one-bed flats and two store areas within the blocks (see Figure 4.29). The August 1961 drawing is also helpful in its inclusion of an area titled 'Future Development' in the map section, which refers to the unknown development area discussed below. The two other tenements in the terrace are slightly different in appearance, and as such can be assumed to have been built at a slightly later date, perhaps indicating why they were not purchased for restoration by the Council at the same time as the first two blocks.

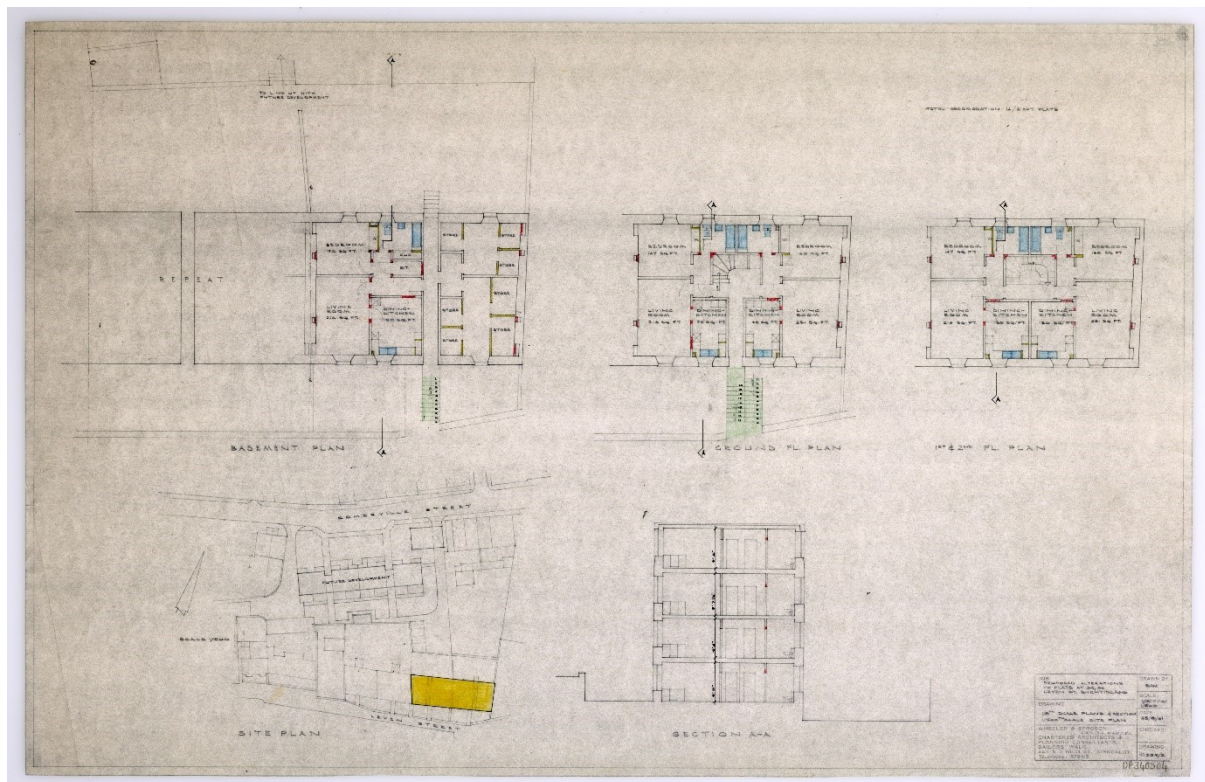


Figure 4.29. Plan and section for the restoration of Job 259 (34-36 Leven Street), August 1961.

Job 280 – Somerville Street/ Kirkgate

Job 280 is another restoration project that took place around the corner from Job 259 on the Kirkgate and Somerville Street between 1962 and 1966 (see Figure 4.30).⁹⁶ Job 280 consisted of three now category C listed tenement blocks built circa 1885. The three-storey blocks were built using squared and coursed sandstone with harl to sides and rear.⁹⁷ Like Job 259, the main purpose of the alterations here was to introduce kitchen and bathroom facilities to the building to bring them up to contemporary housing standards.



Figure 4.30. West Elevation of the tenement block at the corner of the Kirkgate and Somerville Street (Job 280), produced September 1962.

⁹⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job 259,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁹⁷ *Historic Environment Scotland*, 21-41 (Odd Nos) Kirkgate (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22857>).

Job 527 – ‘The Parsonage’

‘The Parsonage’ was built in 1854 for Reverend George Hay Forbes, provost of Burntisland between 1869 and 1870.⁹⁸ It was intended to be part of a broader scheme including a church, schools, parsonage, and baptistery. However, this was never completed and only the Parsonage remains. Wheeler & Sproson took over the site in 1970 and restored and subdivided the building into flats between 1971 and 1972 (see Figure 4.31).⁹⁹



Figure 4.31. Image Showing Wheeler & Sproson’s restoration project ‘The Parsonage’ (Job 527), taken in 2018.

⁹⁸ *Historic Environment Scotland*, 32-42 (Even Nos) East Leven Street, The Parsonage with Railings and Boundary Wall (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22776>).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Unknown Job

As previously stated, the development that sits on the eastern end of Somerville Street has not been listed in the Wheeler & Sproson Job List, most likely due to error. However, the site is indicated on several of the practice's drawings for other parts of the redevelopment project and official photographs of the site are included in the Wheeler & Sproson Collection (see Figures 4.32 and 4.33). The development is additionally indicated on plans for Job 259 (see Figure 4.29 above), suggesting that it had already been planned by August 1961, but it had not been built yet. The completed development is additionally shown in a survey map of the development that was drawn in 1967 at the latest (as will be discussed in section 4.9), indicating that the area was completed at some point between 1961 and 1967. There are additionally several elements of the site that tie it to Wheeler & Sproson's approach, in terms of both form and material. Terraced houses similar to those discussed in the West Leven Street area (section 4.7, below) were used, and a combination of pale harling with elements of wood and slate seen elsewhere in their work at Burntisland and Dysart can also be seen across this development.



Figure 4.32. The larger 4-storey block of Wheeler & Sproson's unnamed development, containing approximately 16 flats, undated.



Figure 4.33. Photograph of the 9 terraced houses of the unnamed development, undated.

Unlike the early phases of the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, the site also contained garages, suggesting that it was most likely constructed towards the end of the project. The site consisted of four blocks, bordering both sides of the street. The first block consisted of a terrace of 9 angled houses, each containing a porch with a store. The smallest block is an unusual three-storey structure with a pend through its ground floor allowing cars to access the garages behind (see Figure 4.34). It appears that the block otherwise consists of an access stair tower and two flats. The final two blocks are both stepped back from the street to create a pedestrian square either side of the central road. While the smaller of these blocks is three-storeys high and consists of two joined L-shaped tenements, the largest of the blocks is four-storeys tall and contains unique extensions to the ground floor flats (as seen in Figure 4.32, above).



Figure 4.34. Photograph of the small two flat pend block of the unnamed development.

4.7. The West Leven Street Developments

The fourth area of Wheeler & Sproson’s work at Burntisland we will examine is the West Leven Street Redevelopment (see Figure 4.35). This portion of the settlement consists of Job 415 ‘Leven Street Redevelopment’, and Job 575 ‘West Leven Street Redevelopment, Burntisland: Phase II’.



Figure 4.35. Map highlighting the West Leven Street area of Burntisland Town Centre, containing Jobs 415 and 575. Remainder of development shown in black.

Job 415 – West Leven Street, Phase 1

The first Phase of the West Leven Street area (see Figure 4.36) commenced in June 1966, with final drawings completed between November 1967 and March 1970. The initial drafts for the project show Wheeler & Sproson experimenting with four storey towers they referred to as

'test cubes'.¹⁰⁰ Throughout late 1966, drawings indicate the progression of these untried designs, with multiple drawings showing changes to the foundation structure of the buildings. These 'cubes' eventually became blocks B1 and B2 of the development and were located at the end of West Leven Street, with variations on this design being used in blocks C1, C2 and C3 situated further along the street (as seen in Figure 4.37). The 'B' blocks were both flat roofed and were harled in a pale biscuit colour and had chamfered corners (see Figure 4.38). The chamfered corners on these blocks reflect the angled buttresses and octagonal tower seen on the adjacent Burntisland Parish Church, which also acted as a key inspiration for Wheeler & Sproson's earlier 1958-61 Columba's Parish Church in Glenrothes (see Figure 4.39).¹⁰¹ The C blocks, though also flat roofed and of the same colouration, were constructed from two joined polygons with a stairwell between. Block A was somewhat detached from the other five blocks and was situated at the bottom of the steep hill the 'cubes' were located on, facing onto Harbour Place. This block is a five-storey slab block of maisonettes, with shed dormer windows positioned along the pitched roofline. Unlike many of its neighbouring Wheeler & Sproson blocks, Block A has a slate roof rather than pantile to reflect the slate roofed properties also overlooking Harbour Place.

¹⁰⁰ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job 415,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹⁰¹ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 67



Figure 4.36. The West Leven Street Development taken from Melville Gardens, showing all six blocks of the development.

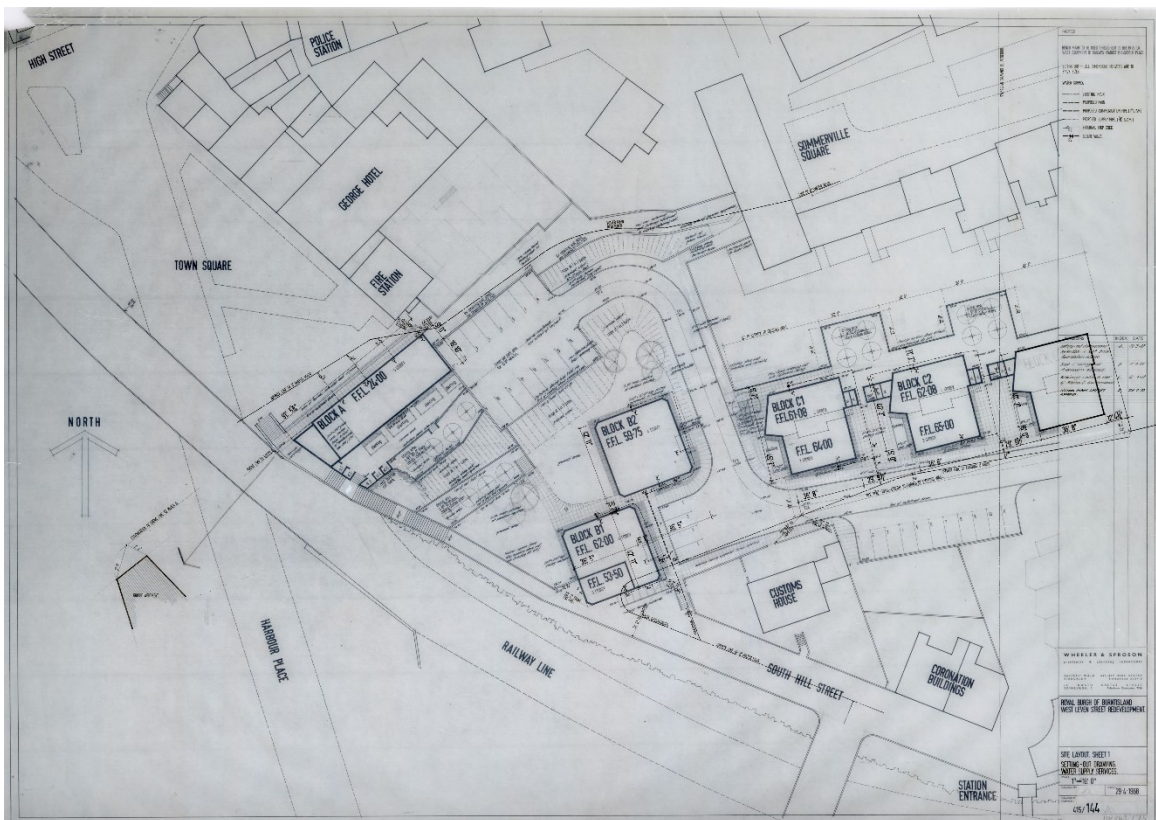


Figure 4.37. West Leven Street Phase 1 'Site Layout' showing Blocks A, B1, B2, C1, C2 and C3, 29 April 1968.



Figure 4.38. The two most prominent blocks B1 and B2 of the West Leven Street development. The site is situated on the hilltop above the rest of the Burntisland Redevelopment Project area.



Figure 4.39. The 17th Century Burntisland Parish Church, with its angled buttresses and octagonal tower.

Job 575 – West Leven Street, Phase 2

The second phase of the West Leven Street development began in March 1972, and drawings were produced up until October 1972. This section of the development consisted of a row of six slightly offset terraced houses (block A) overlooking a square with provision for 22 parking places and two four storey 'cube' towers (blocks B and C). Like the 'cubes' in Phase 1 of the development, the towers were flat roofed with chamfered corners and were harled in a contrasting biscuit and white (see Figure 4.40). The block 'A' terraces were positioned down the slope of the hill, stepping forward each time to create a sheltered entryway and more private garden area. The area also contained a 'toddlers' playground' to the south-western corner, to cater for the children of the development (see Figure 4.41). By positioning the terraces along the road, Wheeler & Sproson created a wide and well-lit access route to the station, which is located immediately to the south of the site.

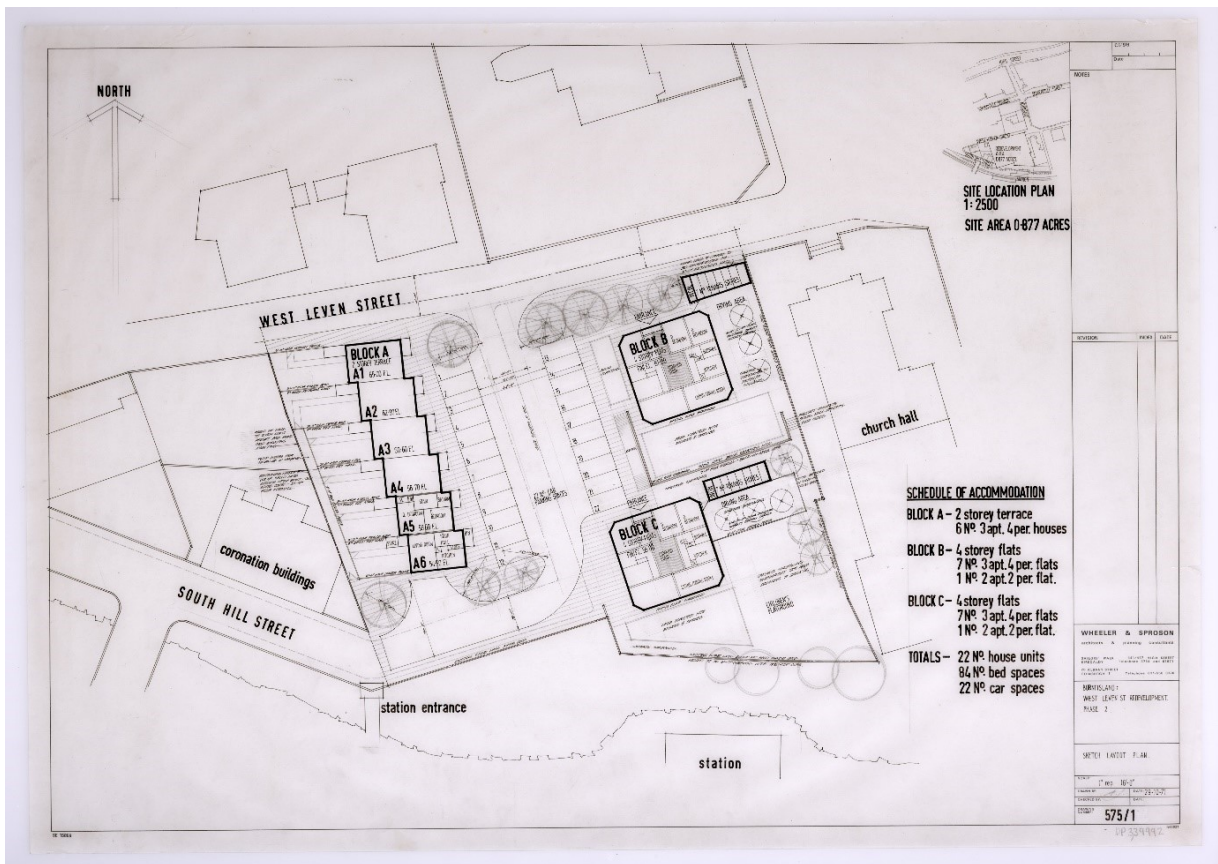


Figure 4.40. West Leven Street Phase 2 (Job 575), showing Blocks A1-A6, Block B and Block C, 29 October 1971.

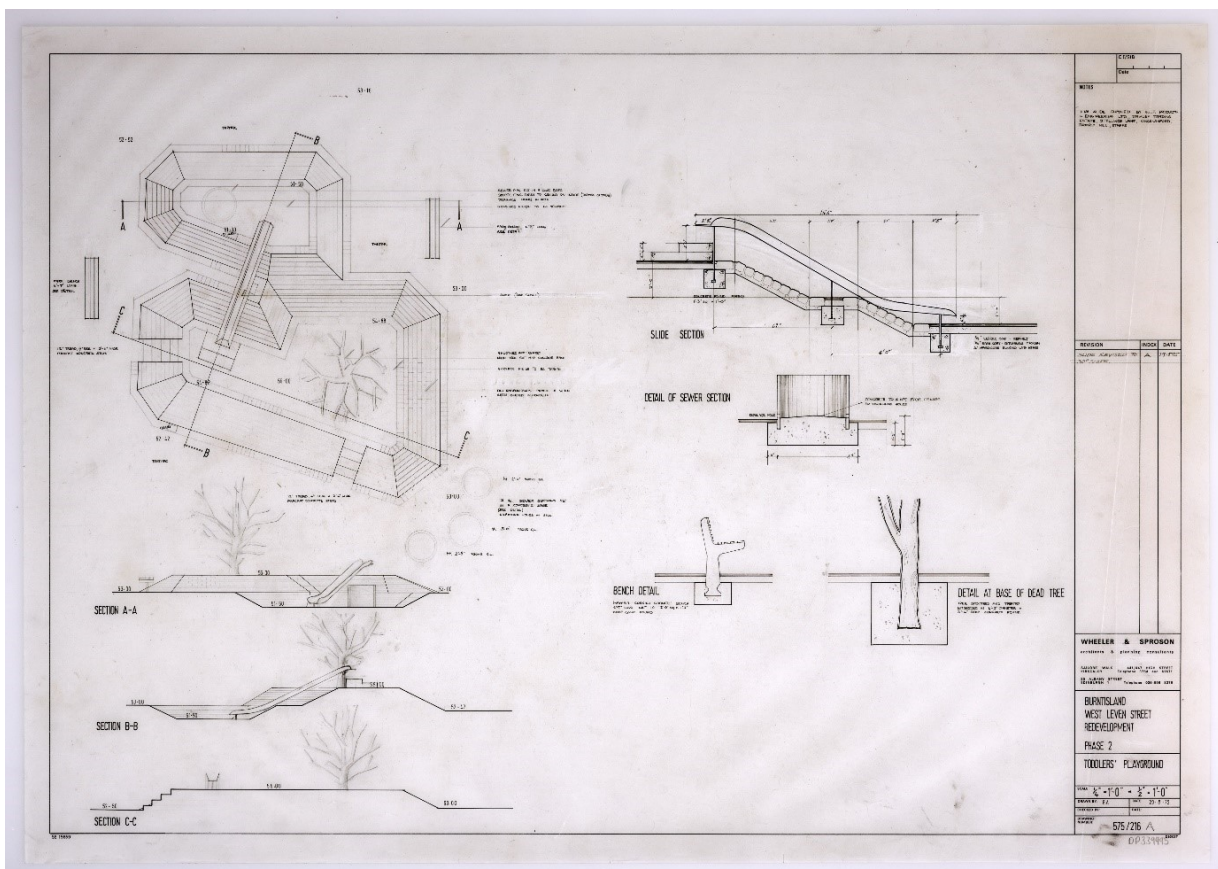


Figure 4.41. Plans for the toddlers play area at the rear of blocks B and C, West Leven Street Phase 2 (Job 575), 29 August 1972.

4.8. High Street/ Harbour Place Developments

The fifth and final area of the development to be discussed is the continuous terrace along High Street/Lothian Road, which consists of the newly built Job 178 ‘High Street/Lothian Street Redevelopment’ and Job 368 which was a restoration at ‘41 High Street’. The area also includes the reconstructed ‘1-2 Harbour Place’ (Job 672) located across the road (see Figure 4.42).

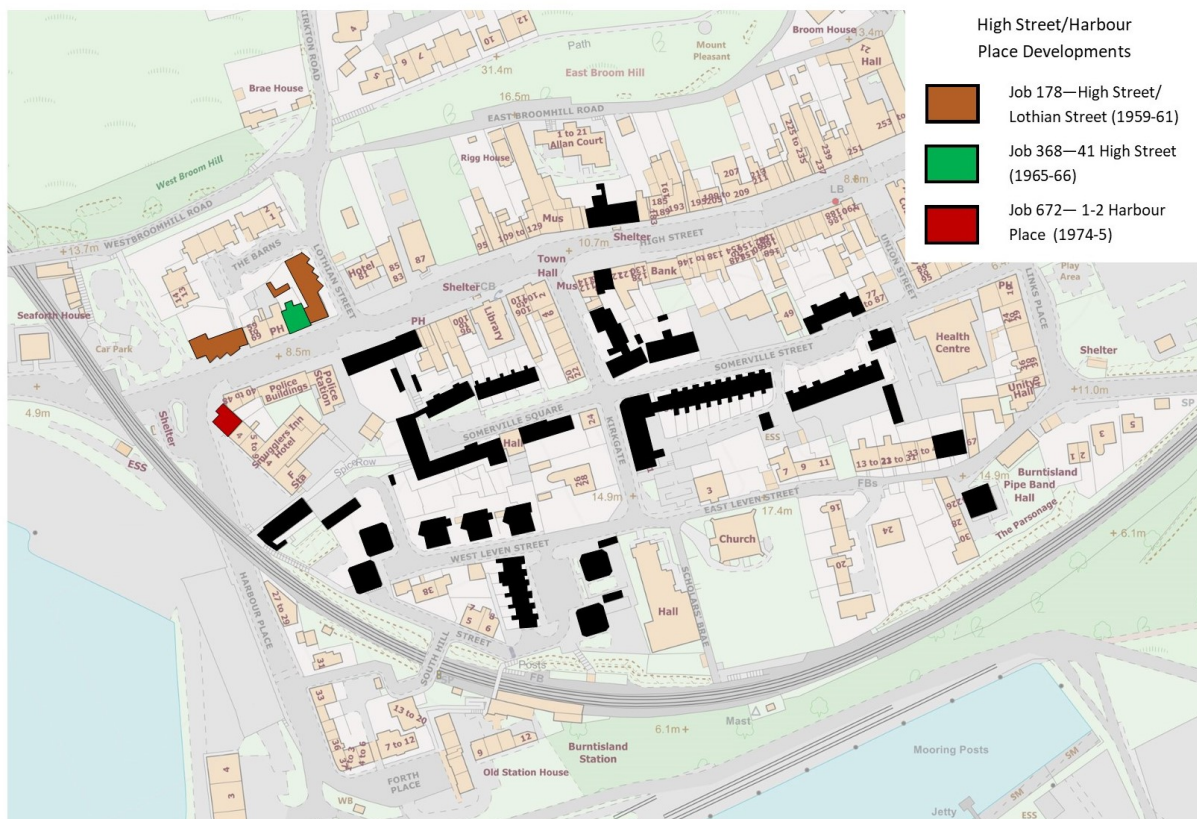


Figure 4.42. Map highlighting the High Street/ Harbour Place area of Burntisland Town Centre, containing Jobs 178, 368 and 672. Remainder of development shown in black.

Job 178 – High Street/ Lothian Street

For Job 178, Wheeler & Sproson’s focus was a corner plot facing the High Street and Lothian Street to the north-west side of the town centre. The plot was split into two areas which were divided by existing buildings which were later restored as part of Job 368 (discussed below). There were three blocks within this phase, with block ‘P’ facing the High Street, block ‘Q’

positioned on the corner of the two roads, and block R facing Lothian Street (see Figure 4.43). The drawings for this phase were completed between November 1958 and October 1961, with construction taking place the following year.

Described as a 'neat addition to the townscape' by the *Architectural Review* in 1963, the development praised the zig-zag elevation for its ability to offer the inhabitants good views down the street whilst introducing some drama to the area (see Figure 4.44).¹⁰² These maisonette 'zig-zag' flats are one of the characteristics of Wheeler & Sproson's work, first being used in Dysart (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). The development was largely faced with pale biscuit coloured harl, whilst small areas around the entrance ways and window areas were finished in stone and slate. A connection section between block P and Job 368 allowed for a pend to connect the High Street to the back of the buildings and was faced in slate. As seen in Anthony Wheeler's drawing of the scheme (see Figure 4.45), there is also a large, glazed stairway connecting blocks 'Q' and 'R', clearly identifying them as independent buildings to create a more sympathetic appearance than one single large block would have done.¹⁰³ Both blocks 'P' and 'R' are also divided into two-storey maisonettes which benefit from either shared garden space in the ground floors or large access balcony areas on the 2nd floor level. The development would go on to win a Saltire Society Extension Award in 1962.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² 'LOOK OUT,' *Architectural Review*, vol. 134, no. 798 (1963), pp 129-130.

¹⁰³ Personal communication with Anthony Wheeler's daughter, Pam Wheeler at 'New Life in an Old Town' Exhibition Opening (27 September 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

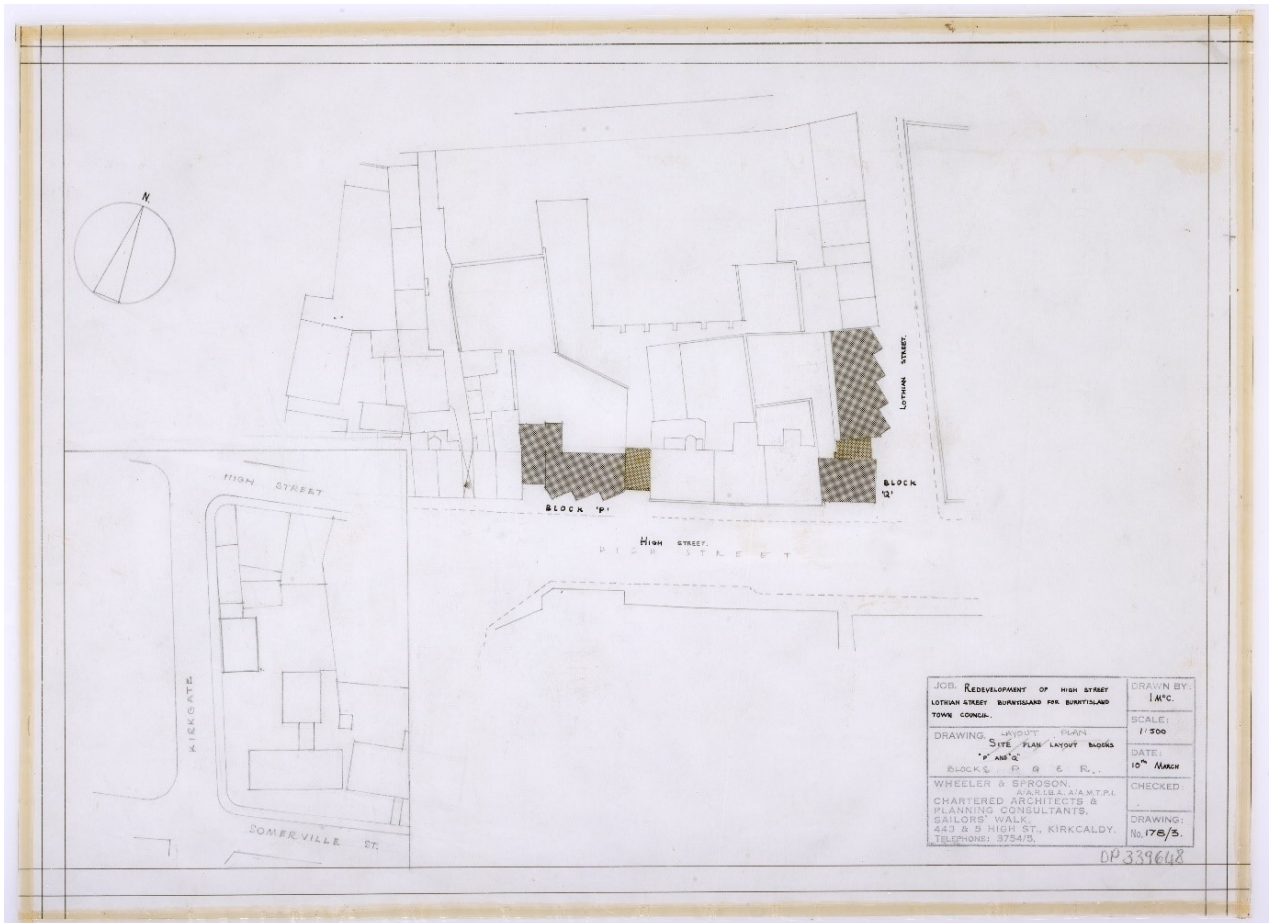


Figure 4.43. The three blocks of the High Street/ Lothian Street Development (Job 178), with block 'R' unlabelled above block 'P'.



Figure 4.44. Photograph of the High Street/ Lothian Street Development (Job 178), circa 1962.



Figure 4.45. Undated drawing of blocks 'Q' and 'R' of the High Street/ Lothian Street Development (Job 178) by Anthony Wheeler, seen from the corner of the High Street and Lothian Street.

Job 368 – 41 High Street

The 'Alteration of 41 High Street' was a restoration job on mid-to-late 19th century 3-storey tenement which stood between the eastern side of Job 178 and the 18th century twin gabled

'Star Tavern' (see Figure 4.46).¹⁰⁵ The building contained shops on the ground floor, a pend to access the back courtyard, and a piend-roofed access staircase to the flats at the rear.¹⁰⁶

Drawings of the building date from March 1965 (see Figure 4.47), with work on the building likely to have taken place later that year.



Figure 4.46. 41 High Street (Job 368) and the 'Star Tavern', shown here prior to restoration.

¹⁰⁵ *Historic Environment Scotland*, 77-79 (Odd Nos) High Street (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22792>).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

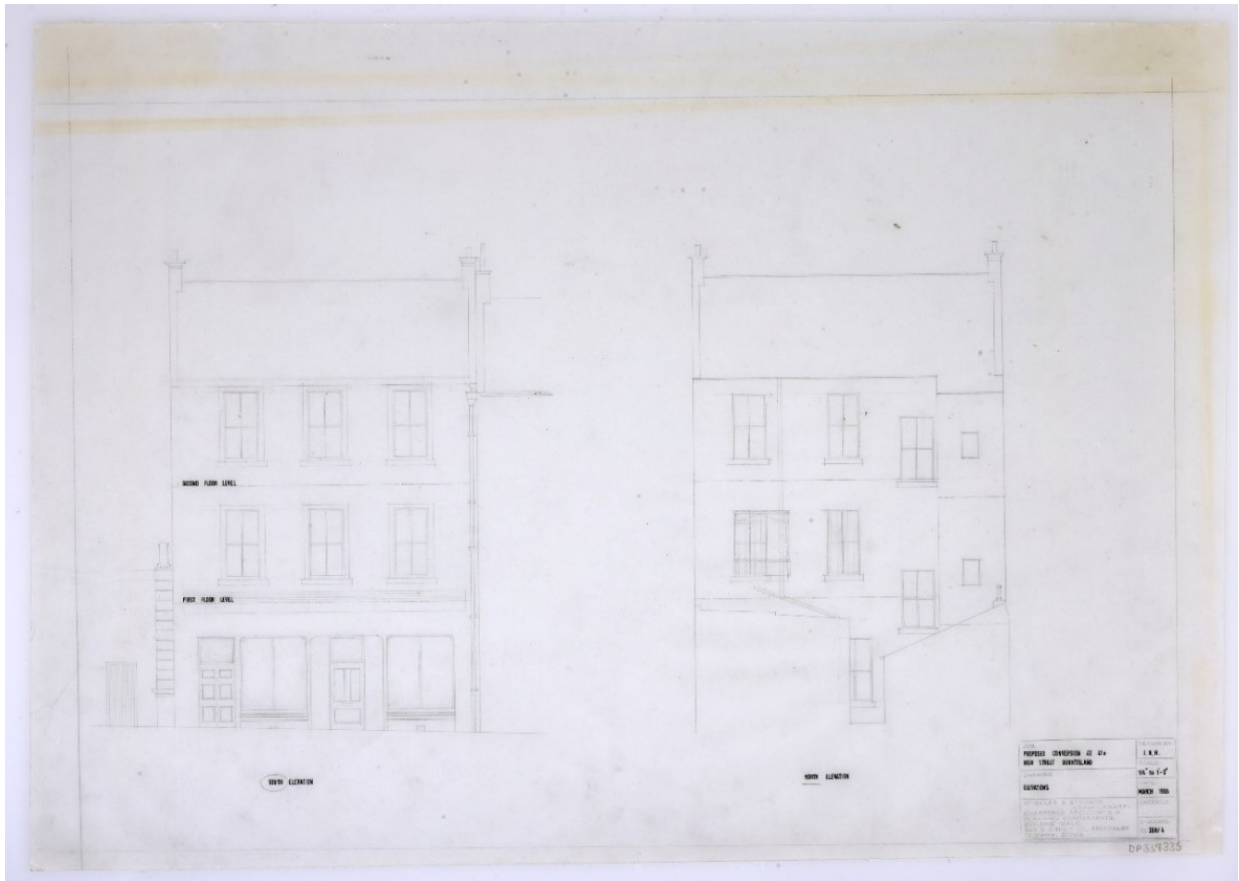


Figure 4.47. 'Proposed Conversion at 41a High Street Burntisland', March 1965

Job 672 – 1-2 Harbour Place

Situated on the corner of Harbour Place and the High Street, 1-2 Harbour Place (see Figure 4.48) was a 17th century property which had been 'much altered over the years.'¹⁰⁷ Originally a merchant's house, the building then became a shop with flats above, before falling into disrepair and become derelict by the 1970s (see Figure 4.49).¹⁰⁸ The building was described as 'very characteristic of the Fife burgh architectural tradition' in a document discussing it, which was found within the Wheeler & Sproson Collection.¹⁰⁹ The document goes on to state that

¹⁰⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Document on Burntisland's 1-2 Harbour Place Development,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the building was 'linked to the Scottish baronial [19th] century public house with circular turret, contributing to the intricate yet integrated architectural forms of Burntisland High Street.'¹¹⁰

The property was one of the few to be entirely reconstructed by Wheeler & Sproson. This usually occurred where a building of architectural or historic significance was too dilapidated or altered to be successfully restored and would otherwise have been listed for demolition by the local authority. Reconstruction was also necessary where the layout of the building was not practical for housing. In the case of 1-2 Harbour Place, Wheeler & Sproson opted to redesign the roof and fenestration to allow for an increased floor area. An undated cutting from the *Fife Free Press* by R. M. Livingstone reported 'the entire Northern gable and flank walls fronting High Street, including forestair, chimney, crowsteps and fenestration being preserved, renovated and incorporated in any replacement building which will be of a constant traditional design and of similar proportions to the existing.'¹¹¹ Drawings dating between 1974 and 1975 show how the practice fit three flats into the building. Figure 4.50 shows the freshly completed reconstruction. This photograph is symbolic of the long-lasting nature of the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, as in the background you can see the 'zig-zag' flats of Job 178, completed 15 years before. The scheme was one of Wheeler & Sproson's most successful within the housing design awards of the period, gaining commendations by both the Saltire Society and the Civic Trust in 1977.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Historic Environment Scotland*, 1-3 (Inclusive Nos) Harbour Place (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22784>).

¹¹² Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design; Civic Trust Awards*, Harbour Place (nos. 1-2) (<https://www.civictrustawards.org.uk/benet/schemes/harbour-place-nos.-1-2>).

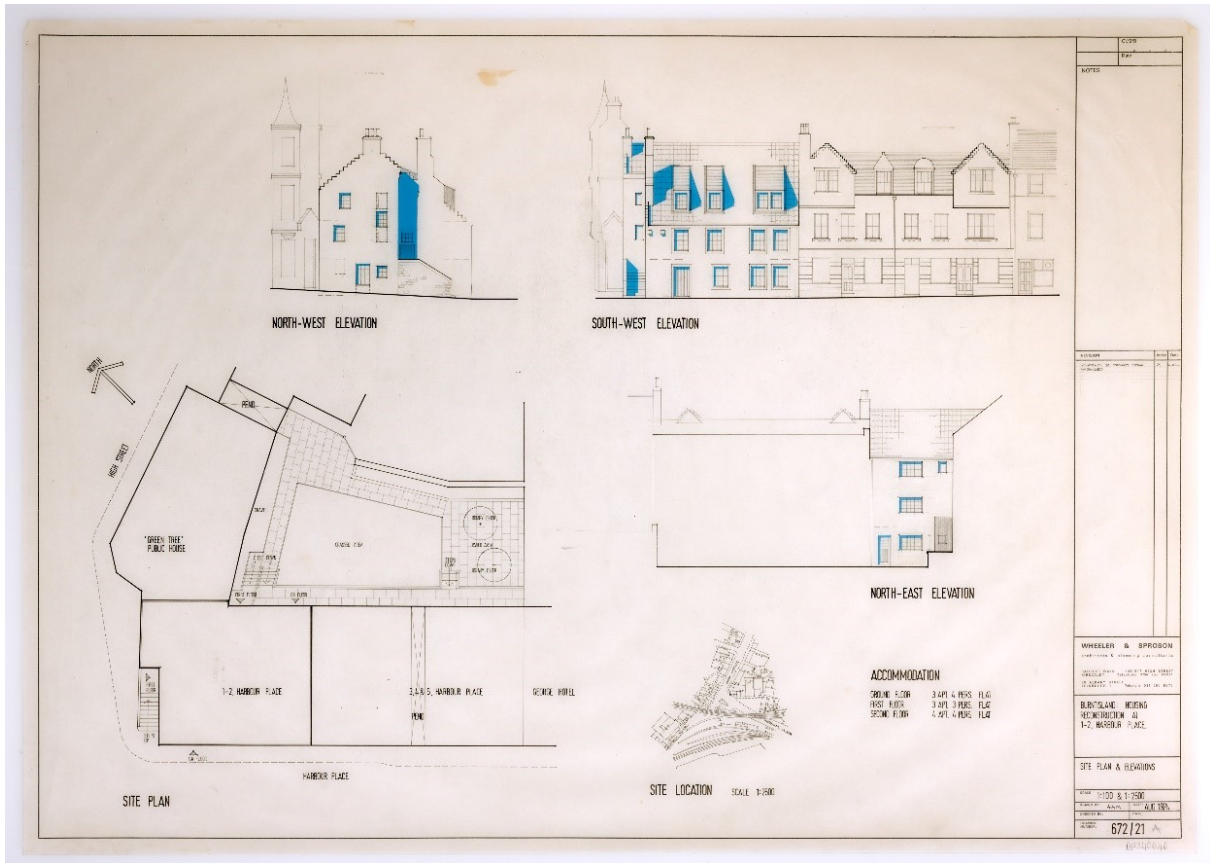


Figure 4.48. Site Plan and Elevations for 1-2 Harbour Place (Job 672) from August 1974.



Figure 4.49. Image showing 1-2 Harbour Place prior to reconstruction. The photograph was likely taken shortly before work began in 1974.



Figure 4.50. Image showing a completed 1-2 Harbour Place (Job 672) with the High Street/ Lothian Street (Job 178) block 'P' behind, circa 1975.

4.9. Survey of the High Street

A final Wheeler & Sproson job for Burntisland Town Council to be discussed is Job 515.¹¹³ As town planners as well as architects, Wheeler & Sproson were called upon to conduct a survey of Burntisland High Street, which was conducted at approximately the same time as Job 491 on the Kirkgate/High Street was being built. Written on the 16th of January 1969, a letter from Donald McInnes thanked the council for commissioning the practice to 'produce an outline plan for the phased redevelopment of the High Street over a long term.'¹¹⁴ A document was

¹¹³ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

¹¹⁴ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Area of Redevelopment: High Street,' letter from Wheeler & Sproson to G. MacLauchlan Esq, Town Clerk (16th January 1969), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

produced showing every building on the High Street, with information on the name and type of building, listing status, owner and condition.¹¹⁵

A series of maps were also produced as part of the survey showing information on condition, listing status, land use, utilities, proposed demolition sites and development areas.¹¹⁶ A compilation map showing much of this can be seen in Figure 4.51. Three 'Pilot Schemes' were proposed for development and can be seen outlined in the map in Figure 4.52 and in the elevations in Figure 4.53. Three areas were identified for this future expansion. Area 1 was proposed in a site off the High Street behind Jobs 526 and 583 (Figure 4.54). A second area was recommended at 'The Barns', behind the High Street/Lothian Street jobs (Figure 4.55). Lastly, the third area was planned as a restoration scheme based on the row of houses that includes 1-2 Harbour place (Job 672).

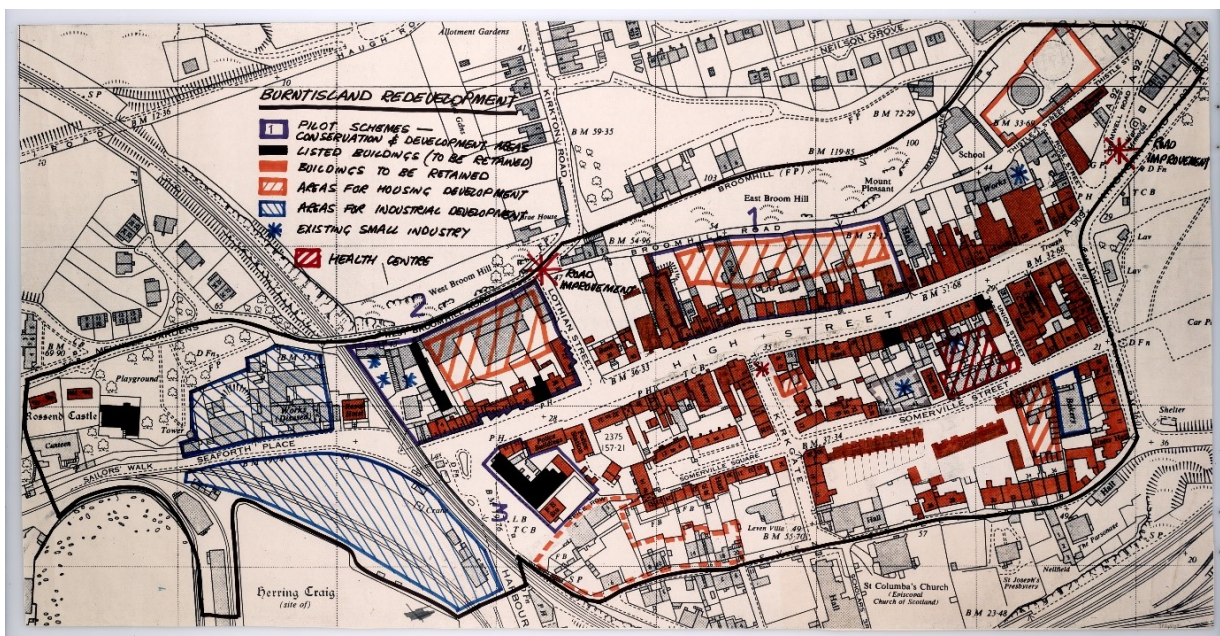


Figure 4.51. Summary map for Survey of the High Street (Job 515) titled 'Burntisland Redevelopment', showing features such as the Pilot Schemes, redevelopment areas and areas to be retained.

¹¹⁵ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Burntisland High Street Redevelopment,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹¹⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job 515,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

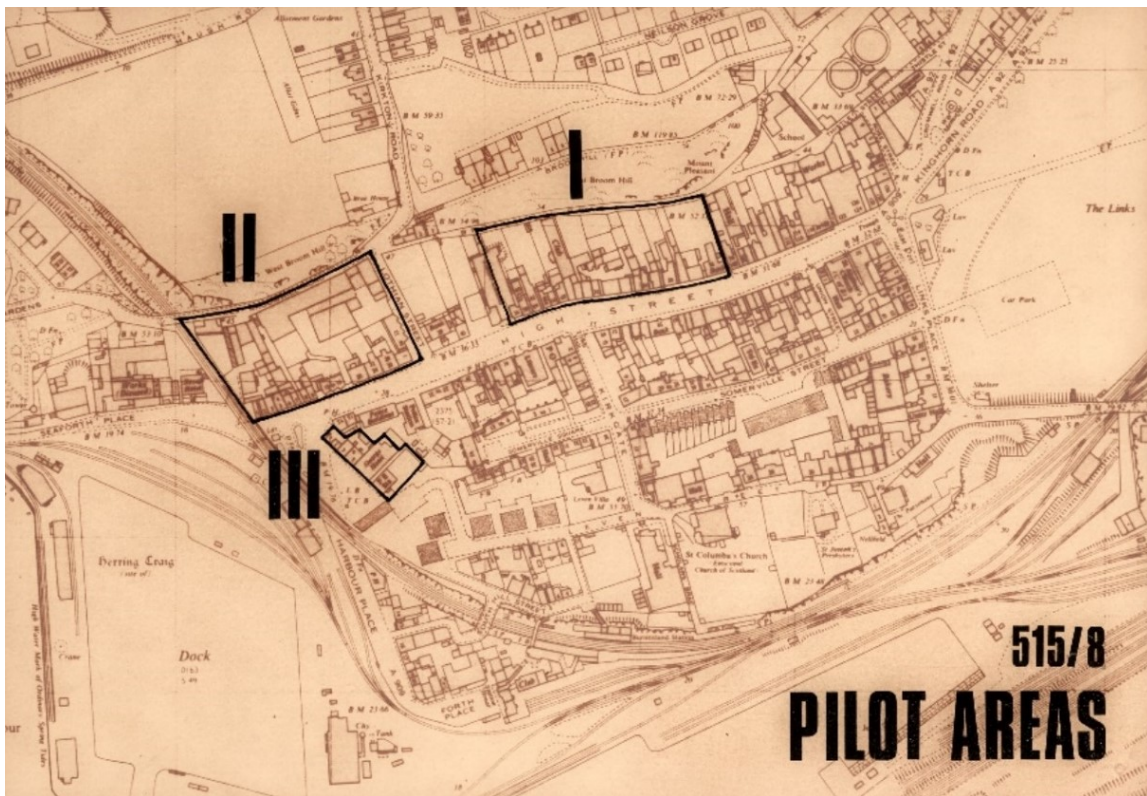


Figure 4.52. Survey of the High Street (Job 515) pilot areas outlined, with number I and II indicating sites that were never completed by Wheeler & Sproson, and area III showing the area that contains 1-2 Harbour Place.

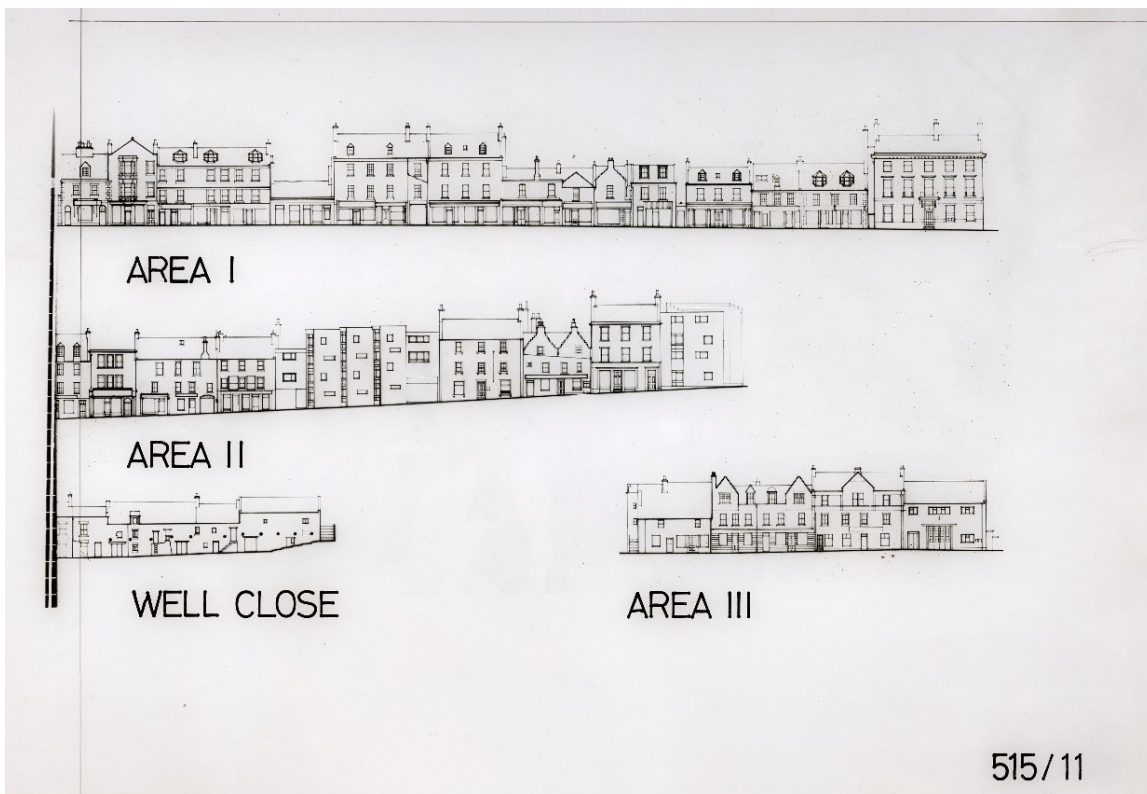


Figure 4.53. Survey of the High Street (Job 515) street elevations of the three pilot areas and Well Close.

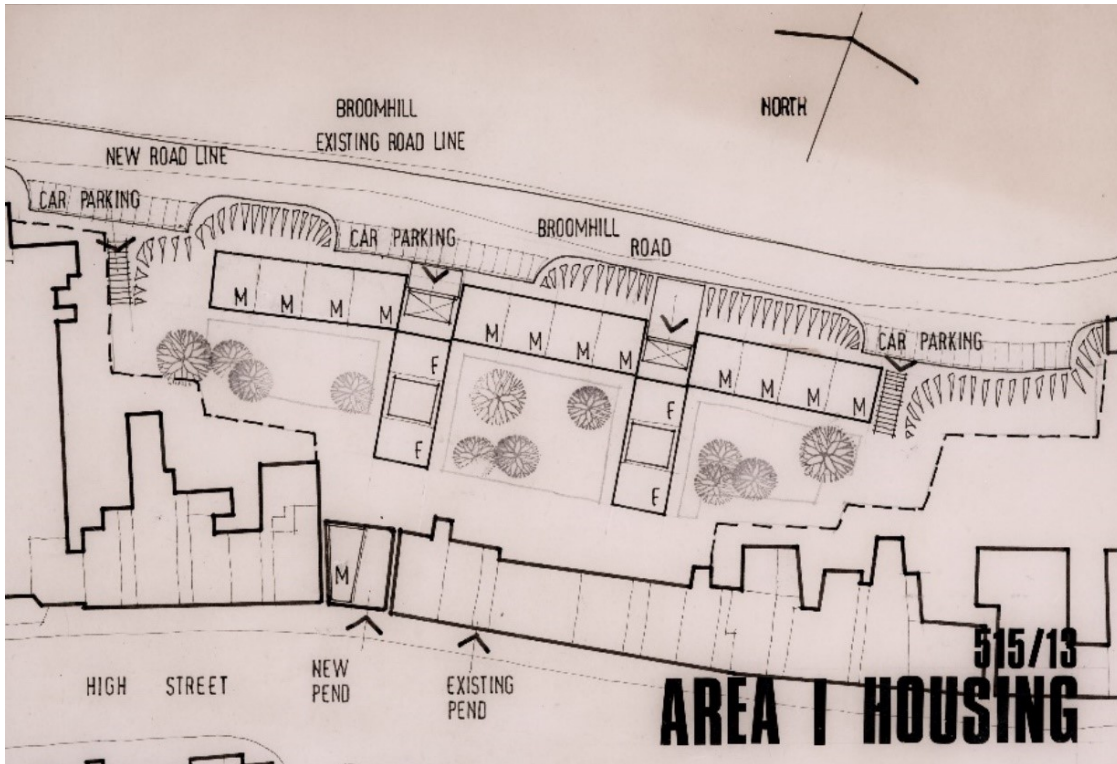


Figure 4.54. Survey of the High Street (Job 515) Pilot Area I, based on a site located behind Jobs 526 and 583.

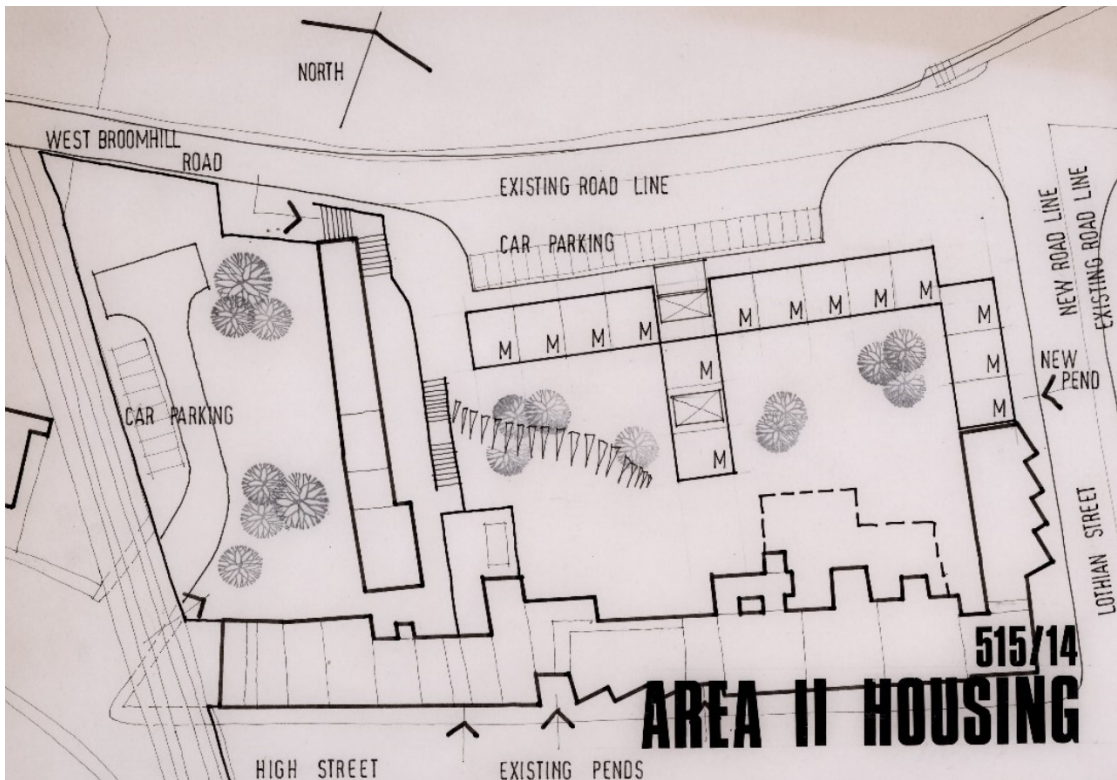


Figure 4.55. Survey of the High Street (Job 515) Pilot Area II, intended to be located behind Jobs 178 and 368.

Although the 1-2 Harbour Place work was completed, the remaining work proposed by these plans was never realised. A proposed health centre for the high street was also recommended as part of the proposals, but the arrangements were deferred in late 1969 'owing to the present financial situation' in the Council.¹¹⁷ The Health Centre was never built on the intended site, with 'Burntisland Medical Group' buildings eventually built by another practice on a different site further along Somerville Street. With the regionalisation of local government in 1975, small burghs like Burntisland changed management from local burgh councils to being contained within much larger authority areas. Local resident Isa Duncanson recalls her husband, who served in the local council, arguing that 'in twenty years time Burntisland'll be a shanty town' and that 'everything'll be for Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes.'¹¹⁸ The concern was that small towns would no longer receive the dedicated approach adopted by local administration. This is something which appears to have happened at Burntisland, with the proposed schemes never completed.

4.10. Conclusion

Across the twenty years of the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, Wheeler & Sproson were the sole contributors to the development of council housing in the burgh, having worked on approximately a third of the central area of the settlement in this time. Their work in Burntisland can be divided into three distinct forms of work: new construction, restoration, and reconstruction. Restoration work done by the practice in jobs such as 14-28 Somerville

¹¹⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'High Street Re-development Proposed Health Centre,' Letter from Burntisland Town Clerk to Wheeler & Sproson (24 October 1969), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹¹⁸ I. Sommerville (ed.), *Burntisland Voices: Recorded Memories of Local Folk 1910 – 1970* (Burntisland, 2005), p. 145.

Street (Job 77), Somerville Street/Kirkgate (Job 280) and 41 High Street (Job 368) demonstrating their skills in the conversion of properties of varying ages into modern housing. Their reconstruction job at 1-2 Harbour Place (Job 672) also showcased the diversity of methods adopted by the practice in 'protecting' historic properties that would otherwise have been lost. Finally, Wheeler & Sproson's new contributions to the settlement can broadly be grouped by building typology. The Somerville Square, the Kirkgate/High Street Somerville Street East contained mainly cubic tenement blocks. The High Street/Lothian Street area is distinguished by its sculptural 'zig-zag' blocks. Lastly, the West Leven Street area on top of the hill is dominated by tower-like structures. In Chapter 5 we will examine the Dysart Redevelopment project, which began just two years after Burntisland, in 1957. Following a similar approach to our investigation of Burntisland, each of the jobs Wheeler & Sproson worked on in Dysart will be explored before a comparison can be made of the two settlements.

Chapter 5: Dysart

5.1. Introduction

Dysart is a small coal town, located between its harbour and the Frances Colliery on the Forth Estuary, east of Burntisland (see Figure 5.1). As with Burntisland, Wheeler & Sproson worked on many jobs across the settlement throughout their career. In Dysart, the practice completed 17 jobs, ranging from council housing to religious buildings.¹ However, this chapter will focus solely on Wheeler & Sproson’s housing jobs that were set within the historic centre of the town, with private housing and non-residential work excluded from the discussion.



Figure 5.1. Dysart is located on the northern edge of Kirkcaldy, across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh and 7 miles from Burntisland.

Wheeler & Sproson’s work at Dysart began two years after they started at Burntisland, with the first drawings appearing just weeks before the grand opening of the Somerville Street/ High

¹ Wheeler & Sproson, ‘Job List.’

Street Development. Across a twenty-year period, Wheeler & Sproson worked on their sites at Burntisland and Dysart in tandem, sharing approaches and concepts across the two schemes, whilst retaining their unique characters.

As with Burntisland, each job will be discussed in turn, outlining the history of the development, what was done and how it came about. The development will then be analysed against the backdrop of W&S's other developments in Section 3. Much of the information for Dysart was derived from primary source material found at the Historic Environment Scotland archives, the Fife Archives and from the newspaper collections at Kirkcaldy Galleries. However, while newspaper records on the Burntisland Development were plentiful due to the town having dedicated pages within the local newspapers of the time, Dysart was simply a small part of the broader Kirkcaldy area and was ultimately discussed less.

5.2. History of Dysart

Dysart is largely situated upon a sandstone cliff, overlooking the settlement's harbour.² Dysart adopts a nucleated layout, with minor roads radiating off the central High Street. The Burgh's main relief slopes from West to East, with the largely 18th and 19th century High Street area towards the centre of the settlement, and the medieval Pan Ha' area located adjacent to the harbour in the South-East.³

² 'Dysart Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan,' *Fife Council* (2009), (http://publications.1fife.org.uk/uploadfiles/publications/c64_Dysart1.pdf), p.6.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

The first recorded mention of the historic Royal Burgh of Dysart was made in the 13th century.⁴ In the 15th century the town became a significant sea port, with exporting salt and coal to the Baltic countries in return for wine, fine cloths and exotic foods.⁵ In his 1710 work 'The History Ancient and Modern of the Sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross', Sir Robert Sibbald painted a picture of Dysart as an industrial and inhospitable place.⁶ He wrote that:

“All the ground on which the town stands had much coal in it ... and part of it for many years has been burning and still burns. In high winds the flames are seen in the night, but in the day smoke doth always appear”.⁷

Over the course of the next 150 years, industry slowed to a near stop. The once profitable coal-fired salt pans, which had earned the town the nickname of Saut Burgh, closed due to the rapid globalisation of the salt industry.⁸ The real death knell to the town came in the 1920s, after a series of economic disasters. In 1924, the harbour was deepened at a cost of £5000 by Dysart council after pressure from the Earl of Rosslyn's coal company.⁹ Whilst the works were in progress, the Earl chose Burntisland and Methil harbours to trade from. This move proved profitable for the company, and they chose not to return to the newly deepened harbour. This not only nearly bankrupted the town, but after the closure of the Lady Blanche pit in 1929, Dysart was forced to become an area of Kirkcaldy in 1930 to make up for its sudden loss of revenue.¹⁰ This deterioration of the coal industry was finally punctuated by the closure of the

⁴ Ibid, p .4.

⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

⁶ R. Sibbald, *The History, Ancient and Modern, of the Sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross* (London, 1710).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dysart Trust, *The History of Pan Ha* (<http://www.dysart-trust.org.uk/panha/ph-history.htm>).

⁹ 'Dysart Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan,' p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

Frances Colliery in 1988.¹¹ As Wheeler said in 1997, once industry had left Dysart, all that was left was housing.¹²

Unlike Burntisland with its small local Council, Dysart was under the control of the much larger and far busier Kirkcaldy Corporation, who were responsible for not only rehousing its existing population but were also under pressure to provide homes for thousands of newcomers from the central belt who were looking to find work in the mining sector. By December 1955 there were 2,433 people on the housing waiting list alone, with others arriving in the area on a regular basis.¹³ Whilst in Burntisland, the Council were only handling two or three small development schemes at a time, Kirkcaldy Corporation had plans for housing which would more than double the size of the existing town. In particular, they were under mounting pressure to redevelop large areas of the town, including the Links Street area, the Gallatown, and Dysart, to name just a selection.¹⁴

In a similar case to Burntisland, Dysart had several properties which had been condemned for demolition since as far back as the 1930s. By April 1956, Kirkcaldy Corporation had identified the buildings it intended on clearing and condemned them for demolition.¹⁵ This included sites such as the former gas holder on the corner of Howard Place and Victoria Street, which had

¹¹ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart, Frances Colliery (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/53997/dysart-frances-colliery>).

¹² McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context,' p. 111.

¹³ '3297 Houses in Post-war decade. But no appreciable Reduction in Waiting List,' *Fife Free Press* (15 December 1956), p. 9.

¹⁴ 'New Gallatown Traders Tackle Town Council. Want Redevelopment Started at Once. Combined Stadium and Swimming Pool Proposed,' *Fife Free Press* (12 May 1956), p. 9.

¹⁵ 'Redevelopment of Dysart,' *Fife Free Press* (15 April 1956), p. 5.

proven difficult for the council to acquire.¹⁶ By October, the Corporation was able to invite tenders for the demolition of the first of the condemned buildings in Dysart.¹⁷ Within the month authority was given and demolition work had begun on South Street and Howard Place, which consisted of 24 two and three apartment houses.¹⁸

Although these demolitions were generally invited by the population of Dysart, who were keen to be rehoused in higher quality homes, there was public outcry and a 'great deal of distress' when it was announced that the people of Dysart whose homes were being demolished would be rehoused three miles down the road in the Links Street area of Kirkcaldy.¹⁹ The Links Street area had been identified as the most pressing area in Kirkcaldy for development, and its prominent position along the esplanade made it a suitable location to bolster the Corporation's reputation as a housing authority. As a result, the Links area became the priority of the authorities and subsequently took precedence over Dysart.²⁰ As Links Street was then finished first, it was there that the people of Dysart were sent. Councillor Brodie spoke scathingly of this method at an election meeting in March 1957, criticising the practice of moving populations to other parts of town, in particular the elderly populations who didn't like 'to be parted from the area where they have lived all their days'.²¹ Instead, Brodie suggested that a minimum number of people be decanted for the first stage, allowing people from elsewhere in Dysart to be moved into them whilst their area was developed, retaining the original population as close to their origin as possible.²² This method was eventually adopted to an

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'Demolition Work,' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (13 October 1956), p. 6.

¹⁸ 'Redevelopment at Dysart,' *Fife Free Press* (20 October 1956), p. 4.

¹⁹ 'What's To Be Done About Dysart?' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (09 March 1957), p. 1.

²⁰ 'Redevelopment of Dysart,' p. 5.

²¹ 'J. S. O'Malley (Ratepayers Association)' *Fifeshire Advertiser* (21 April 1956), p. 8.

²² 'Redevelopment of Dysart,' p. 5.

extent, with some of the population rehoused elsewhere, whilst parts of the community were able to stay on.

5.3. Dysart Redevelopment Project

By the time the clearances had begun in Dysart, Wheeler & Sproson had been appointed as the architects to undertake Phase 1 Redevelopment of the historic burgh. Wheeler was attracted by the 'essentially urban' character of the town and saw it as an opportunity to carry out similar work to what he had already begun just 8 miles away in Burntisland.²³ Across a period of twenty years, Wheeler & Sproson designed a multi-part local-authority housing development in Dysart that contained 37 separate structures and resulted in the construction of 280 houses.²⁴

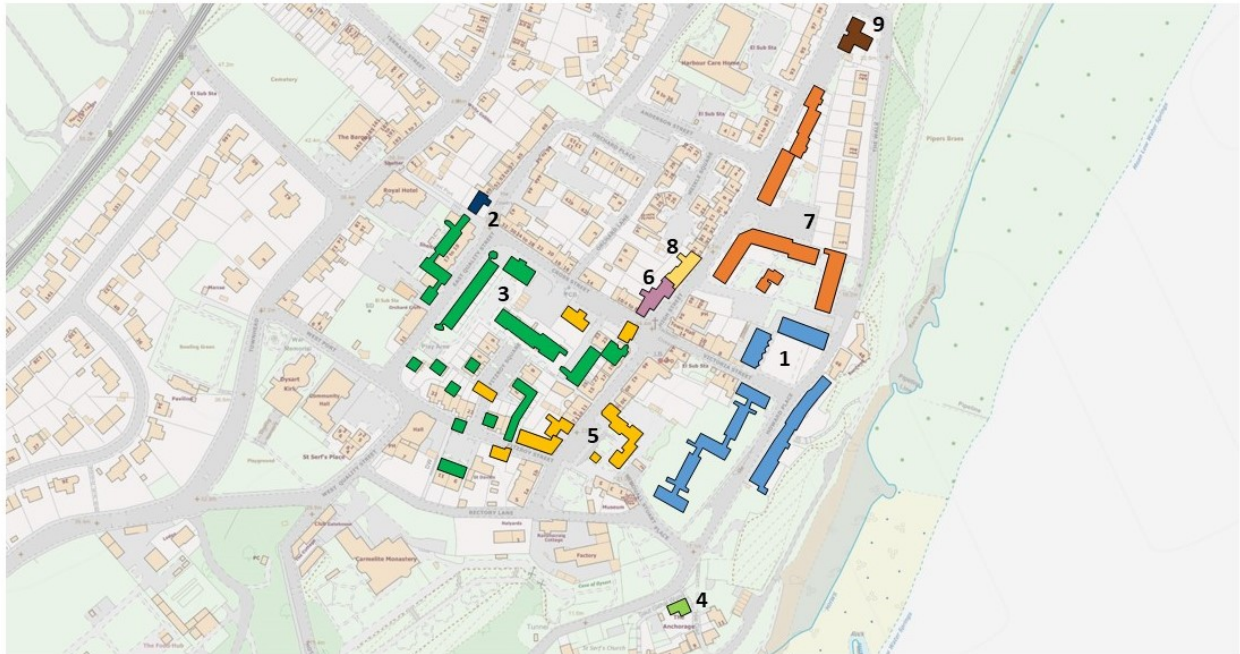
Figure 5.2 shows the job numbers, dates, and locations of the 9 jobs that make up the Dysart Redevelopment Project. Unlike in Burntisland, where the development was tackled in a series of smaller jobs, Dysart was approached in a more 'comprehensive' manner and was divided into larger 'phases'. The development was completed in three of these broad phases, with Phase 3 split into three separate jobs. Four additional jobs were also completed on small restoration and reconstruction projects throughout the settlement. Although a final restoration job was completed within the settlement by the practice between 1970 and 1971 at St Serf's Church Tower, close to 'The Anchorage', it has not been included within this analysis

²³ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 70.

²⁴ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 41.

as it was not a housing project.²⁵ Figure 5.3 shows a 1998 aerial photograph of Dysart, showing all phases of local authority work completed by Wheeler & Sproson.

Dysart Redevelopment Project



1) Dysart Phase 1

Job: 114
Dates: 1957—1963



2) Restoration of 'The Towers'

Job: 205
Dates: 1963—1965



3) Dysart Phase 2

Job: 242
Dates: 1961—1970



4) Restoration of 'The Anchorage'

Job: 342
Dates: 1963—1967



5) Dysart Phase 3—Part 1

Job: 428
Dates: 1967—1973



6) Restoration of 43-67 High Street

Job: 514
Dates: 1971—1972



7) Dysart Phase 3 - Part 2

Job: 576
Dates: 1971—1976



8) Restoration of 69-71 High Street

Job: 673
Dates: 1974—1975



9) Dysart Phase 3 - Part 2, Block 10

Job: 688
Dates: 1974—1975



Figure 5.2. Dysart Redevelopment Project with individual job numbers and date ranges shown. Dates are provided based on the first and last dates indicated within Wheeler & Sproson Collection archival material.

²⁵ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'



Figure 5.3. The Dysart Redevelopment Project is shown in its entirety in this 1998 photograph, though some changes to roofing of Phase 2 have occurred by this point.

5.4. Job 114 - Dysart Phase 1

Phase 1 of the Dysart Redevelopment was first proposed in the mid-1950s by the Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy. The intention of the project was to clear slum housing on the site and build modern homes in their place. Having already begun their work just 7 miles down the road in Burntisland, Wheeler & Sproson were seen to be an ideal fit for the authorities at the time and were selected to tackle this site.²⁶ The practice was given just Phase 1 of the redevelopment to work on first, without an overall plan of the complete redevelopment project of the town.²⁷ Wheeler described the area as being in a 'ruinous' state and beyond hope or rehabilitation.²⁸ This was partially due to subsidence in the area which had been caused by local mine underworking, including the disused Lady Blanche coal pit, located just metres from the development area.²⁹ A letter from the National Coal Board dated the 17th of June 1957 indicates that ongoing extractions were proposed to take place from the Productive Coal

²⁶ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 70.

²⁷ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 111.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment Proposed First Development,' (7 November 1957), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

Measures, 182m below the surface at Dysart in 1960.³⁰ The brief was ‘pretty loose’ and requested only that Wheeler & Sproson build a certain number of two, three and four apartment homes that met the general standards of the Department of Health for Scotland.³¹

The first drawings of Phase 1 were created in 1957 and illustrated the four blocks that would make up the area surrounding the junction of Victoria Street and Howard Place, as seen in Figure 5.4 The development was situated immediately east of the central area of Dysart, on the coast. The blocks contained electric underfloor heating, double glazing in living room windows and communal laundrettes.³²

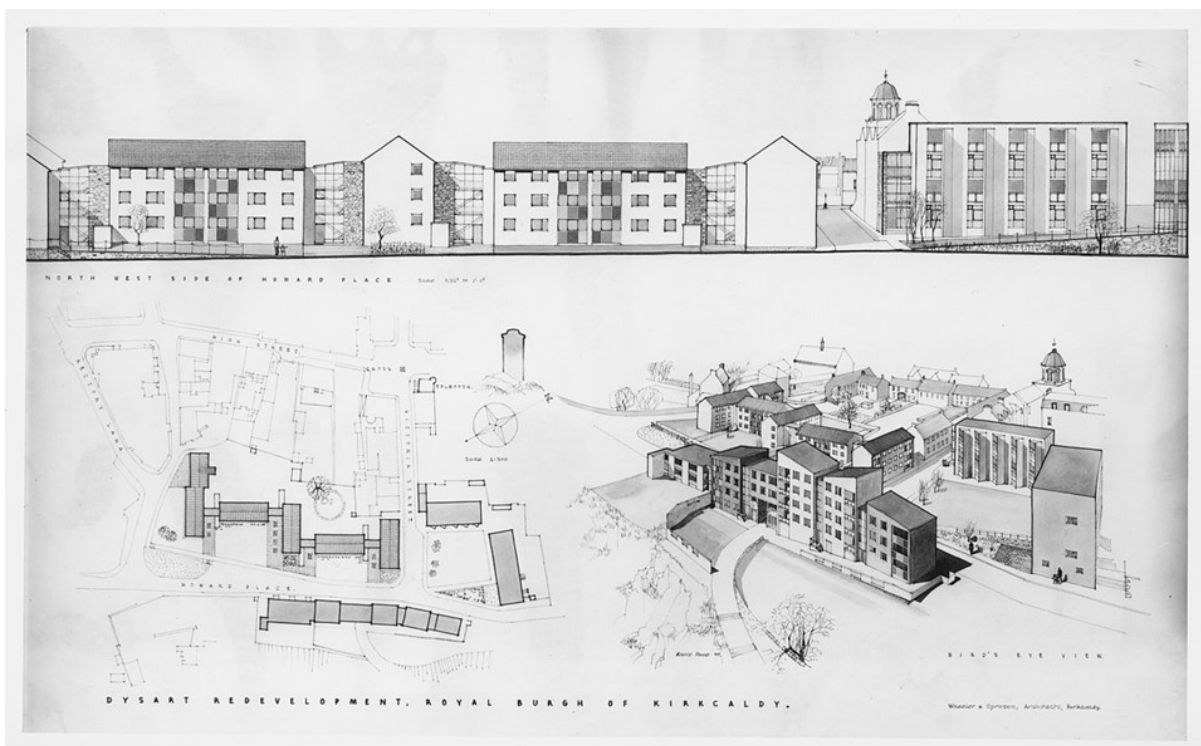


Figure 5.4. ‘Dysart Redevelopment, Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy’, Job 114. The layout plan shows the four blocks that form Phase 1 of the Dysart Redevelopment. Running clockwise from the left is Block A, B, C, with block D running along the bottom of the plan.

³⁰ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, ‘Site for Housing at Dysart.’ Letter from the National Coal Board to the Burgh Engineer (17 June 1957), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

³¹ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 111.

³² ‘Saltire Society Award for Kirkcaldy,’ *Architects’ Journal*, vol. 135, no.7 (1962), p. 338.

Communications began between Wheeler & Sproson and the contractors at the start of 1958, with the first work beginning in November of the same year. Wheeler described the scheme as 'complex' and recalled that it had given his team 'many sleepless nights' due to disagreements with officials who had no 'real vision of what the new buildings should look like, and instead were only interested in achieving housing numbers.³³ He also spoke of going to great length to convince the councillors that what they were getting was 'quite unique and new' and that they would get something 'they'd never dreamed they could have'.³⁴ Problems continued to worsen for the practice, when communication problems arose between the architects and some of the contractors, regularly resulting in work being redone multiple times due to cracks being found on the ceilings and floors of the BISON pre-cast concrete sections.³⁵ Despite these issues, the project came to a completion in late 1959, residents moved in soon after, and the scheme won Saltire Society Award the following year, in 1960.³⁶

Block A

Block A was composed of five rectangular three-storey blocks set at right angles to one another (see Figure 5.5).³⁷ Each block was connected by a glazed stairwell that accessed flats on either side. The block contained 24 two bed flats and 6 one bed flats. The blocks were topped with pantile roofs and deep set balconies connected to living areas were provided. These balconies were primarily located to the rear of the building, potentially to provide protection from winds and to overlook a children's play area (discussed in Chapter 6) located below. The blocks were

³³ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 115.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to Concrete (Scotland) Ltd (8 November 1958), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

³⁶ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

³⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Scale 1/8" to 1'0" Drawing' (1957), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

arranged to show either their gable ends or fenestrated fronts towards the street to benefit from a broadly south-west facing aspect for all apartments (seen in Figure 5.6.).

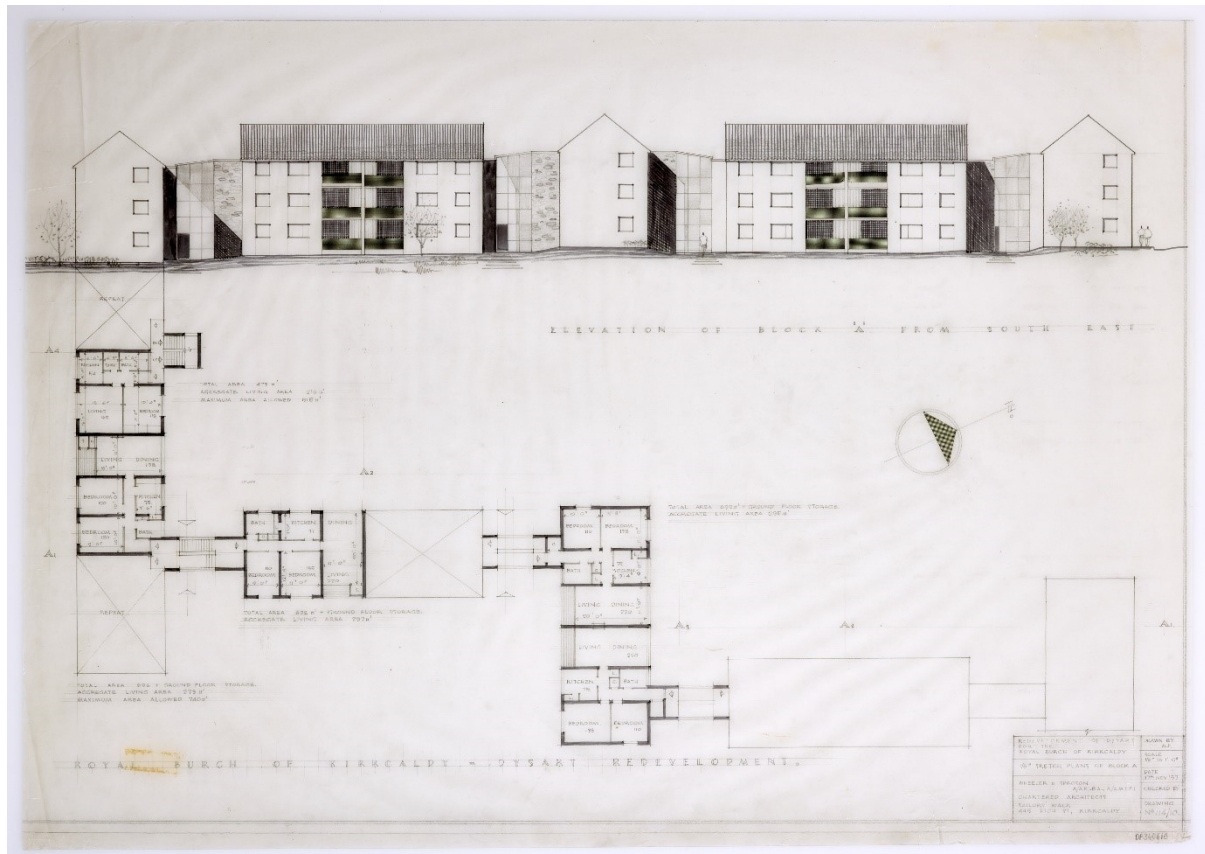


Figure 5.5. '1/8" Sketch Plans of Block A' of Dysart Phase 1', 17th of November 1957.



Figure 5.6. 1997 photograph of Dysart Phase 1, Block A.

Blocks B and C

Blocks B and C can be found north of Victoria Street and sit at right angles to one another to create an open square. This layout was likely chosen as the two blocks straddle an area where a gas tower stood as late as the mid-1950s, which was most likely removed to make room for the development.³⁸ Both blocks are four story maisonette blocks with flat roofs, deep set balconies overlooking the square area and rear 'deck' access balconies. Like its counterpart in Burntisland, Block B was described by Wheeler as 'Zig-Zag' flats. The block adopts a jagged appearance, with projecting balconies and 'bay window' that take advantage of the southern light (see Figure 5.7). Block C has a flatter profile, with contrasting deep red coloured balconies and cream coloured projecting living spaced contained within a black concrete band which surrounds each housing unit (see Figure 5.8).

³⁸ Ordnance Survey, 'British National Grid (EPSG:27700),' (1950), *Digimap*.

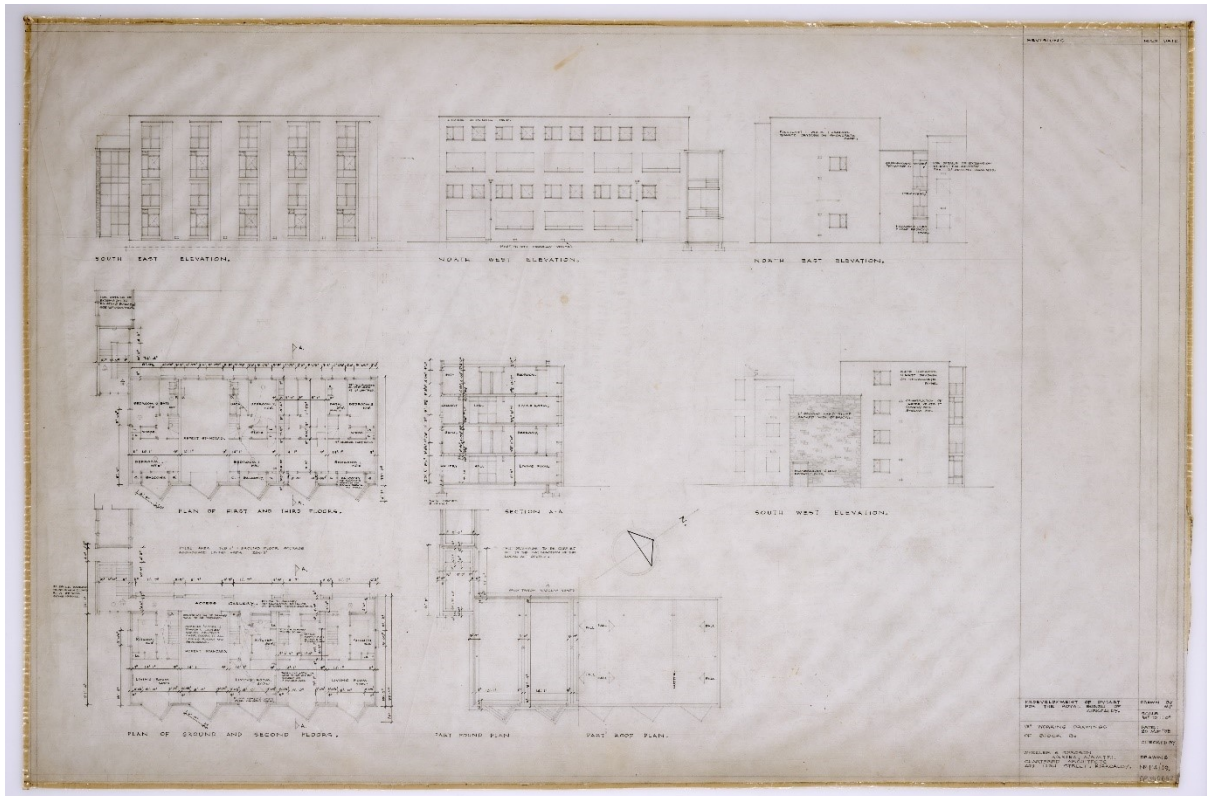


Figure 5.7. '1/8" Working Drawings of Block B' of Dysart Phase 1, 20th of March 1958.



Figure 5.8. Photograph of Blocks 'B' and 'C', circa 1963.

Block D

Finally, Block D can be found to the East of Howard Place, between the road and an original massive rubble stone retaining wall (see Figure 5.9). It consists of a long sea-front row of mono-pitched roofing, creating a 'disruptive shape on the skyline' (see Figure 5.10).³⁹ The block contains a series of either two, three, four or five storey blocks linked by glazed stairwells. The six sections of the block are faced with a section of contrasting colours and materials, ranging from rubble masonry, to brown and pale blue colour washed harl.⁴⁰ The frontage of the central section contains a rubble masonry base course with sections of local 16th century dormer heads set within it. In 1960, Phase 1 won the Saltire Society Housing Design Award, with Block D of the development praised for being:

'...a most original and vigorous composite of blocks of varying number of storeys... and it has a most unusual roofline in striking contrast to that of the other blocks. As a foil to the frankly geometrical character of this long flatted group on the cliff edge, the fine undulating 17th century masonry retaining wall on the sea side has been carefully restored.'⁴¹

This retaining wall was used as a 'viewing platform' and drying green.⁴² Accessed through an underpass, or 'pend', and a series of steps, Wheeler & Sproson designed the block in a way which preserved an existing pedestrian right of way.⁴³ An additional area to the South-East of Block D, at the site of the historic Lady Blanche coal pit, was also to be landscaped with the inclusion of a further viewing platform (see Figure 5.11).

³⁹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 112.

⁴⁰ 'Saltire Society Award for Kirkcaldy,' p. 338.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage",' pp. 3-48.

⁴³ 'Saltire Society Award for Kirkcaldy,' p. 338.

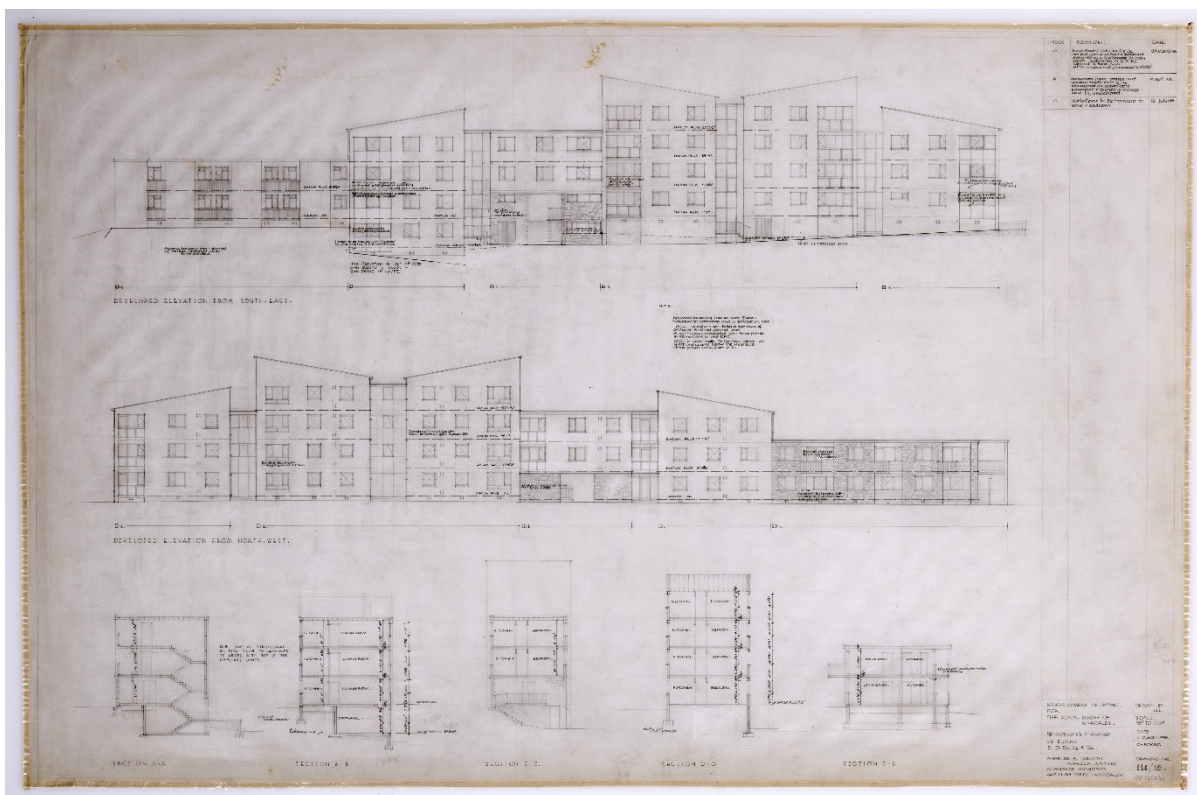


Figure 5.9. '1/8" Working Drawings of Blocks D, D1, D2, D3 & D4', 11th of March 1958.

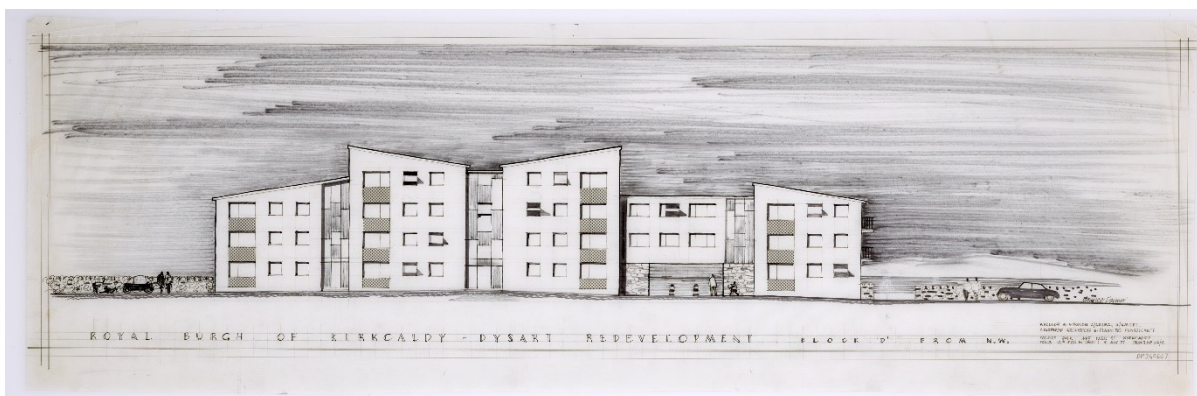


Figure 5.10. 'Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy. Dysart Redevelopment. Block D From N.W', 5th of July 1957. Prior to the addition of the final two storey block to the right-hand side.

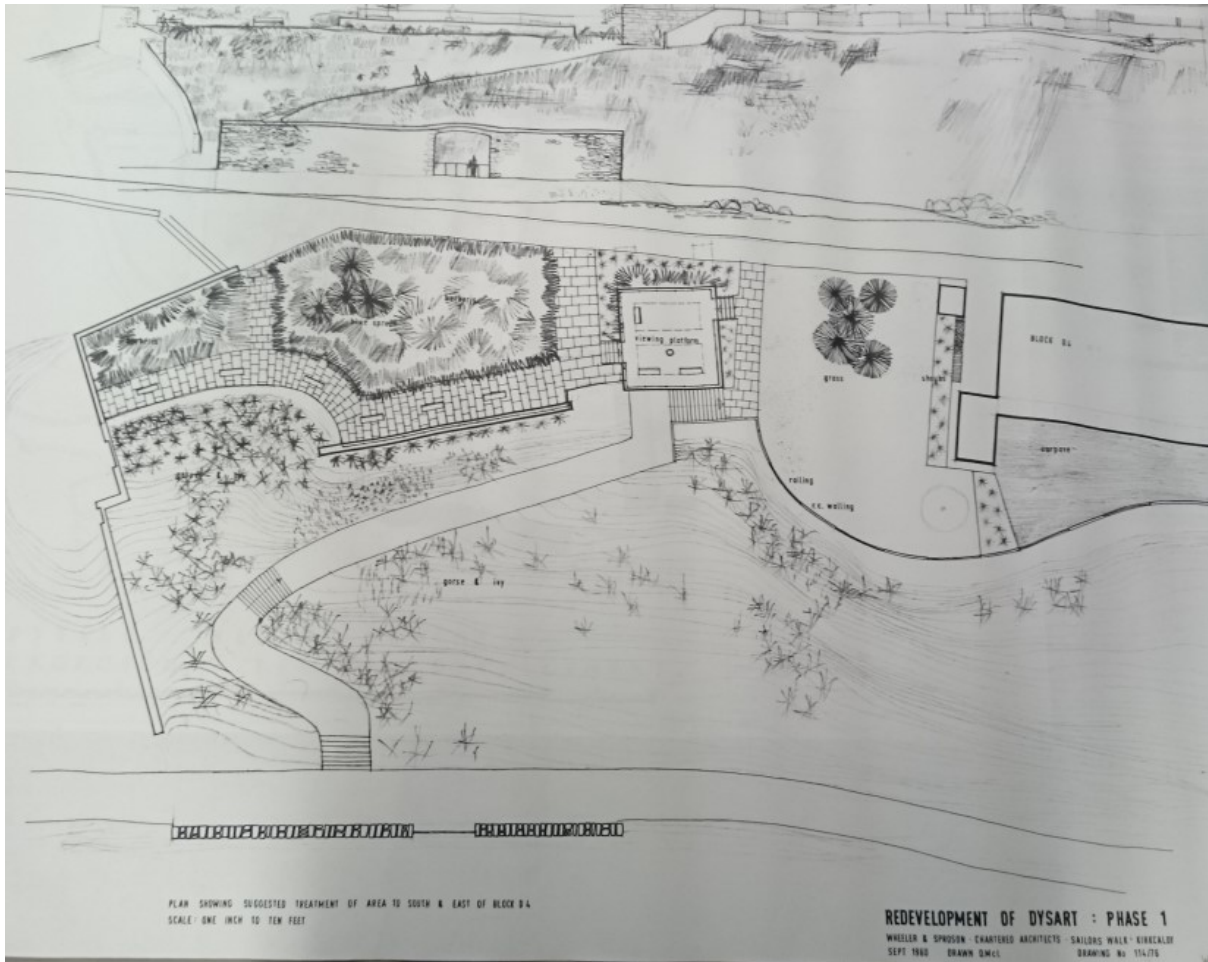


Figure 5.11. 'Plan showing suggested treatment of area to south & east of Block D4', at the site of the historic Lady Blanche Pit.

5.5. Job 242 - Dysart Phase 2

Phase 2 of the Dysart project began in 1961 when a survey drawing of the site was produced.⁴⁴

Formal acceptance of the work was later issued by Wheeler & Sproson in February of that year.⁴⁵ The area was situated between Dysart's High Street and Quality Street and was

⁴⁴ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Contoured Plan of the Site,' (24 February 1961), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁴⁵ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase Two,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to Kirkcaldy Burgh Engineer (1961), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

described by Wheeler as ‘an inward looking district of convoluted alleys and broken-down walls.’⁴⁶ Several plans for the development were produced across early 1961. A drawing titled ‘Contoured Plan of the Site’ from the 24th of February 1961 (Figure 5.12) and an undated model, show a layout for the site that was close to the final scheme (Figure 5.13). However, the practice experimented with their ideas for the site, with a ‘Preliminary Layout Sketch’ from the 2nd of March 1961 showing a collection of south facing semi-detached blocks covering much of the site (see Figure 5.14).

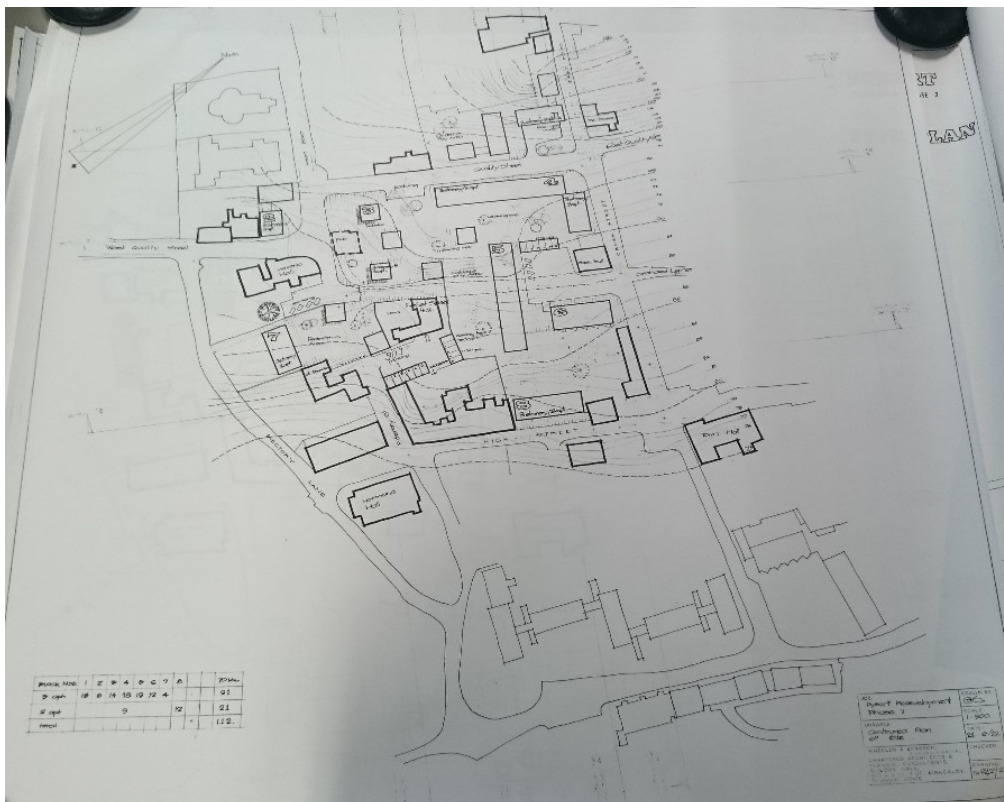


Figure: 5.12. ‘Contoured Plan of the Site’, showing the 8 blocks of Dysart Phase 2, 24th of February 1961.

⁴⁶ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage"', pp. 3-48.

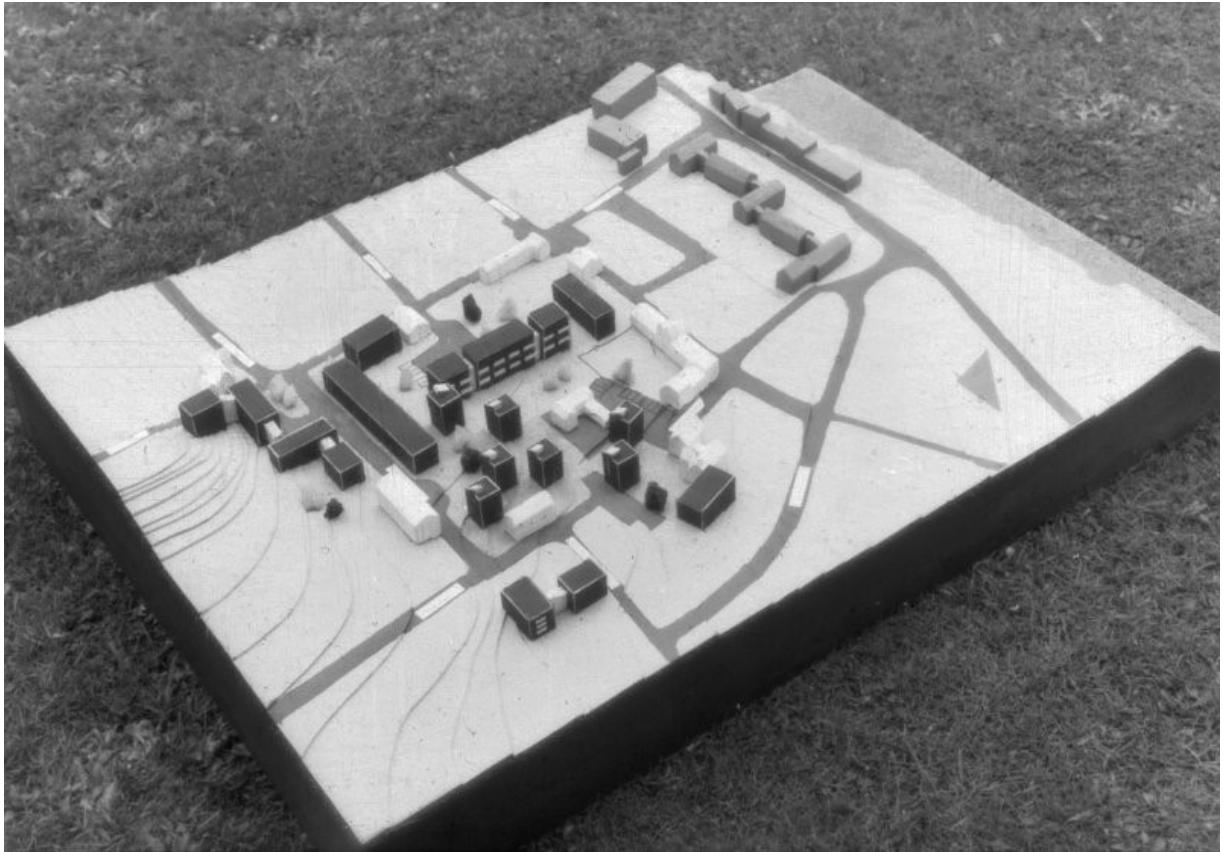


Figure 5.13. Undated model of Dysart Phase 2, showing the first phase towards the top of the image. The model is slightly different to the final result. One of the small towers (to the top-left of the grouping) and block on the bottom left-hand corner were never built, partially due to the discovery of mine shafts beneath their proposed sites.



Figure 5.14. 'Preliminary Layout Sketch' from the 2nd of March 1961 shows an alternative plan to what was finally constructed.

By December 1961, practice finally settled on a modified version of the first layout plan, as seen in Figure 5.15. This scheme was organised in a more dispersed manner than Phase 1 of the development, containing 8 separate areas containing 14 individual structures, as detailed in the plan. Fitzroy Square was extended across the existing Relief Street to create a 'safe pedestrian setting for children.'⁴⁷ Wheeler & Sproson's main aim in this area was to implement what Wheeler saw as 'one of the major objectives' of Modern Movement planning, to allow for increased sun penetration.⁴⁸ The scheme also stands out as the first at the Dysart Redevelopment Project to have no drying greens. As Wheeler put it, 'Kirkcaldy had a high standard of housing management, and they provided laundrettes, each to be shared by five or ten tenants.'⁴⁹ While Phase 1 contained usage of rubble masonry and blue harling, Phase 2 was more reserved in colour and material. Pale white and biscuit harling was used across the site, with only a small selection of structures or features picked out in charcoal. The site consisted of a mixture of four-storey 'tower' blocks and a series of long tenement-like slab blocks, all situated within a landscaped area.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 113.

⁴⁸ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage"', pp. 3-48.

⁴⁹ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 113.

⁵⁰ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage"', pp. 3-48.

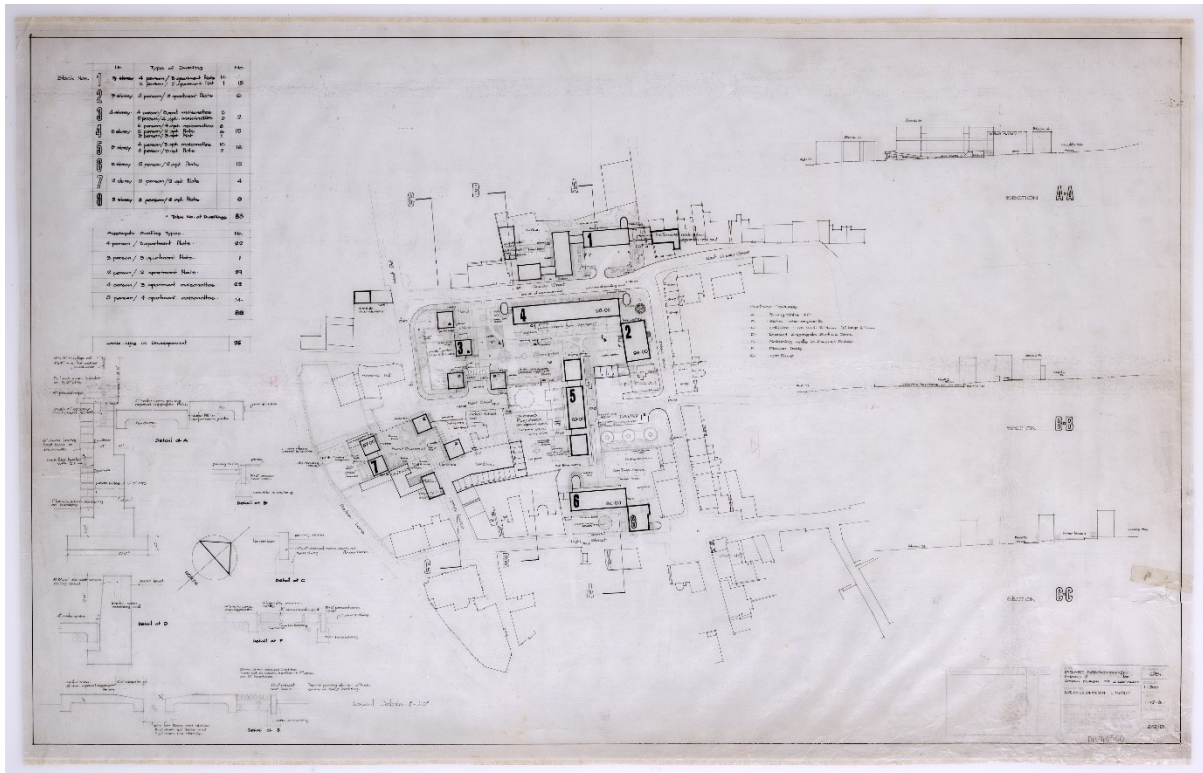


Figure 5.15. Final layout plan for the Phase 2 Area, 1st of December 1961.

The area presented several difficulties for Wheeler & Sproson to contend with. In a letter to the Department of Health for Scotland, Wheeler discussed the Masonic Hall, Relief Street Hall and two pubs that were situated within the site.⁵¹ Although he had found ways for the halls and 'The Black Bull' to be worked around, Wheeler argued that it would be necessary to persuade the owners of a pub on Quality Street to move to a new premises so their building could be replaced with the proposed housing.⁵² A second issue arose for the practice surrounding car parking in the area. Wheeler explained that 'one of the biggest problems in this layout has been the provision of car parking areas with some lock-ups.'⁵³ He found that he was not able to incorporate as many lock-up garages into the plan as he would have liked,

⁵¹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' Letter from Anthony Wheeler to The Department of Health for Scotland (April 1961), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

without compromising the design. Instead, he hoped that other areas outwith the Phase 2 site could eventually be found for this.

Unfortunately, the project hit its further hurdles within a few months of commencement. A series of excavation bore holes uncovered a mine shaft or well situated within 12 meters of the surface, directly beneath the planned location of one of the four-storey point blocks (area 3).⁵⁴ At the suggestion of Wheeler & Sproson, rather than relocating the tower, excavation work was carried out to further identify the nature of the shaft and plans for reinforced foundation work that would span the shaft were drawn up by a structural engineer.⁵⁵ Further complications arose in December 1964 when two balconies on the blocks in area 3 and area 7 failed to pass their structural loading tests.⁵⁶ Structural engineers, L.N Henderson Ltd, were called upon to create a report of remedial measures to cantilever balconies in January 1965 to resolve the problem.⁵⁷

Almost immediately after this, the development hit another significant difficulty when the acting main contractors, R. Pert and Son's Ltd went into liquidation and were asked to cease work and leave site on the 19th of February.⁵⁸ By the summer of that year, a replacement contractor was found.⁵⁹ There were a number of problems with the standard of the work R.

⁵⁴ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase Two,' (1961).

⁵⁵ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment – Second Stage,' Letter from Burgh Engineer to Wheeler & Sproson (1961), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁵⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase Two,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to Kirkcaldy Burgh Engineer (1965), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁵⁷ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase Two,' (1965).

⁵⁸ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2. Erection of 88 Houses and 26 Lock up Garages – Reference – B/21,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to R. Pert and Sons Ltd (1965), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁵⁹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Redevelopment of Dysart, Phase 2 – Completion of Terminated Contract,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to Kirkcaldy Town Chamberlain (1965), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

Pert and Son's completed on the site, such as faulty installations of WCs, poor quality plasterwork and incorrectly installed underfloor ventilation.⁶⁰ These problems were repaired in the coming months, and despite regular complaints by Wheeler & Sproson of sub-standard building work throughout the project, it won the practice another Saltire Society award and was completed in 1970.⁶¹ As the block numbering system adopted by Wheeler & Sproson encompasses several blocks under each number, the following section will explore Phase 2 area by area as opposed to block by block.

Area 1

Area 1 was located on the Northern side of Quality Street and consisted of three separate blocks of three and four storeys, set at right angles to each other. They contained a mixture of two and three apartment flats. The northern most block was smaller than the other two and was connected to the restored 16th century 'The Towers' (discussed below) by a timber-clad linking section, forming a pend below (see Figure 5.16). As Wheeler put it 'the general intention here is to create an enclosed square such that the restored 'Towers' will be a predominant architectural feature.'⁶² This block also contained garages on the ground floor level, with three apartment flats above. All three blocks had projecting concrete and wooden balconies and were coloured in biscuit-coloured and black harling.

⁶⁰ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Dysart Redevelopment -Phase 2,' Letter from Wheeler & Sproson to Kirkcaldy Burgh Architect and Planning Officer (1965), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁶¹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁶² 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).



Figure 5.16. Dysart Phase 2 Block 1, with its connecting section abutting the 17th Century 'The Towers', circa 1970.

Area 2

The second block faced on to Cross Street and backed on to Fitzroy Square, as seen in Figure 5.17. A squat three-storey block, it contained two and three apartment flats. The block was designed 'with linking staircases to achieve differing levels.'⁶³ Like much of the development, the bulk of the building was harled in a biscuit colour, with details above the third-floor windows and down the access stairwell picked out in dark wood panelling.

⁶³ Ibid.



Figure 5.17. Dysart Phase 2, Block 2, with Block 4 to the right and Block to the left, circa 1970.

Area 3

Area three is possibly the most recognisable area of the Phase 2 development. Six individual four-storey point blocks were positioned in and around the newly formed Fitzroy Square (see Figure 5.18). These were intended to 'echo the tower idea' seen in neighbouring historic tower houses, such as 'The Towers'.⁶⁴ The blocks appear to be randomly dispersed but were in fact specifically placed to benefit from open aspects, ideal privacy, lighting conditions, south facing fronts.⁶⁵ Each block contained two maisonette blocks, stacked on top of each other. The flats were provided with a balcony and large windows on the south-west facing elevations, with smaller windows on the remaining three sides. Four of the blocks were painted in the same

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

biscuit coloured shade as the majority of the blocks in Phase 2, but two blocks were picked out in charcoal.



Figure 5.18. Dysart Phase 2, Area 3 Blocks, circa 1970.

Area 4

The fourth area of development was the long three-storey block located along the southern edge of Quality Street (see Figure 5.19). The block contained two and three apartment flats along the ground floor, with four-apartment maisonette flats located on the upper floors. An access balcony runs internally along the block, with glazed sections looking on to Quality Street. This gallery was linked to a curved access stairwell by a glazed bridging section. Sections of timber cladding were applied to the area above the upper windows.



Figure 5.19. Image showing Dysart Phase 2 Block 4 to the right-hand side of the image, with the block 3 area in the background, circa 1970.

Area 5

The largest section of the Phase 2 redevelopment was the five-storey slab block with a pitched pantile roof that makes up area five, on Orchard Lane (see Figure 5.20). The ground level contains two-apartment flats, with two levels of three-apartment maisonette flats stacked above.⁶⁶ A projecting ramp once rose along the length of the block to the first floor to meet a gallery on which the entrances to most of the maisonettes can be found.⁶⁷ Glazed linking staircases topped with stone faced crow-step gabled roofs provided additional access to the upper maisonette flats on the third floor. The ramp has since been removed and replaced by a third replica stairwell.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage",' pp. 3-48.



Figure 5.20. Image showing Dysart Phase 2, Block 5 on the left, with one of the six towers of block 3 on the right, circa 1970.

Area 7

The seventh area was located on the southern edge of the Phase 2 development area, on Fitzroy Street, adjacent to the 17th century St. David's L-plan, crow-stepped townhouse to the south-east and a Masonic Hall to the north-west. The single small block was placed in this area and set back from the street front, with the land in front transformed into a public square with St. David's as a focal point. As Anthony Wheeler put it, 'I have tried to make [St. David's] an important element in the pedestrian area south of the Masonic Hall.'⁶⁸ The block was simple in form, composed of four 2- and 3-bedroom apartments in a flat roofed two-storey building. Unfortunately, this building has since been demolished and no drawings or images survive detailing its structure. However, the block is visible in a 1970 Ordinance Survey map of the settlement, identified as '9 to 12' Fitzroy Square (see Figure 5.21).

⁶⁸ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

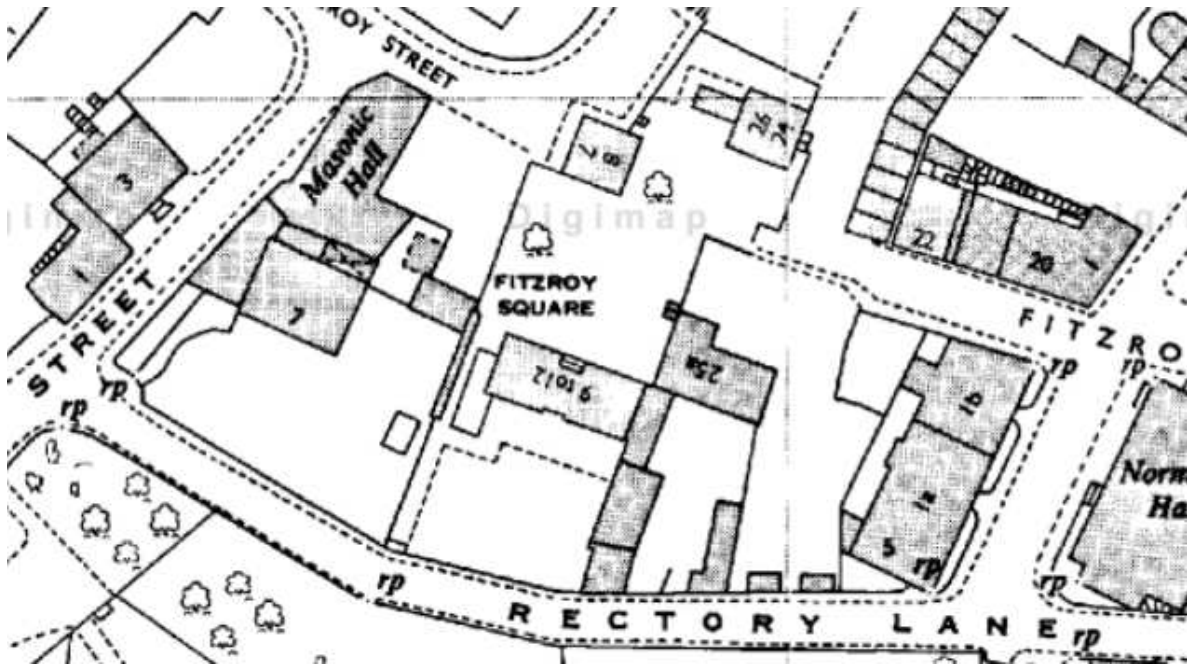


Figure 5.21. Section of a 1970 Ordnance Survey Map showing Dysart Phase 2 – Area 7. The new block is down on south Fitzroy Square labelled '9 to 12', with St. Davids marked '25' to the right and the Masonic Hall is to the left.

Areas 6 and 8

The final areas in the redevelopment, were two large three-storey blocks of two apartment flatted dwellings. The blocks were positioned at right angles to one another, forming a small paved public square with planters and trees on the High Street side (see Figure 5.22). Both buildings were accessed by curved side entrances at one end, which opened out on to projecting deck access galleries on to the rear on all levels (see Figure 5.23). The blocks were faced in the biscuit colour seen throughout the development and with features to the rear picked out in charcoal as is seen in much of Phase 2.



Figure 5.22. Dysart Phase 3, Blocks 6 and 8, with the town's Tollbooth in the background of the image, circa 1970.



Figure 5.23. The rear of the Area 6 block showing its curved access stair tower and deck access balconies. Image taken in 1997.

5.6. Job 428 - Dysart Phase 3 -Part 1

After the completion of the first two phases of the Dysart Redevelopment project, Wheeler & Sproson went on to complete a third phase, which was focused largely along areas either side of the western end of the High Street. The development was completed between 1967 and 1973.⁶⁹ Phase 3 – Part 1 consisted of an open public square off the High Street and utilized more ‘traditional’ features such as pantile roofs, finials, and use of stronger coloured harl than was seen in Phase 2.⁷⁰ Although like Phase 1 and 2, much of the work done in this phase was new development, it also contained examples of restoration and reconstruction work. Unfortunately, information on Phase 3 – Part 1 is limited.

By 1967 the local newspapers had begun to stop reporting on the housing developments, likely as they were no longer a novelty in the area. There is also far less material available in the Wheeler & Sproson collection for this phase, as it appears many of the drawings were lost before the collection was taken on by Historic Environment Scotland. However, the scheme stands out as one of the few examples of primarily modern work to be praised by both the Saltire Society and the Civic Trust. The scheme won a Saltire Society Extension award in 1971 and a Civic Trust commendation in 1972.⁷¹ The Civic Trust praised the ‘really imaginative planning and some admirable reconstruction work [that was] most sensitively executed.’⁷² The

⁶⁹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, ‘Job 248,’ *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁷⁰ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 113.

⁷¹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁷² *Civic Trust Awards*, Dysart Redevelopment Phase III (<https://www.civictrustawards.org.uk/benet/schemes/dysart-redevelopment-phase-iii>).

structure of the site can be seen in the March 1968 'Site Layout' (see Figure 5.24) As each block number refers solely to one building, Phase 3 – Part 1 will be discussed block by block below.

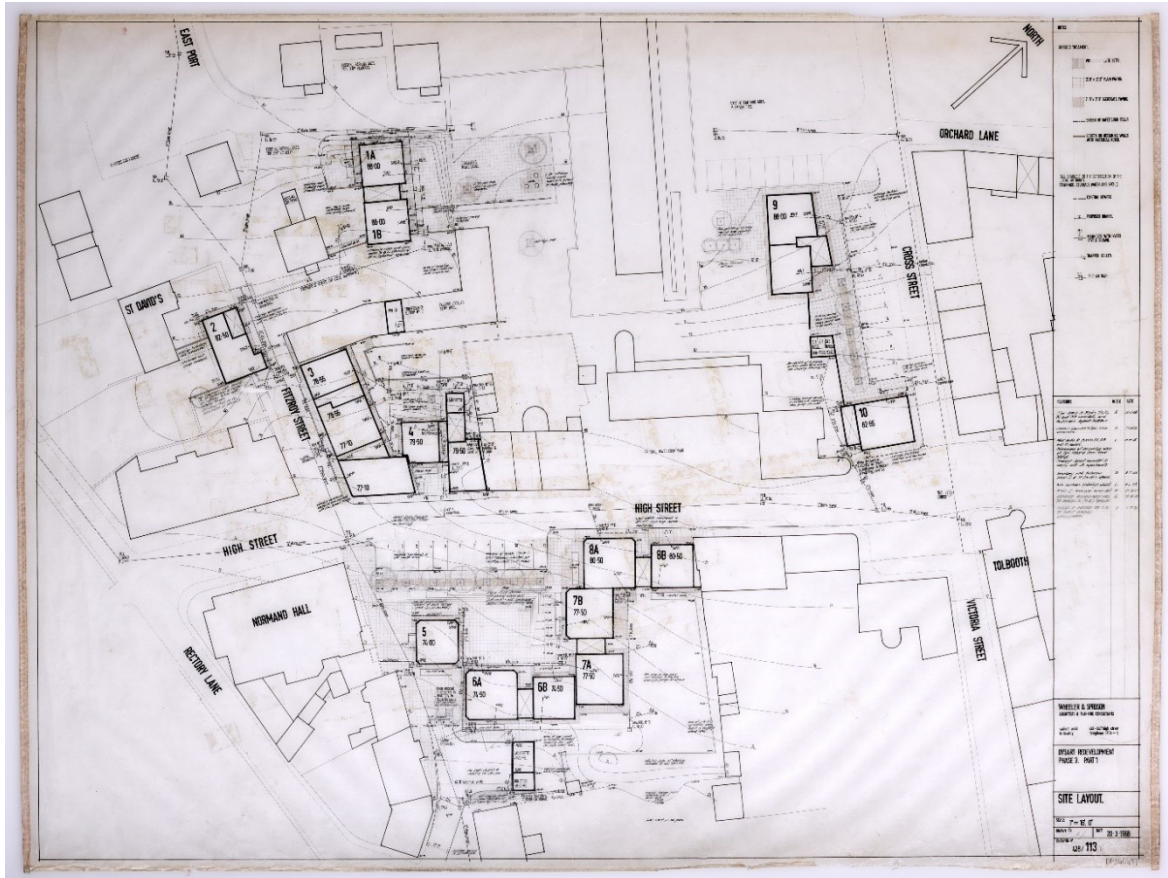


Figure 5.24. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1 'Site Layout', 20th of March 1968.

Block 1

Block 1 was a two-storey block similar in structure to Phase 2 Area 7, with four flats spread over the two floors and a central staircase used to access the flats. Unfortunately, this block has since been demolished and no archival or photographic material has survived of it.

Block 2

The second block of the development was originally built circa 1700 but was reconstructed in 1806 and again by Wheeler & Sproson in 1967.⁷³ Wheeler & Sproson's interest in the 'protection' of this building goes as far back as 1961, when Wheeler wrote to the Department of Health for Scotland about plans he had prepared for its restoration.⁷⁴ Retaining the block was undoubtedly a challenge for the practice, with a local council keen to clear the development sites of older properties in favour of new construction (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).⁷⁵ Significantly, however, the block stands out as one of the few buildings that Wheeler & Sproson managed to retain based not only on its architectural, but also its historical interest. In a 1997 interview, Wheeler spoke of including this house as it was once 'owned by [John McDouall Stuart,] the first man to walk from one end of Australia to the other!'⁷⁶ According to an overview layout and landscaping plan for the development from 18th of January 1973, the building was one of the few examples of reconstruction done by the practice, most likely due to the poor condition of the original building.⁷⁷ The building was reconstructed in 1967 and contained 3 two-bed flats, which were accessed from Fitzroy Street to the north of the building (see Figure 5.25). The building was harled and painted in white to match the neighbouring St. David's.

⁷³ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart, 11 and 13 Fitzroy Square (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB45504>).

⁷⁴ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

⁷⁵ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 111.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁷⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Site Layout Plan' (18 January 1973), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

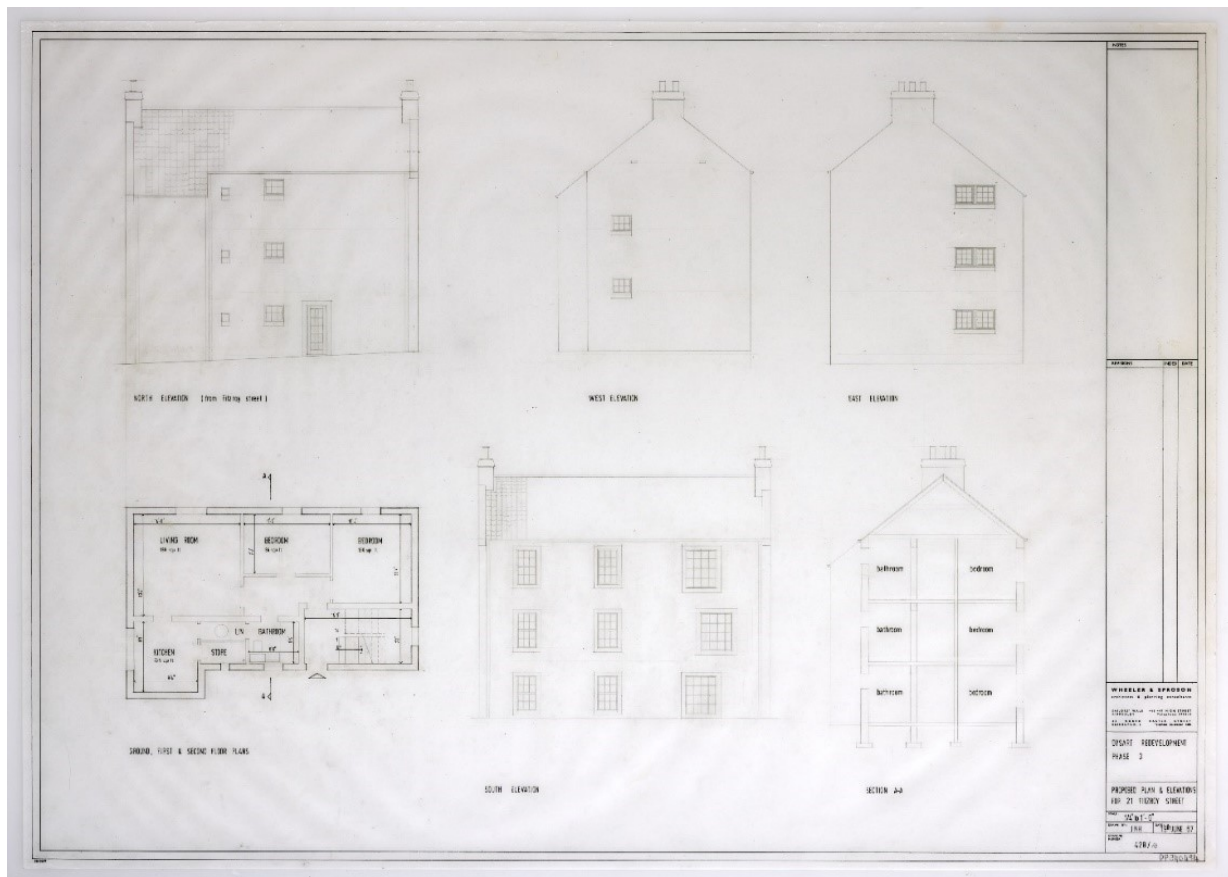


Figure 5.25. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 2, ‘Proposed Plan & Elevations for 21 Fitzroy Street’, 19th of June 1967.

Block 3

The second historic building on the site that Wheeler & Sproson planned to ‘safeguard’ was a two-storey crow-stepped tenement block from the late 19th century.⁷⁸ Situated on the corner of Fitzroy Street and the High Street, the building featured a curved corner on its lower storey with contrasting right-angled corner on the floor above. Drawings of the block from April 1968 show how the practice updated the tenement with new pantiles and replacement windows (see Figure 5.26).

⁷⁸ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 113; *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart, 2-14 (Even Nos) Fitzroy Street and High Street (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB45505>).

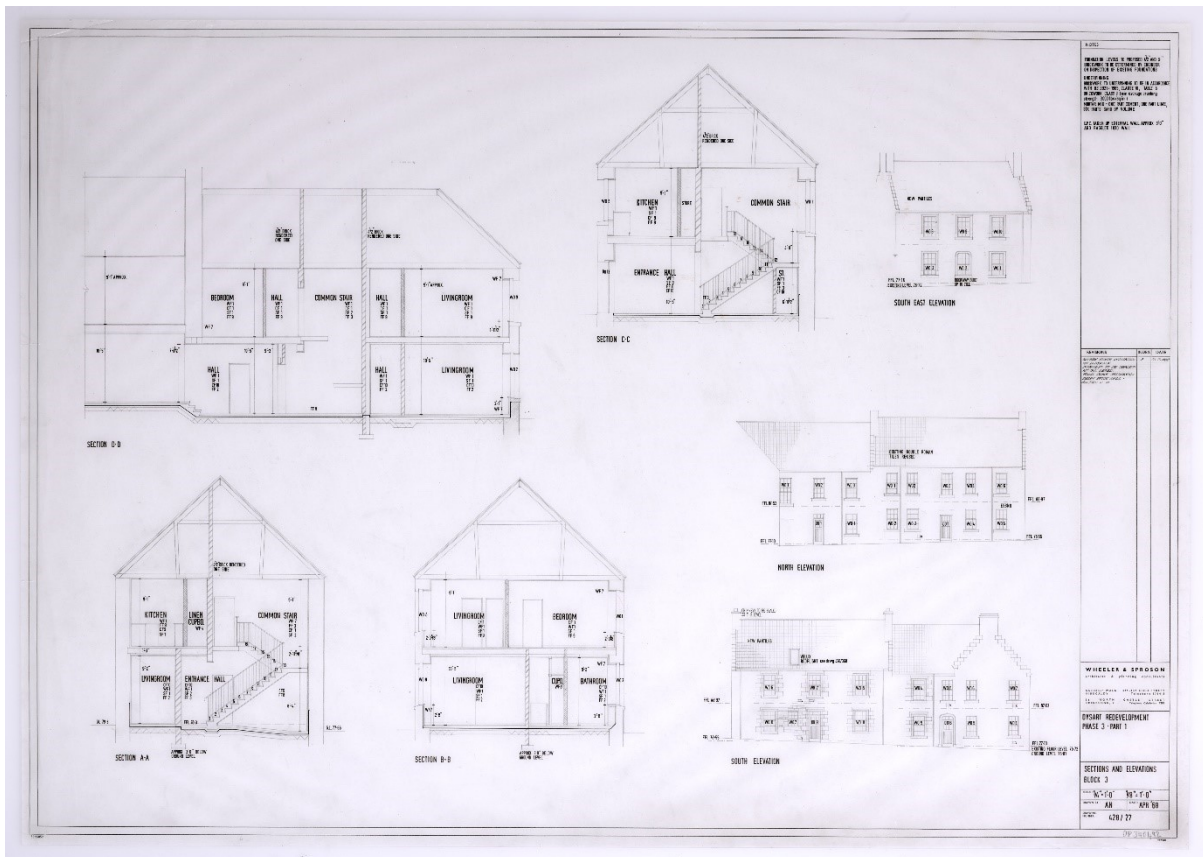


Figure 5.26. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 3, 'Sections and Elevations', April 1968.

Block 4

Block 4 of the Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1 development was a modern two-part L-shaped block that faced on to the High Street and formed a small pedestrian square. Figure 5.27 shows the aging tenement that was on the site prior to demolition. Further images of the building show extensive structural damage, with the roof to the rear of the building in a state of semi-collapse.⁷⁹ The replacement block retained a similar height and roofline to the original, with pantiles and harling used to provide a comparable aesthetic (see Figure 5.28). Six one-bedroom

⁷⁹ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart, 3 High Street (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/92348/dysart-3-high-street>).

flats were contained within the building, connected by an enclosed access stairwell to the rear.⁸⁰ However, although it is difficult to determine what the colour of the original building was, it is clear that a more romantic colour pallet has been used in the replacement blocks, with some windows surrounded in charcoal and the recessed block picked out in a pale pink.



Figure 5.27. Image of the tenement that stood on the site of Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 4, taken October 1964.

⁸⁰ 'Dysart Redevelopment Phase 3, Block 4,' (18 December 1967), *Fife Archives*.



Figure 5.28. Image of Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, showing much of the central area of the development. Left to right is Block 2 in white, Phase 2 – Block 3 in charcoal, the restored Block 3, Block 4 in pink and white, and the side of Block 5, circa 1973.

Block 5

Block 5 of the development was one of the most ‘iconic’ and sculptural structures of the entire Dysart Redevelopment Project. The only example to be used in Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 5 was a 4-storey tower of two stacked duplexes, similar to those found in Phase 2 (see Figure 5.29). The block was positioned at the centre of a tree-lined ‘piazza’ directly opposite the small, recessed square formed by Block 4.⁸¹ Much like Wheeler & Sproson’s West Leven Street development in Burntisland, the structure consisted of 3 chamfered storeys in a biscuit colour. The chamfered nature of the tower’s corners reflected the curved corner of the 19th century

⁸¹ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, ‘Site Layout Plan,’ (18 January 1973), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

tenement (Block 3) across the High Street (as can be seen in 5.28). However, the block is particularly unique amongst the work of the practice due to its square planed top floor, painted in charcoal, topped with a pantiled pyramid hipped roof with weathervane (see Figure 5.30). This use of shape and colour can also be considered as a modern reinterpretation of the 16th century Tolbooth, seen further along the street, with its two tone colouring and octagonal tower. Block 5 stands out as one of the most photographed buildings of the Dysart Redevelopment Project within the collection, demonstrating its popularity within the practice. Unfortunately, no detailed elevations or sketches of this block have survived. It is likely that these drawings may have been taken home by the architects or mounted for display given the significant status of the block.

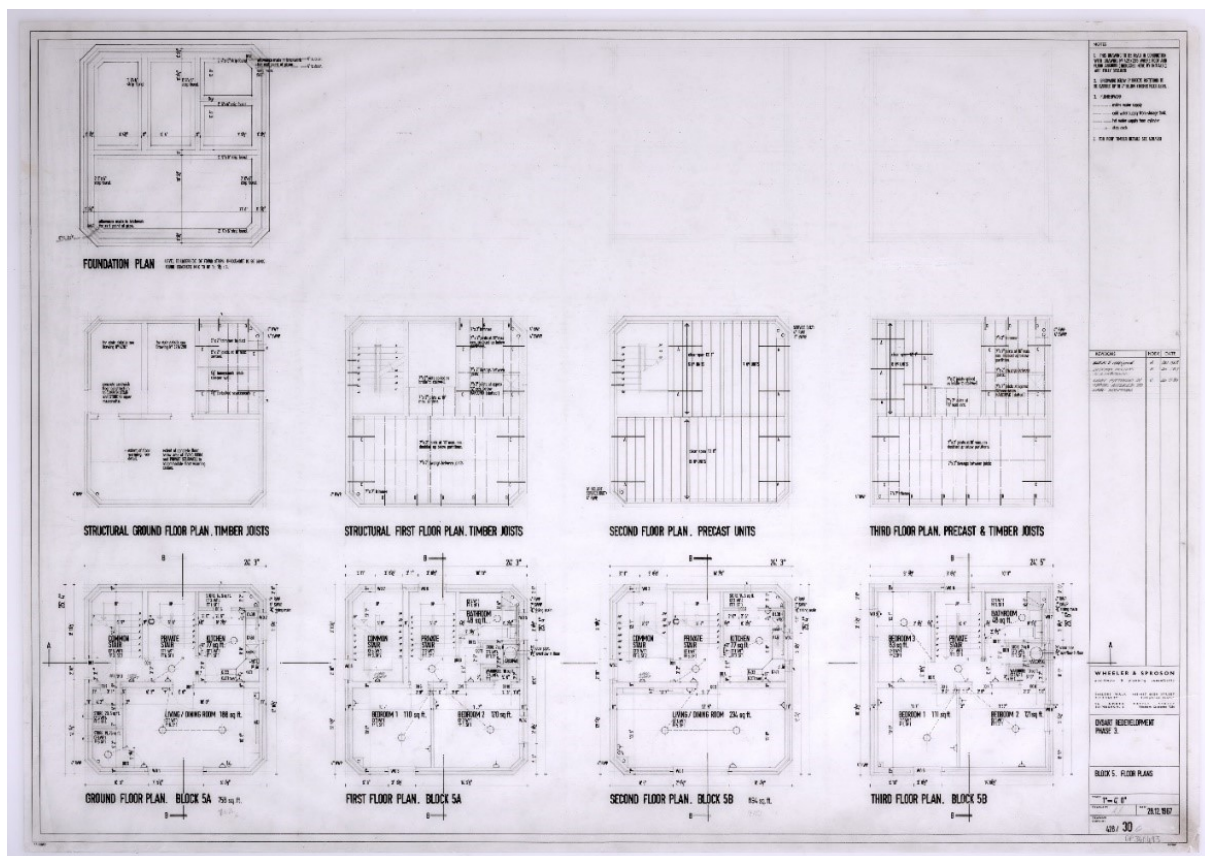


Figure 5.29. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 5, 'Floor Plans', 28th December 1967.



Figure 5.30. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Blocks 5, 6, 7 and 8, circa 1973. The octagonal tower of the Tollbooth can be seen to the left side of the image.

Block 6-8

Blocks 6, 7 and 8 were formed in an L-shaped tenement, which surrounding the 'piazza' in which Block 5 sat. The blocks were composed of 6 separate square towers with chamfered edges, similar to those seen at the West Leven Street area of Burntisland but were instead connected by stairwell sections (see Figure 5.31). Wheeler & Sproson employed a distinctive use of colour in these blocks (as seen in Figure 5.30 above), with Block 7 picked out in what Wheeler described as 'traditional [...] deep reds' and the stairwells were faced with in ochre coloured wood panelling.⁸² A block containing a laundrette and bin storage was positioned behind the buildings, facing on to McDougall Stewart Place.

⁸² Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job 428,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.



Figure 5.31. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Elevations of Blocks 5, 6, 7 and 8, with Block 5 floor plan shown, 19th of June 1967.

Block 9

The ninth block of Phase 3 – Part 1 was designed as a flat-roofed, three-storey block facing on to Cross Street (see Figure 5.32). The block was accessed by a stairwell which abuts the building. Within the block, Wheeler & Sproson placed six flats, with three 2-bed and three 1-bed flats. Intended to blend into the Phase 2 buildings surrounding it, the block was harled in the typical biscuit colour seen across Fitzroy Square.



Figure 5.32. Image of Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 9, taken September 1997.

Block 10

The final block of the Phase 3 – Part 1 development was a three-storey block containing one ground floor flat and one 1st floor maisonette.⁸³ The block faces on to the centre of Dysart and the 1887 Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee Lamp that is situated where the Town Cross once stood. The block was designed in 1968 and consists of two full storeys and an attic floor (see Figure 5.33). The block is reminiscent of 1-2 Harbour Place in Burntisland, reconstructed two years later in 1970 (see Figure 5.34). Like Harbour Place, the block was accessed by an enclosed two-story stairwell with a roof profile slightly lower than the main building.

⁸³ 'Site Layout Plan' (18 January 1973).

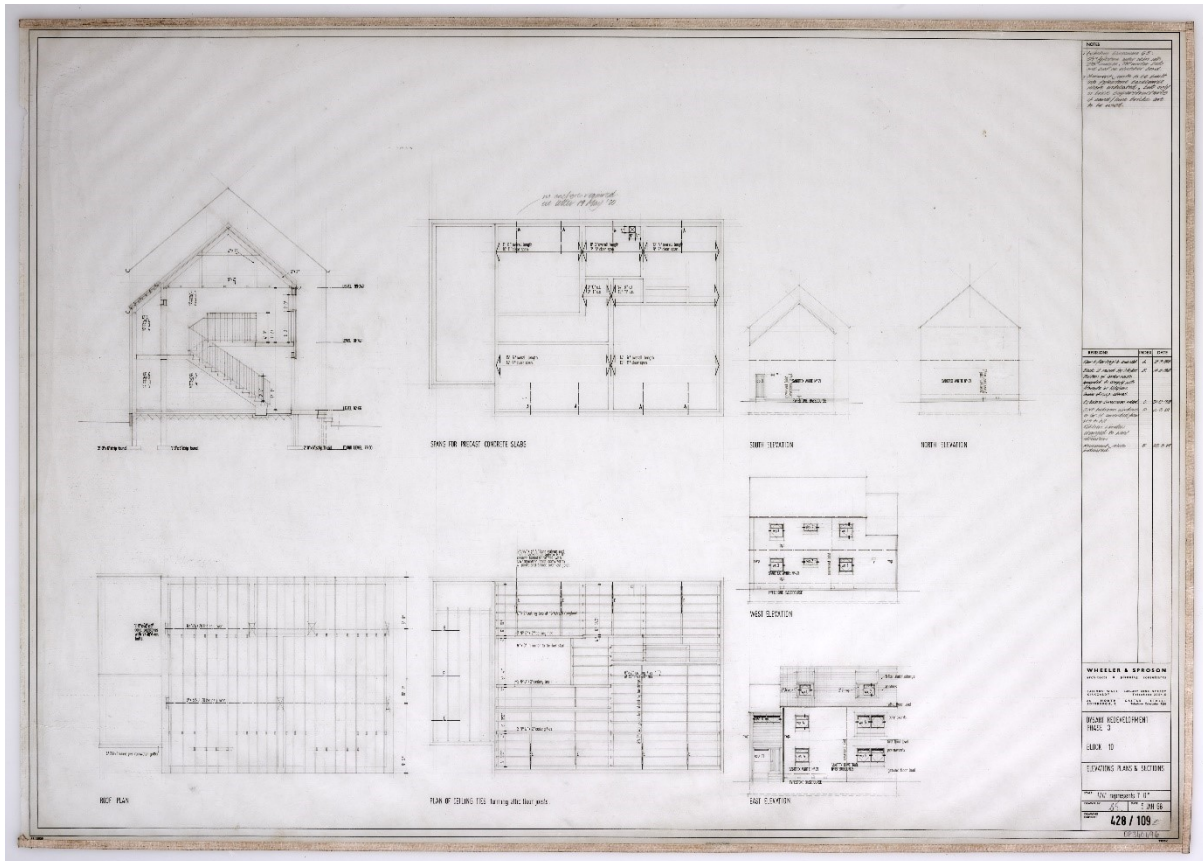


Figure 5.33. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 10 'Elevations and Sections', 5th of January 1968.



Figure 5.34. Image of Dysart Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 10, taken 1997.

5.7. Job 576 - Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2

Dysart Phase 3 - Part 2 moved away from the smaller blocks seen in Phases 2 and 3 – Part 1. Instead, the development was largely composed of long two and three-storey tenement style buildings, similar in scale to those in Phase 1. It is possible that Wheeler & Sproson saw Phase 1 and Phase 3 – Part 2 as peripheral to the historical central area, and thus a larger tenement and terrace style blocks were more appropriate. Work on the development took place between 1967 and 1976, with the first drawings of the site appearing in August of 1967. The contract confirming Wheeler & Sproson as the architects to design the scheme was signed in October 1971 by Anthony Wheeler, Frank Sproson and partner to the practice, Donald McInnes.⁸⁴ According to a document produced by Wheeler & Sproson titled 'Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3, Part 2,'

'Although the stone-built properties on the east side of the High Street, mainly tenements with some detached houses, had certain architectural qualities, their haphazard arrangement make restoration out of the question without sterilising the valuable land behind them, and creating sub-standard living conditions in most of the lower floors.'⁸⁵

It was therefore decided that other than a row of inter-war Council Houses to the south-east of the site, facing The Walk, all other buildings would be demolished. Figure 5.35 shows some of the buildings that were demolished to make way for the Phase 3 – Part 2 development

⁸⁴ 'Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy: Land for Development Dysart Phase III Area 2,' (October 1971), *Fife Archives*.

⁸⁵ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Kirkcaldy District Council -Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3, Part 2,' (undated) *Historic Environment Scotland*.

crossed out. The map is undated and is likely an early plan for the area, as further buildings, such as the Greengrocery and the building faintly marked as 'Jamiesons Bakers' were eventually removed. Shops such as these were proposed to be replaced in the High Street reconstruction project discussed below.

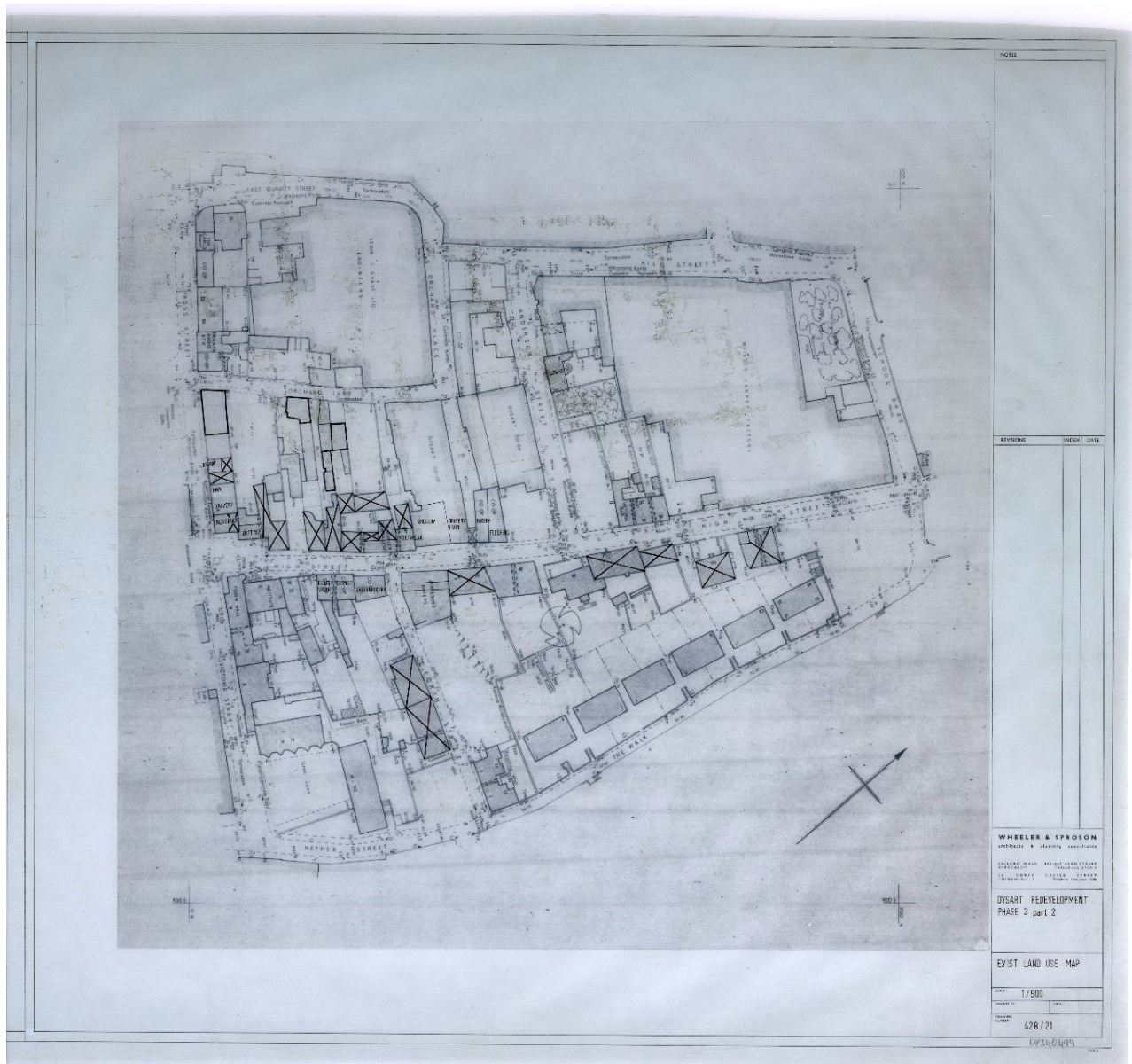


Figure 5.35. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, 'Existing Land Use Map', with buildings proposed for demolition by the Council crossed out. Undated.

In their place, Wheeler & Sproson proposed the creation of a 'pedestrian piazza', which would dominate the southern half of the site (see Figure 5.36, area 'B').⁸⁶ This 'piazza' would be bound to the north, east and west by 'continuous flatted dwellings' and to the south by the backs of the Victoria Street properties, including the Phase 1 blocks.⁸⁷ A set of 'twin tower blocks' would be placed to the centre of this square, 'expressing the architectural theme common to other Dysart Redevelopment.'⁸⁸ The square would also feature a 'pedestrian way', which ran from the shore up to Dysart High Street 'under the westmost block of flats.'⁸⁹ This footpath would roughly follow the route of the original Forth Street, which was removed for the creation of the scheme. Wheeler & Sproson saw this area as a 'worthwhile convenience' to the residents of Dysart, whilst also providing a safe area for children to play away from traffic.⁹⁰ To the north of the area, the practice designed a series of tenement buildings and houses along the remaining section of the High Street.

⁸⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Kirkcaldy District Council- Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3, Part 2,' (undated), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

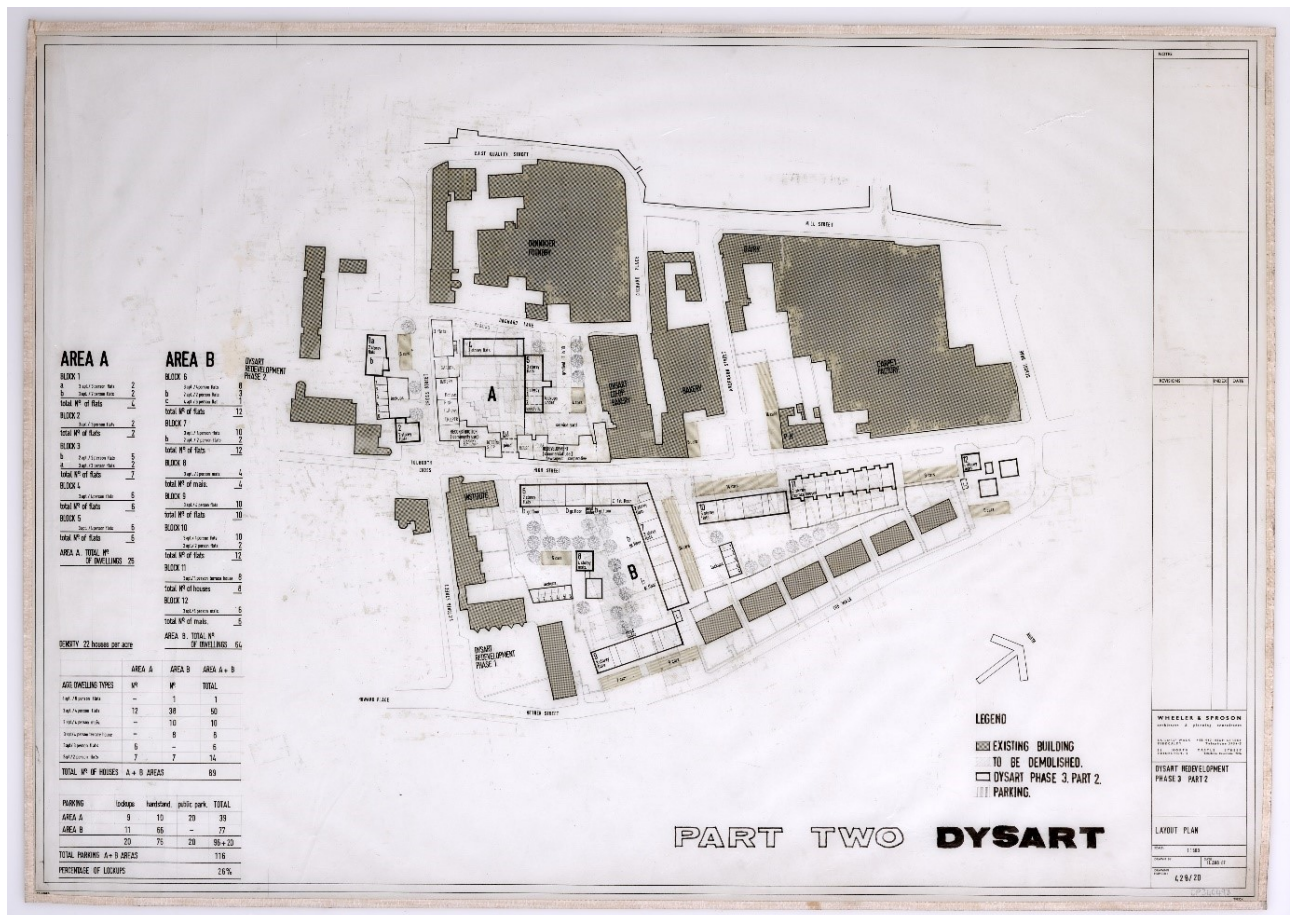


Figure 5.36. An early plan showing Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, with additional blocks (4 and 5) indicted in the area ‘B’ portion of the drawing. Area ‘A’ signifies a part of the development which was partially intended to compose several of Phase 3 Part 1’s blocks and an additional block behind the High Street reconstruction work (Job 514) which was never completed. Drawing from the 14th of August 1967.

Just as was done for the earlier phases, Phase 3 – Part 2 received a ‘comprehensive landscaping scheme’, seen in Figure 5.37.⁹¹ This was conducted by Kirkcaldy Parks Department, as had been done in all previous schemes at Dysart.⁹² The landscaping plan shows the addition of several grass areas and the planning of a number of trees. Overall, the development brought about the creation of 50 homes, all of which were provided car parking facilities.⁹³ The scheme was finally completed in 1976. Unfortunately, no completed mapping of the scheme remains within

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

the archive, so Figure 5.38 has been created to demonstrate the numbering of the blocks.

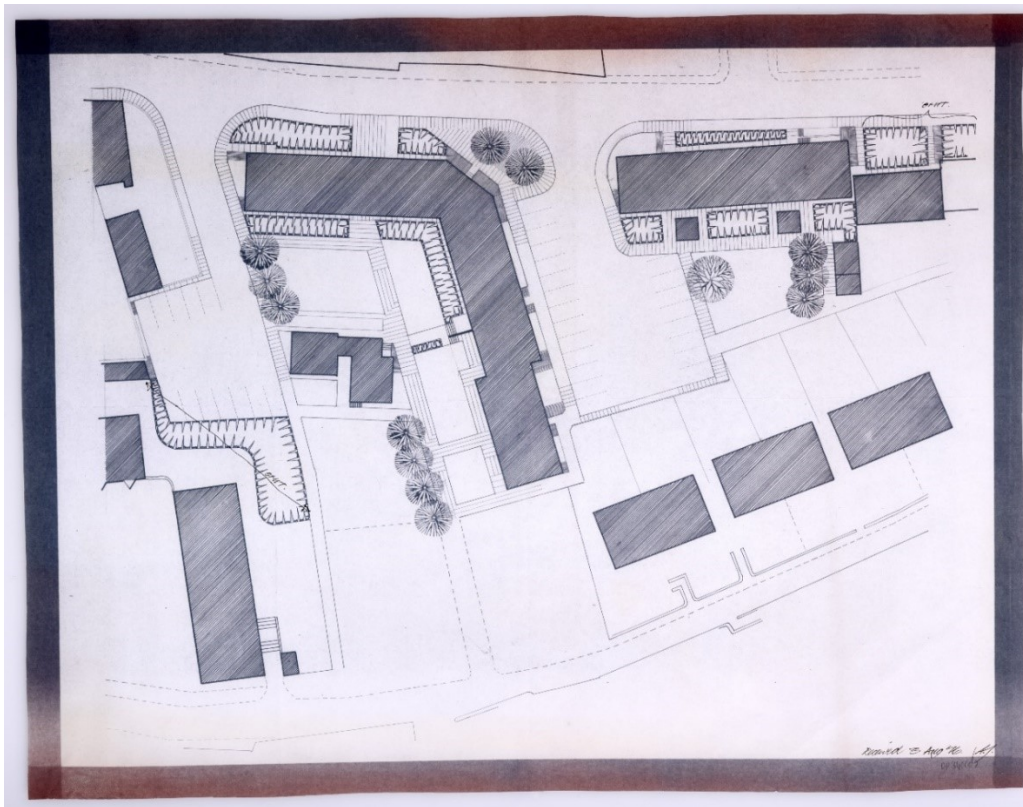


Figure 5.37. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2 Landscaping Plan for part of the development, 3rd of August 1976, designed prior to the addition of the large block on the empty plot to the bottom of the image.



Figure 5.38. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2 Layout Map showing the final position of the 8 blocks, with surrounding phases by Wheeler & Sproson shown in black.

Block 1

As previously mentioned, Phase 3 – Part 2 contained a set of towers, similar to the single towers seen in Phase 2 and Phase 3. This time, however, the towers were attached by a central access stairwell section, which would allow for a more effective use of space within the towers for living purposes (see Figure 5.39). According to Wheeler & Sproson, privacy was also ‘carefully considered’ for the towers, with fewer windows on the elevations facing the bulk of the ‘piazza’.⁹⁴ As with other areas of Phases 3 – Part 1 and Part 2, Wheeler & Sproson made use of dark red colouring on one of the towers to tie it to the traditions of the area (see Figure 5.40). This was then contrasted against the sharp white of the second tower. Their position at the centre of the pedestrian square was intentional, making them the sculptural focal point of the scheme. The towers were carefully placed to avoid sunlight obstruction to surrounding blocks.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

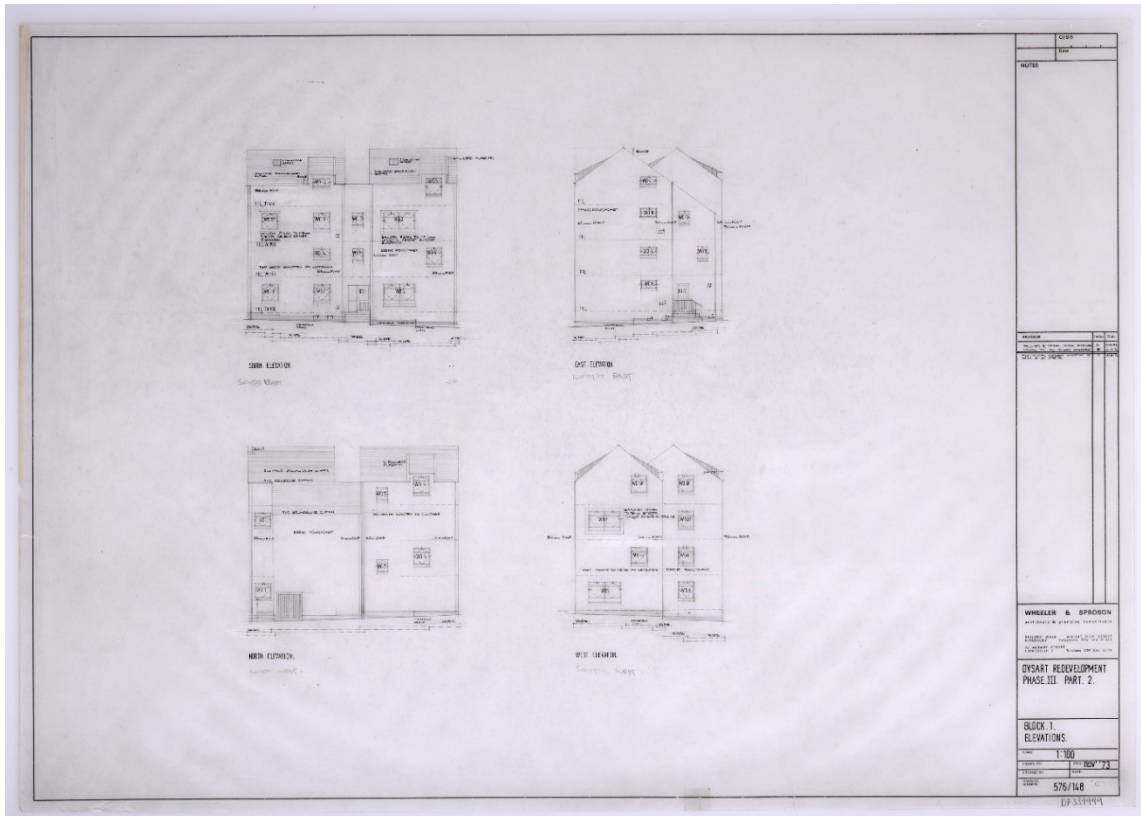


Figure 5.39. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, Block 1 Elevations, November 1973.



Figure 5.40. Dysart Phase 3- Part 2, Block 1 taken circa 1976.

Block 2

Little archival material is available on Block 2, but began to appear on Site Layout drawings from early in the design process, such as the 14th of August 1967 Layout Scheme for the remainder of the Dysart Redevelopment Project, as seen in Figure 5.36 above. However, Figure 5.40 above, shows that Block 2 was not present at the point when the remainder of the scheme was completed, as it should have been visible behind the small towers in the image. It therefore, must have been added at some time after the completion of the remainder of the phase in 1976. However, it is known that the block contains 12 flats, which were accessed from two interior access staircases. The block was also cut through the middle at ground floor level with a pend, which allowed pedestrian access through the site along the line of the original Forth Street, as discussed above (see Figure 5.41).



Figure 5.41. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, Block 2 with its red section. Block 4 is seen to the left in ochre and Block 1 to the right in white. Taken November 2020.

Blocks 3 and 4

Described as 'forming the backcloth to the environment' of the pedestrian piazza by Wheeler & Sproson, blocks 3 and 4 were a large L shaped corner tenement block that stretched along the high street and downwards towards the coast along the line of a car parking area.⁹⁶ Drawings of these blocks were first created in November 1973, such as the elevations shown in Figure 5.42. The buildings were of two and three storeys in height and contained flats. Both blocks were topped with a pantile roof and painted in a similar subtle biscuit shade to that seen across Phase 2. The westernmost block was cut through at ground floor level by a pend, which connected the footpath which ran through the square to the High Street. Access to one of the flats and a communal storage area were located within the pend. The blocks were landscaped to the front and rear with a combination of decorative cobbles, paving, grass and trees.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

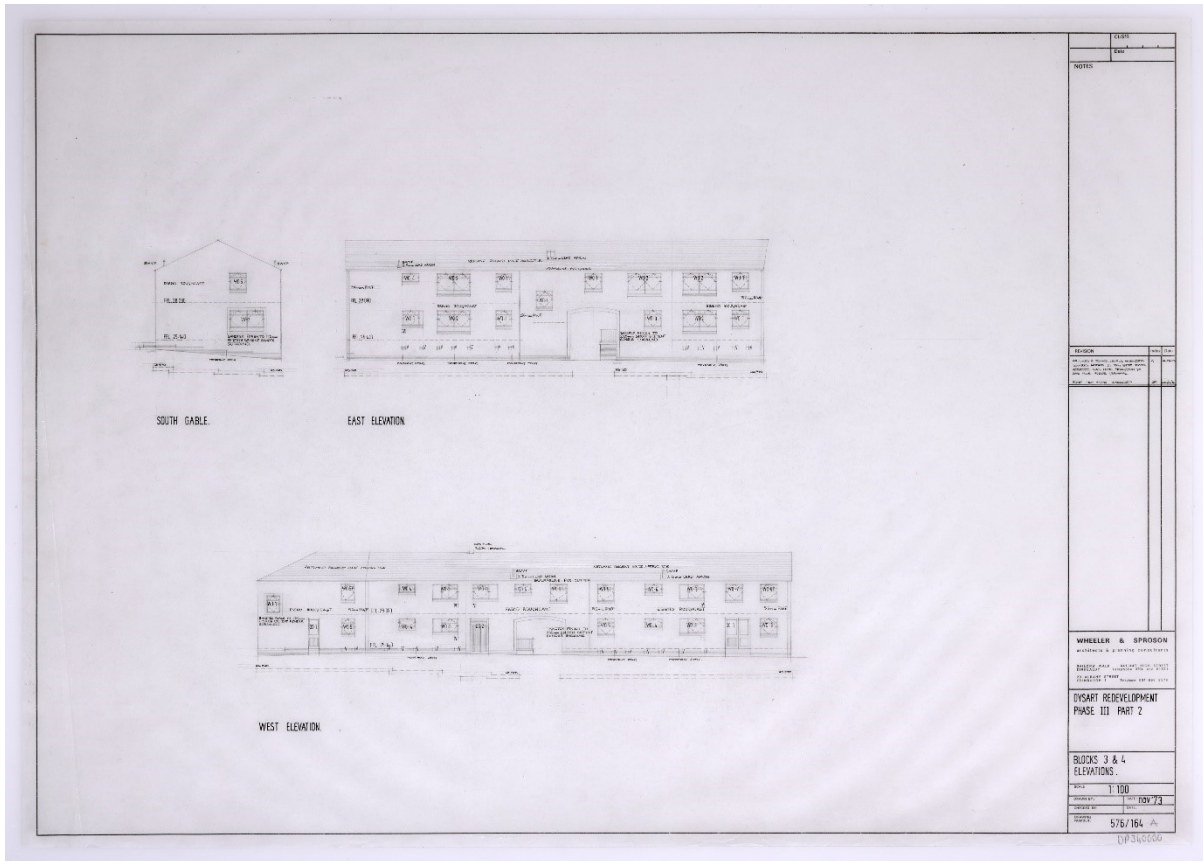


Figure 5.42. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, Blocks 3 and 4 Elevations, November 1973.

Block 5

The final tenement-style block of the scheme, Block 5 was similar in scale to Block 2. It contained 12 flats across three-storeys, accessed from two stairwells. The blocks were predominantly biscuit in colour, with two bands of deep red over the stairwell areas. Half of the block can be seen in Figure 5.43. A narrow stretch of grass was used as a buffer between the flats and the pavement, while the rear of the flats benefited from a shared garden area with three separate storage and laundry buildings.



Figure 5.43. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, Block 5, with Blocks 6, 7 and 8 further along the street taken October 2016.

Phase 3 – Part 2 - Blocks 6, 7 and 8

Lastly, Phase 3 – Part 2 also contained the only terraced housing in the entire Dysart Redevelopment Project (see Figure 5.44). The two-storey terrace was split across three connected blocks and contained 7 homes. The terrace was originally designed to be similar in shape to the terraces housing in Burntisland at the West Leven Street area and the unknown site on Somerville Street.⁹⁷ However, they were eventually organised in a stepped terrace with one block of two houses places up to the street edge, the next asymmetrical block of three homes is stepped several meters back, while the last two home block is stepped back yet again. As with the front gardens, the outdoor areas at the back of the blocks become increasingly large in area. The blocks were painted in the characteristic biscuit colour but also contained a selection of windows picked out with deep red surrounds. The first and last blocks also notably contain slate elements on their first floors above their entrance doors. Though this is combined

⁹⁷ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Phase 3 – Part 2 Layout Plan,' (14 August 1967), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

with the typical pantiles seen in all pitched roofs in the Dysart Redevelopment Project, the use of slate here indicates that this phase is moving away from the vernacular heart of the settlement and towards the 19th century expansion areas.

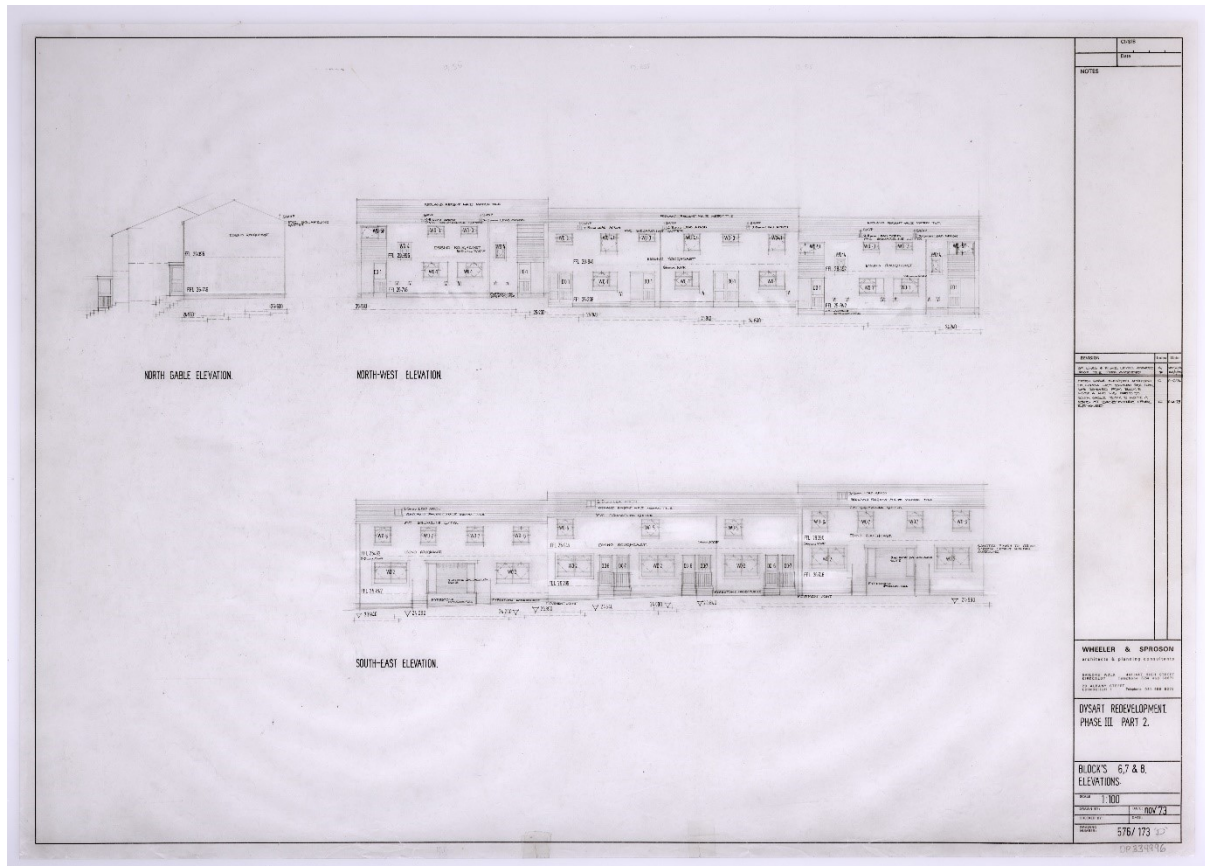


Figure 5.44. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, ‘Block’s 6, 7 & 8 Elevations’, November 1973.

5.8. Job 688 - Phase 3 – Part 2 – Block 10

The final newly built phase of the Dysart Redevelopment Project was Block 10, a continuation of Phase 3 – Part 2. It is not known why this block was completed as a separate contract, but it is likely to have been designed and constructed between 1976 and 1977. As can be seen in the 1967 ‘Layout Plan’ for the development above in Figure, the site was originally intended for a cluster of three towers, similar in appearance to those seen elsewhere in the development. These were described as ‘a terminal feature [...] in the form of a three-storey flatted cluster

block with panoramic views over the Forth estuary.’⁹⁸ Unfortunately no plans exist of this ‘cluster’, however it is likely that they would have been very close in nature to those constructed by Wheeler & Sproson at their 1964-1977 Langlee Development (discussed in Chapter 7), which would have been near completion by this point.

Instead, a three storey ‘T’ shaped block was designed which stepped down the hillside and provided unobstructed views across the Forth (see Figure 5.45). The block was topped with a steep pantiled roof, with the unusual addition of a slate roofed and walled dormer window directly on top of the pantiles (see Figure 5.46). Although no information survives to explain why this change was made, it is possible that the ‘T’ shaped block was quicker and cheaper to build than its counterparts and was potentially hastened through construction due to the change in local authority area management which had occurred the year before.

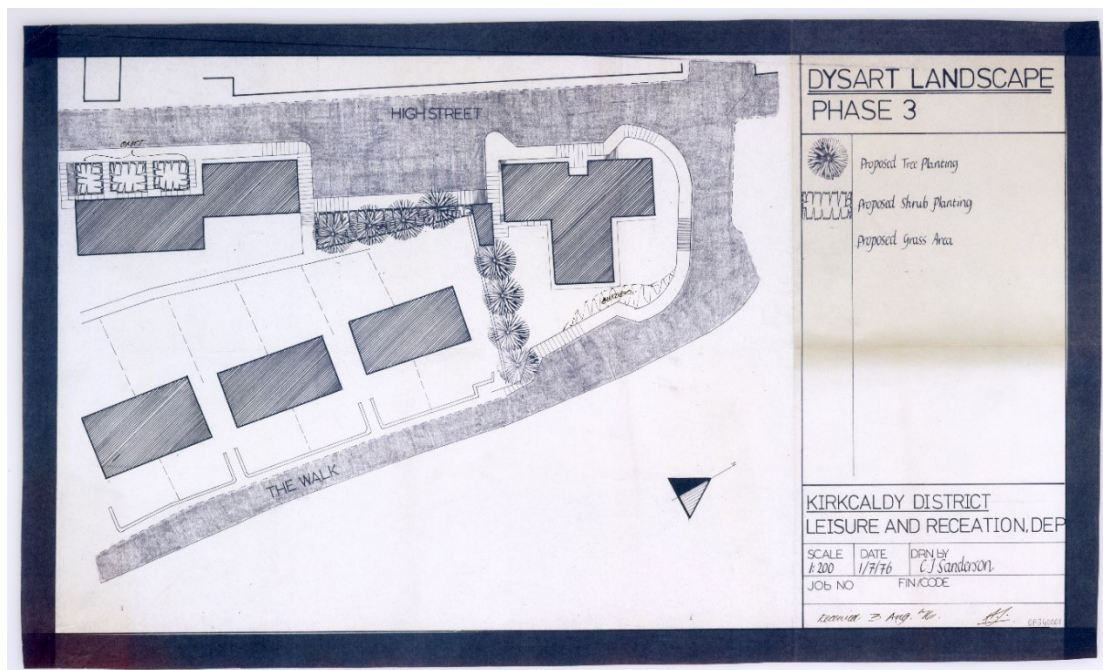


Figure 5.45. ‘Dysart Landscape Phase 3’ showing the ‘T’ shaped Phase 3 – Part 2 – Block 10. 1st of July 1976.

⁹⁸ ‘Kirkcaldy District Council -Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3, Part 2.’



Figure 5.46. Dysart Phase 3 – Part 2, Block 10 taken November 2020.

5.9. Restoration and Reconstruction Projects

Several restoration and reconstruction projects were completed as individual housing jobs by Wheeler & Sproson across the central area of Dysart. These were mostly done for the local Council, but the restoration work done at ‘The Anchorage’ contributed to the broader Pan Ha’ restoration scheme conducted by the National Trust for Scotland. Both ‘The Towers’ and ‘The Anchorage’ would go on to each gain both Saltire Society and a Civic Trust Awards commendations in 1972.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

Job 205- Restoration of the Towers

Dating from 1589, 'The Towers' is an L-planned tower house situated on East Quality Street in Dysart, adjacent to Phase 2.¹⁰⁰ In a 1961 letter to the Department of Health for Scotland, Anthony Wheeler described 'The Towers' as 'in very good condition and well maintained.'¹⁰¹ Wheeler appreciated the 'high architectural quality' of the building, noting the tower section as a 'predominant feature' (see Figure 5.47).¹⁰² As one of the building with the local council were keen to demolish, Wheeler & Sproson had to fight for 'The Towers' to be retained as part of the overall scheme for the area.¹⁰³ When the *Architectural Review* briefly discussed the development in 1965, they termed Wheeler & Sproson's work on the building as 'urban renewal in the true sense', acknowledging that the retention of the building was only achieved after a 'stiff tussle with the local council.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart 43-47 East Quality Street, The Towers with Forecourt Wall (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB36434>).

¹⁰¹ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage",' pp. 3-48.

¹⁰⁴ 'Stop Press: SOS,' *The Architectural Review*, vol. 137, no. 816 (1965), pp. 169-170.



Figure 5.47. 'The Towers' in Dysart taken prior to restoration, circa 1962.

Drawings from November 1963 show Wheeler & Sproson's plans for reorganising the interior of 'The Towers' into three flats (see Figure 5.48). They fit a one bed flat on the ground floor, and two bed flats on the 1st and 2nd floors. A studio was also placed into the top of the tower, though it is unclear which flat this is connected to. The exterior was also carefully restored, with fresh white harl added and window margins re-painted (see Figure 5.49). Wheeler also retained the 'adequate forecourt' to the front and surrounded the property with paving, flower beds and retaining walls, providing 'different textures' to the area.¹⁰⁵ The block was also attached to Area 1 of the Phase 2 scheme by a wooden clad 'bridging' section. This section contained a single flat which abutted the exterior wall of 'The Towers' without actually

¹⁰⁵ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

connecting through to the historic building. This linking section helped to tie the restoration to the broader scheme, whilst retaining pedestrian access along the existing perimeter street pattern.¹⁰⁶ The restoration was completed by 1965.¹⁰⁷

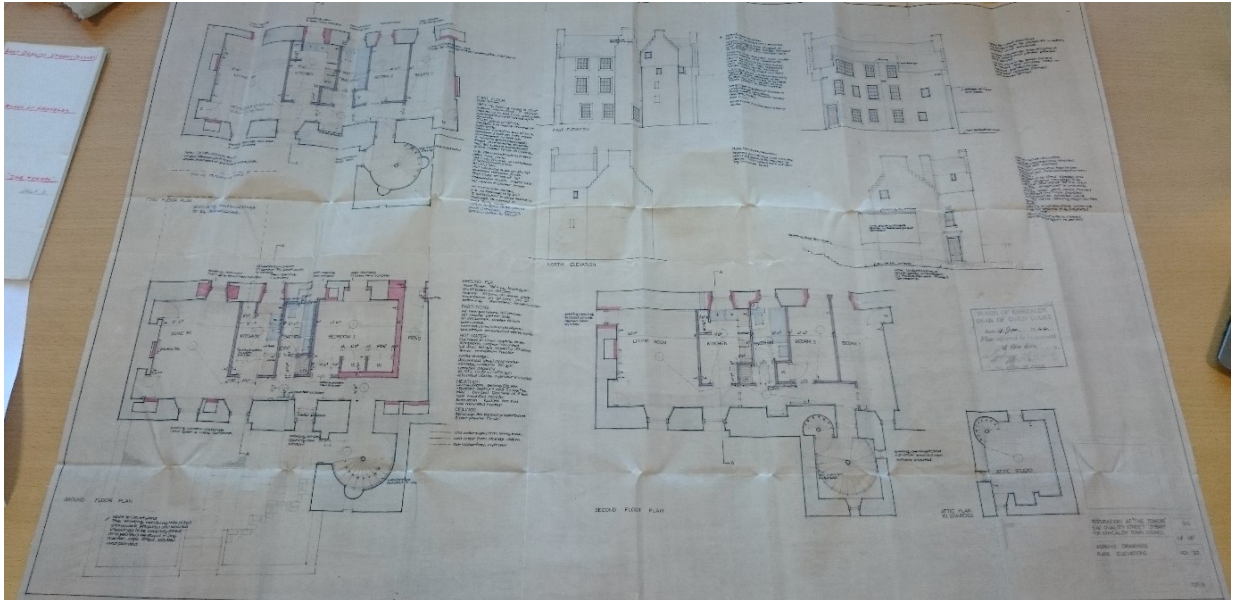


Figure 5.48. 'Working Drawings Plans Elevations' for 'The Towers', November 1963. Alterations to the original structure shown in red.



Figure 5.49. 'The Towers', Dysart post completion, with the bridging section from Phase 2, Block 1 shown to the left. Taken circa 1965.

¹⁰⁶ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage",' pp. 3-48.

¹⁰⁷ *Historic Environment Scotland*, Dysart 43-47 East Quality Street, The Towers with Forecourt Wall.

Job 342 - Restoration of 'The Anchorage'

According to a date inscribed on one of its window pediments, 'The Anchorage' dates from around 1582.¹⁰⁸ Wheeler & Sproson took on the restoration of the building in 1967 for the National Trust for Scotland's Little Houses Improvement Scheme.¹⁰⁹ The practice was able to fit two modern flats into the property, with a three-bed maisonette with a large storage area on the ground and 1st floor, and a one bed flat on the 2nd floor. Wheeler & Sproson did as little as possible to the building to retain its original character. Drawings show how the chimney was demolished, likely due to the structural damage seen in Figure 5.50 and rebuilt to centre on the ridge of the roof.¹¹⁰ 'The Anchorage' was then finished in a coat of white harl and new slates, as was done at 'The Towers' (see Figure 5.51).

¹⁰⁸ *Historic Environment Scotland*, General view of The Anchorage, The Shore, Dysart, from S. (<https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1590005>).

¹⁰⁹ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, pp. 105-108.

¹¹⁰ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Job 342 Drawing Plans' (15 November 1964), *Historic Environment Scotland*.



Figure 5.50. The Anchorage prior to restoration, taken in October 1964.



Figure 5.51. The Anchorage post restoration work, circa 1967. Block A of Phase 1 can be seen behind.

Job 514 - Restoration of 43-67 High Street

Situated in a prominent location at the heart of Dysart and facing across the High Street to the late 16th Century Tolbooth, 43-67 High Street was a collection of four adjoined historic properties.¹¹¹ A photographic survey of the site was done by the Scottish National Buildings Record and the Ministry of Work across October and November 1964.¹¹² The photographs show the properties in a poor state of repair, with some buildings with either smashed or missing windows and pantiles (see Figure 5.52). Due to their poor condition, Wheeler & Sproson decided that restoration would not be possible, and that reconstruction would offer the best opportunity to 'retain' the buildings. Figure 5.53 shows the four buildings being rebuilt from brick and timber; a method used in all newly constructed buildings in the development. The buildings were replaced as closely as possible to the originals in terms of general form and height, with characteristic features such as crowsteps, dual tone colouring and the projecting ground floor room on 43 High Street retained.¹¹³ Additional fenestration was added to some of the High Street facades, particularly of the white and green building at 2 Cross Street. This was done as to allow for increased living spaced within the building, without which effective conversion into housing may not have been feasible.

¹¹¹ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage",' pp. 3-48.

¹¹² *Historic Environment Scotland, Dysart, 45 High Street* (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/92358/dysart-45-high-street>).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*



Figure 5.52. 43-67 High Street prior to reconstruction by Wheeler & Sproson, taken 1964.



Figure 5.53. 43-67 High Street, Dysart during construction, showing the brick and timber structure employed, circa 1971.

Although the upper floors were intended for houses, as with the rest of the Dysart Redevelopment Project, 43-67 High Street stands out as the only development to contain shop units. As early as 1961, Wheeler spoke of the site in a letter to The Department of Health for Scotland which was primarily about Phase 2. In the letter, he explained that he had 'prepared a test plan' that showed the potential for shops at 'the town hall square'.¹¹⁴ He hoped that the Department for Health would approve 'the corner of High Street and Cross Street' for retail.¹¹⁵ This request was successful, as by 1972, Wheeler & Sproson had agreed with the Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy to create 11 homes, 2 shops and a library on the site.¹¹⁶ The development was named the 'Dysart Community Centre' and was completed by 1977, winning the Kirkcaldy Civic Society Amenity Award of that year (see Figure 5.54).¹¹⁷ The buildings were finished in bright pinks, yellows and greens, as seen in Figure 5.55.

¹¹⁴ 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Minute of Agreement between The Royal Burgh of Kirkcaldy [...] on the one part and Wheeler & Sproson, Chartered Architects [...] on the other' (14 January 1972), *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹¹⁷ *Kirkcaldy Civic Society*, Plaques 1977 to 1988 (<http://www.kirkcaldycivicsociety.org.uk/Index.asp?MainID=26725>).



Figure 5.54. 46-67 High Street, Dysart after reconstruction, circa 1975.



Figure 5.55. Image of 43-67 High Street (Job 514) post-completion, showing the bright use of colour adopted by Wheeler & Sproson for the reconstructed buildings.

Job 673 - Redevelopment of Property at 69-71 High Street

Wheeler & Sproson continued their work on the historic High Street buildings by continuing next door to 69 to 71 High Street. Unlike 43-67, the work on 69-71 was a restoration job, retaining most of the original structures.¹¹⁸ Prior to their restoration, the buildings were in a dilapidated state, with severe damage to windows, doors, and roofing. As can be seen in Figure 5.56 the roof of the central building had been lost. Plans of the building housed at the Fife Archives show the plans for the replacement roof for this building.¹¹⁹ The two larger buildings received reasonably straight forward conversions, with existing openings changed from doors to windows (see Figure 5.57). The smallest building, however, was a cause for debate within the practice, with several plans proposed to connect the development. 'Scheme C' can be seen in the July 1974 'Plans and Street Elevations' (see Figure 5.58), which show a proposal to connect the development to 43-67 High Street through the construction of a four-bay tenement. Instead, a replica tenement and a wooden clad connecting section was used, similar to the one linking 'The Towers' with Phase 2. This was likely used to allow for pedestrian access to the rear of the building, and to contribute to the network of paths the practices contributed across the settlement.

¹¹⁸ 'Phase 3 – Part 2 Layout Plan' (14 August 1967).

¹¹⁹ 'Proposed Remedial Work to Housing Block in High Street Dysart' (6 April 1974), *Fife Archives*.



Figure 5.56. 69-71 High Street, Dysart prior to restoration, circa 1973.



Figure 5.57. 69-71 High Street, Dysart post restoration, taken circa 1975.



Figure 5.58. ‘Scheme C Plans & Street Elevations’ for 61-71 High Street, showing an alternative proposal for the left-most block, July 1974.

A final extension of the row of buildings was proposed in January 1975, as seen in Figure 5.59 the ‘Elevation & Site Location Plan’ shows an expansion of the site beyond the ochre block to number 77 through the development of an L-shaped block. The block would be similar in structure and material to Phase 3 – part 1 – Block 4, also providing a sheltered public courtyard. Unfortunately, this extension was never completed. As with the final proposed schemes at Dysart, it is likely that this extension of the development fell victim to the changing local authority structures of 1975, with the reorganisation of governance of the time prevented it from being completed.

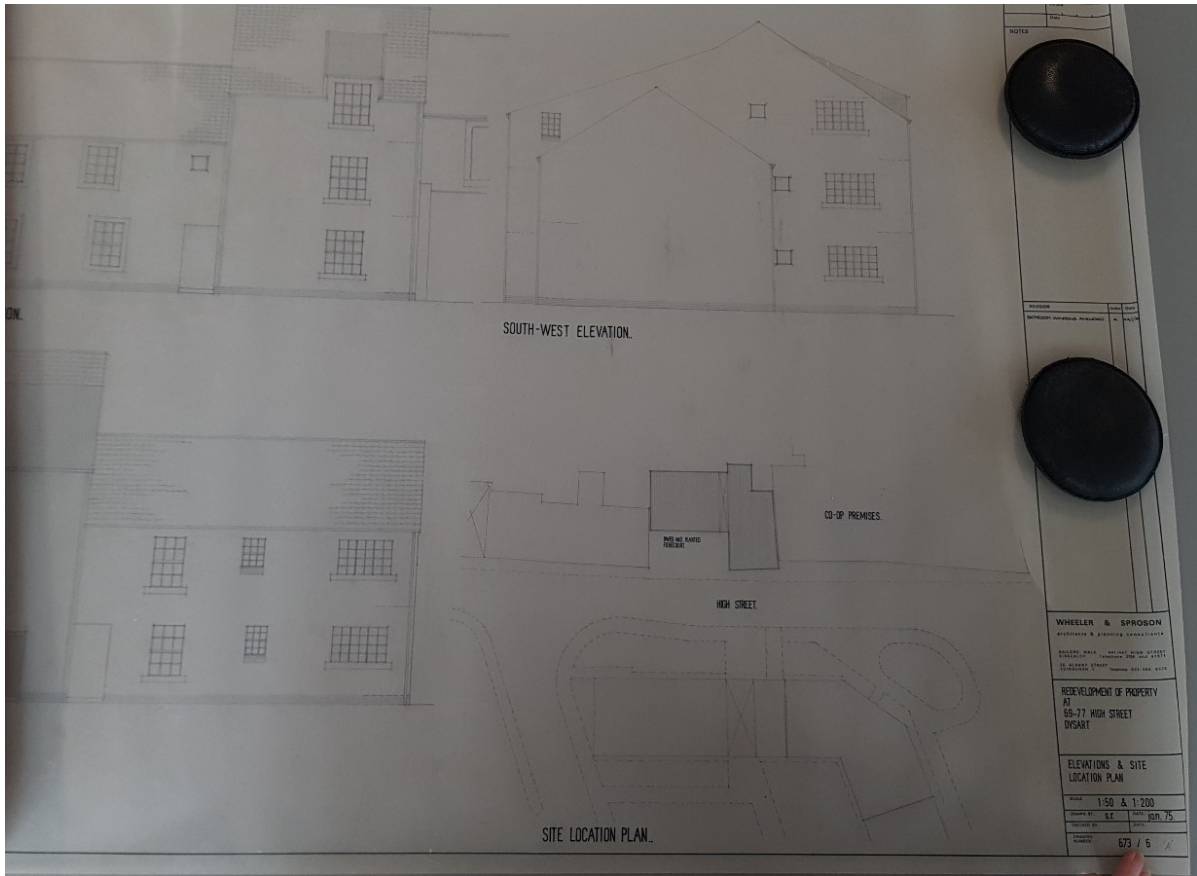


Figure 5.59. ‘Elevations & Site Plan’ for the never-completed continuation of 69-71 High Street, up to number 77. January 1975.

5.10. Conclusion

Unlike the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, which was developed over the course of 16 smaller schemes, the way Wheeler & Sproson were able to tackle Dysart is easier to envisage. Overall, the development was completed in 4 broad phases, plus a collection of four restoration and reconstruction projects. Each Phase of the development is unique in character, with the dramatic coastal blocks of Phase 1, the intricately dispersed Phase 2, the romantic Phase 3 – Part 1, and the tenemental Phase 3 – Part 2.

Whilst Dysart was largely completed in consecutive phases, Burntisland was unusual in the complex layering of its phases, taking place often at the same time as one another, and regularly with the next phases of development already in mind. This was in part down to the developments being completed in two very different local authorities. Burntisland was a relatively small Council with limited space available for further redevelopment and had the capacity to take an interest in preservation and the aesthetics of the sites. By comparison, Kirkcaldy was a much larger Council who were taking on an enormous range of building work across large areas, with Dysart just a small portion of the overall expansion of the town. As a result, their priorities centred more on housing numbers than how the sites looked.

Regardless of this, it is clear that Wheeler & Sproson adopted a general method for approaching the settlement which is carried throughout both Burntisland and Dysart redevelopment projects. Throughout the developments, Wheeler & Sproson limited the materials used to mainly stone, harl, pantiles, slate, concrete and glass. Although the forms of the various stages of the developments vary from deck access blocks to terraced houses and from towers to slab blocks; there was a consistent height of between two and five storeys and the scale of the blocks generally reflected that of the surrounding historic buildings. For example, parts of Phase 2 in Dysart were designed to mimic the tower house nature of their 16th century neighbours. Likewise, in the eastern part of Somerville Street in Burntisland four storey slab blocks were used to mirror the scale of the 19th century tenement rows nearby. There is also an overarching landscaping design visible across the developments, with more intimate areas such as squares and shared gardens benefiting from a softer approach of grass, bushes and trees, while the busier routes and more public areas were given a 'harder' treatment of

paving slabs and cobbles. This approach became a trademark of Wheeler & Sproson's approach to historic burgh redevelopment and can be seen in several of his later projects.

Despite their similarities, however, there are some distinct differences between the two developments. Although Burntisland contained more individual jobs, the scale of Dysart's phases eclipsed those of Burntisland in physical plot size, number of individual buildings and house numbers. The determination of the local councillors in Dysart to demolish much of the central area also meant that Wheeler & Sproson had much larger plots to work with, whilst Burntisland was approached in a more piecemeal manner. This larger scale approach to development also gave Wheeler & Sproson greater opportunity to factor in sight lines to historic buildings through the careful placement of blocks in the larger sites.

The approaches Wheeler & Sproson took when designing Burntisland and Dysart will be further explored in Section 3. Chapter 6 will examine how the practice went about developing their distinctive approach at Burntisland and Dysart in more detail by relating it to the work of those who came before them. This will be done by examining how Wheeler & Sproson contributed to the urban environment, positioned materials and colours, and used form at Burntisland and Dysart. Chapter 7 will then explore the broader work of the practice, relate it to that of their contemporaries, and examine their successes within the architectural awards of the period.

SECTION 3: WHEELER & SPROSON'S PLACE IN SCOTTISH ARCHITECTURE

Chapter 6: 'Small Scale and Monumental' – Wheeler & Sproson's Design of Burntisland and Dysart.

6.1. Introduction

Described by *Scottish Field* in 1967 as a 'zestful' and 'flamboyant' character, Anthony Wheeler's 'vitality and hint of the unconventional' were telling clues that his approach to historic burgh redevelopment was unlike that of many of his contemporaries.¹ The creative handling of a range of forms, materials, colours allowed the practice to produce a varied and interesting environment. In both Burntisland and Dysart, Wheeler & Sproson were fortunate to have the opportunity to be experimental with their work. In the 1950s, it was common for local authorities to propose housing development sites without a planning brief prepared.² In this system, councillors' views were key when it came to getting schemes approved.³ However, Wheeler spoke of councillors having little 'real vision' of what the developments should look like.⁴ Instead of this making the designing of schemes a simpler task, Wheeler & Sproson struggled with councillors who were uninterested in the architectural aspects of their proposals. With mounting council house waiting lists in both local authority areas, instead of

¹ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

² Ibid.

³ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 111.

⁴ Ibid.

being focused on design, their interests laid primarily on achieving the proposed number of dwellings.⁵

As discussed in Chapter 5, this imbalance in the priorities of the councillors led to Wheeler suffering from ‘many sleepless nights’ finding ways to convince them that their proposals for the developments would allow them to reach the housing numbers within the projected budget.⁶ The practice ‘had to try and explain to them, that here was something they’d never dreamed they could have.’⁷ To do this, they went to great lengths to convince the councillors in Burntisland and Dysart that they would be given something ‘unique and new’.⁸ The practice regularly scheduled meetings to explain how the plans would benefit the areas whilst still achieving the councillors’ housing goals.⁹ Visual aids, such as the models of Burntisland and Dysart shown in Chapters 4 and 5, were also used by the practice to communicate their ideas to the councillors.

Wheeler & Sproson’s vision sought to balance old and new, allowing their developments to simultaneously assimilate and stand out. Their proposals were visibly steeped in the forms and materials of the towns they were based in, as well as that of the surrounding Fife region. Features such as pantiled roofs, clipped gables and chamfered corners were prominent across

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

the two redevelopment projects. The integration of restoration and reconstruction work also provided the developments with a strong connection within the historic environment.

Important as Fife was, the practice drew inspiration from a wide range of sources when creating their distinct style. When interviewed, Wheeler cited inspirations ranging from the 13th century San Gimignano in Italy, through to 20th century continental Modernism. He believed that revivalism was 'phony', and as a result, utilised a blend of building types, materials and styles in his developments.¹⁰ Whilst the restoration and reproduction work completed by the practice was a significant element in the overall plan, Wheeler was very clear that he wanted his new work to be visibly modern in nature.¹¹ When asked where his commitment to the Modern Movement originated, he cited his travels around the United Kingdom, Europe and Israel, where work by architects such as Alvar Aalto and Denys Lasdun became inspirations.¹²

Wheeler & Sproson's approach, for the most part, aligned with the broader 'Modern-Vernacular' figures such as Robert Hurd and George Scott-Moncrieff (convener of the Saltire Housing Award). Their methods of integrating modern and vernacular themes and principles, were similar to those seen in the approaches recommended in *Building Scotland*.¹³ In particular, Wheeler & Sproson's ideals mirrored most closely those of Robert Matthew, who Wheeler followed as Saltire Society Awards Chairman. Like Wheeler, Matthew believed that

¹⁰ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹¹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 112.

¹² 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

¹³ Hurd and Reiach, *Building Scotland*.

whilst new Scottish architecture should be inspired by its traditional surroundings, post-war era buildings should clearly identify and be perceived as modern.¹⁴ In his 1995 interview, Wheeler explained how he had spent a great deal of time driving around Scottish historic towns and villages with Matthew, studying and discussing their admiration for the traditional domestic architecture they observed.¹⁵

Like his colleagues within the Saltire Society, Wheeler did not understand his work in terms of modernity versus tradition, but rather as complete projects that respected the significance of age within the historic settlements, whilst also acknowledging more recent trends.¹⁶ Wheeler & Sproson combined traditional and modern materials, colours and forms to create something new and unique. The modern elements marked the development within its own era, whilst the use of vernacular features demonstrated respect for the surrounding historic environment. Wheeler & Sproson's aim was to create developments that avoided the replication of existing architecture, but in a way that was not out of place within the historic setting.

Somerville Street in Burntisland was the practice's first attempt at redeveloping a central historic area, combining old and new into one complete scheme and demonstrates one of Wheeler & Sproson's earliest efforts to find equilibrium between the existing historic properties and their modern replacement housing (see Figure 6.1).¹⁷ To achieve this, the practice observed the features of the adjacent 16th and 17th century properties and applied

¹⁴ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, p. 158.

¹⁵ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹⁶ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

¹⁷ Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage"', p.41.

these to their modern blocks. Elements such as scale, use of materials (including harling and pantiles), and elements (for example external stair access) were used in a contemporary manner in the new buildings. To root these blocks firmly within the Modern Movement, materials like concrete were used in significant areas, such as stairwells. Modern forms, including decking and a bridge were also integrated into the design. What resulted was described at the time as ‘some of the best urban renewal in the country.’¹⁸ By assessing the significant elements of Wheeler & Sproson’s designs thematically, this chapter will explore how the practice adapted the lessons to the past to develop their own approaches to the use of form, materials, colours, layout and landscaping within their Burntisland and Dysart developments.

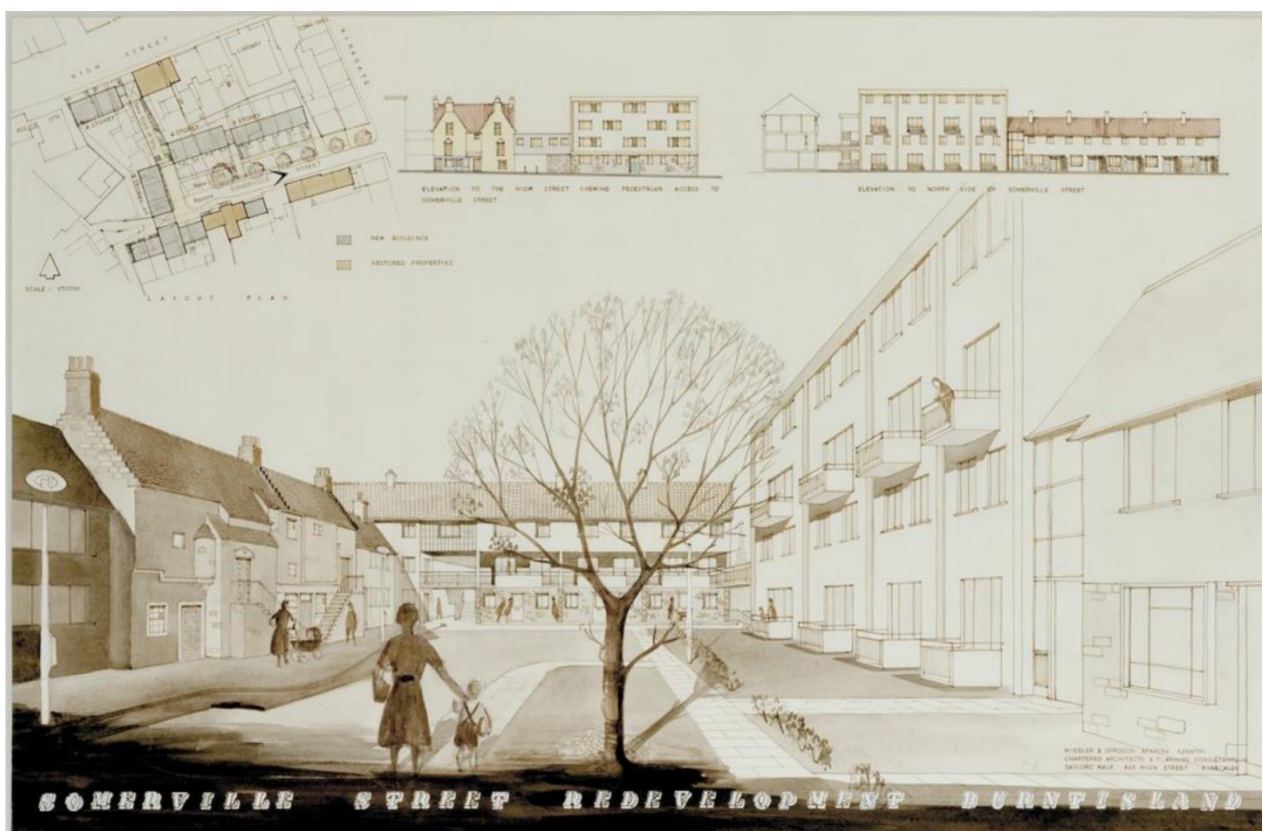


Figure 6.1. ‘Somerville Street Redevelopment Burntisland’ (Job 51), showing a blend of modern and vernacular forms and materials across the development.

¹⁸ I. Nairn, ‘Over the Bridge to the Burghs,’ *The Observer* (13 September 1964), p. 24.

6.2. Wheeler & Sproson's Contribution to the Urban Environment

As experienced town planners, Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson's work in Burntisland and Dysart allowed them to experiment with the use of layout and the creation of public spaces. They rejected both extreme high and low-density urban environments popular at the time, in favour of medium-density areas of three to five storey housing. It was in difficult sites such as Burntisland and Dysart that Wheeler & Sproson were able to put these beliefs into practice. They aimed to strike a balance between quality and economy in their housing by creating a feeling of surprise and intrigue without harming the existing environment. They did this by using pends, alleyways and most notably, squares. It was through these squares that they aimed to bring about a sense of monumentality whilst maintaining the small-scale character of the historic burghs. The approach that Wheeler & Sproson took to the urban environment of Burntisland and Dysart can be related to several of the prominent town planners and architects which Wheeler referred to as inspirations throughout his interviews. Most notably, the work of Thomas Sharp, Frederick Gibberd and Camilo Sitte are reflected in many aspects of Wheeler & Sproson's own work. To understand how these influences helped to shape their designs, it is necessary to take a closer look at Wheeler & Sproson's approach to town planning at Burntisland and Dysart.

Density of Layout

Prior to the Second World War, one of the primary forms of housing being built in Scotland was the privately developed bungalow.¹⁹ Estates of these bungalows were generally built in the suburbs and were often spread out over extensive areas due to their large gardens, a sharp contrast to the dense tenements seen in Scotland's towns and cities. As we saw in Chapter 2, many architects of Wheeler's generation were critical of this form of development. Wheeler opposed their 'meaningless, fussy details' and low-density dispersal, and arguing that they failed to create a successful unified environment.²⁰ Similarly, Wheeler criticised the Garden Cities and Addison Act cottage housing (as explored in Chapter 1) for their low densities of 30 to 40 people per acre. He considered their layout to be a wasteful use of large sites and organised in 'dreary geometric patterns' which could only be seen from the air.²¹

Equally, Wheeler disapproved of the alternative Modernist approach of dispersed tower blocks within large areas of green space, which was becoming prevalent at the time.²² Whilst many planners and architects in the 1950s promoted the dominant paradigms of Corbusian Modernism or the Garden City, Wheeler suggested instead that 60 to 80 people per acre in mixed-type developments was a more efficient and interesting use of space.²³ Designing such a scheme would involve the use of three-dimensional compositions, with every aspect, including landscaping, planned by one team.²⁴

¹⁹ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 211.

²⁰ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

²² Nairn, 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs,' p. 24.

²³ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 31.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

When explaining his views in an interview with *Scottish Field* in 1967, Wheeler picked up a pencil and sketched out alternatives to the bungaloid style of development.²⁵ What he drew were variations on the classic terrace form, with one example making use of ‘introverted’ houses built around courtyards to create a uniform yet creative environment. In the interview Wheeler commented on the magnificence of Glasgow’s Victorian terraces as an example of this, and argued that this form of high-density, uniform housing should be considered as equally prestigious as individual houses.²⁶

This method can most closely be related to the ‘modern urbanist’ approach of Thomas Sharp. Sharp’s 1946 book *The Anatomy of the Village* criticises extensive bungaloid growth and recommends instead similar high-density terraces to those used by Wheeler & Sproson.²⁷ In the book, Sharp suggests the use of fully joined terraces for a number of reasons, including their economy, heat retention, creation of community and architectural unity.²⁸ Sharp observed that detached and semi-detached housing had a ‘scrappy and restless architectural effect’, and due to their large gardens and increased cost of services ‘the greater their private advantage, the greater the public disadvantage.’²⁹

²⁵ Ibid, p .30.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, pp. 57-78.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 54-55.

Sharp followed a similar concept when working in an urban environment. Written at the time when Wheeler was working as Assistant City Architect in Oxford, Sharp's 1948 plan for the city proposed the retention of the population within the centre, instead of banishing people to the suburbs as seen in other places at the time.³⁰ Once public and university needs were met, housing was to be created in the city in three and four storey urban blocks.³¹ Sharp's influence on Wheeler can be clearly seen in both Burntisland and Dysart, where a high-density, urban scale was central to their design.³² His solution for their redevelopment was 'compactly planned to create a truly urban, not suburban, core' of mainly three and four storey flats, just as Sharp had done in Oxford.³³

The higher-density form of development which Wheeler favoured, was particularly justified in Burntisland and Dysart due to the difficult nature of the sites. The constraints imposed by varied topography, presence of significant historic properties, mine underworking and prior industrial usage in the towns allowed Wheeler & Sproson to create something 'original and exciting' in the limited space available for development.³⁴ While these problems increased the cost of construction in these areas, by designing higher density housing, Wheeler was able to balance quality and economy. In the 1967 *Scottish Field* article, the author commented that by selecting Wheeler & Sproson, local authorities ensured that they had a practice that could 'master the problems' and 'raise standards' in the towns.³⁵

³⁰ Sharp, *Oxford Replanned*, p. 155.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Watters, 'Limits of "Heritage".'

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 31.

³⁵ Ibid.

Awareness of Existing Landscapes

Approaching difficult sites such as these required extensive survey of the land prior to design so that the location of mine shafts, contaminated land and historic properties could be determined. This is an approach which was also adopted by Frederick Gibberd in his work on Harlow New Town in 1946. The first thing that Gibberd did on site was surveying and sketching the area to help him understand the natural features and topography.³⁶ He then used this information to form the basis of the development, using the landscape to help divide the area up into zones, with natural valleys forming boundaries.³⁷

There are several indications that Wheeler & Sproson made use of the topography and disruptive features in Burntisland and Dysart. In Dysart, Phase 1 - Block D is clearly positioned in a prominent location along the cliff edge, incorporating the existing stone retaining wall into the design (Figure 6.2). Adjacent to this, Phase 1 - Blocks B and C were also positioned with the prior landscape in mind, with the blocks straddling the site where a gas tower had once stood. Also in Dysart, the impact of mining in the area led to spaces such as Fitzroy Square, which made use of larger blocks around the perimeter and small towers carefully placed to avoid areas where there were known mine shafts close to the surface. In Burntisland, Wheeler & Sproson's 1969 Survey of the High Street (discussed in Chapter 4) demonstrates the clear interest and expertise the practice had in surveying the location, including the quality of historic buildings, as seen in Figure 6.3.

³⁶ Manley, *Frederick Gibberd*, p. 48.

³⁷ Powers, *Modern*, p. 116.



Figure 6.2. The existing stone retaining wall was incorporated into Dysart Phase 1, Block D and used as a drying green.



Figure 6.3. Wheeler & Sproson's Policy Map of Burntisland, indicating features such as areas for future housing, buildings to be retained and industrial development areas.

The difficult nature of the sites proved to be beneficial in helping Wheeler & Sproson create environments which were unique and interesting. In his 1997 interview with Charles McKean, Wheeler began by quoting the 16th century Venetian architect, Jacopo Sansovino, stating that, 'he once described a city as a 'place which should be built for the convenience of those who live in it, and for the great surprise of strangers.'"³⁸ Wheeler wanted his developments in Burntisland and Dysart to feel 'different' when you explored them, and for visitors to know exactly where they were by the appearance of the architecture.

This balance between convenient and surprising is a regular occurrence in Wheeler & Sproson's work. The developments were designed for convenient use by residents, with integrated laundry areas, public paths, store cupboards, and flats that were a maximum of 5 storeys for ease of access. Meanwhile, elements such as the little towers, the use of traditional materials, and vernacular features like pends added a sense of surprise and intrigue to the area. This uniqueness that Wheeler & Sproson aimed for was deemed successful in 1965 by conservation campaigner Colin McWilliam, who praised the Dysart redevelopment for its 'sympathy to the old and the sculptural interest of the new.'³⁹ Most significantly, McWilliam liked the 'immediate obvious feeling of belonging on the site' and praised the development as 'intelligible' and 'part of an idea of living a good life in Dysart today.'⁴⁰

³⁸ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 112.

³⁹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 43.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

In his interview with *Scottish Field*, Wheeler insisted that 'greater awareness of lay-out and landscaping must now follow the rising standard of house design.'⁴¹ He saw his work as contributing to an environment as a whole and 'designed places, not merely houses.'⁴² Wheeler believed that he needed to base the plan for his developments on the existing site and surroundings. To do this, he attempted to fit his designs in and around the existing environment and historic architecture, in opposition to the *tabula rasa* style approaches adopted elsewhere. An example of this is the way that the developments in both Burntisland and Dysart are planned so that pathways and rights of way were retained by integrating pends and squares into the design. This can be seen best in the Somerville Street/ High Street development in Burntisland, which benefited from a pedestrian pend through the central block, and Fitzroy Square in Dysart.⁴³ Wheeler was very conscious that layout and landscaping had to go hand in hand with housing construction. He wanted to create streets, not just isolated housing. Whilst much of the focus of the era was on enhancing housing standard, he was determined that urban environments also required improvement.

Sensitivity to the Historic Environment

Most significantly, Wheeler & Sproson were keen to take the original layout and architecture of the settlements into consideration when planning their developments. Like Thomas Sharp, who argued that village planning was 'full of subtleties concerning scale and character', Wheeler & Sproson preferred to fit their architecture in and around the existing historic

⁴¹ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

environment to celebrate this.⁴⁴ This was particularly important in Fife where, as Andor Gomme put it in the *Architectural Review*, 'old buildings have survived in greater numbers than anywhere else in the country.'⁴⁵ Appendix 3 contains survey maps conducted as part of this project which show the distribution of new buildings, reconstruction work and restoration across Wheeler & Sproson's developments at Burntisland and Dysart.

This approach was at odds with much of the thinking of the period, with many architects and planners arguing that old and new should be separated and that facsimile reconstruction should be avoided.⁴⁶ Likewise, local authorities were keen to 'wipe out' the slums through heavy use of clearances, and replace them with a completely new development.⁴⁷ As Wheeler explained in his 1995 interview, for many 'a boredom comes over and a desire to do something different.'⁴⁸ Wheeler contested this approach, instead arguing that conservation was necessary in creating a unified environment.⁴⁹

Like their colleagues in the Saltire Society, Wheeler & Sproson had a very specific idea of what period of architecture was most worthy of conservation. They had a vision of the historic burghs being symbols of 16th and 17th century development and were not particularly interested in the architecture that was built in the interim. They saw less significance in the 18th and 19th century buildings cleared to make way for their developments, usually only saving

⁴⁴ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, Prefatory Note.

⁴⁵ Gomme, 'Counter-Attack New Among the Old,' pp. 353-354.

⁴⁶ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 33-48.

⁴⁷ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ E. Peets, 'Famous Town Planners: II. Camillo Sitte,' *The Town Planning Review*, vol.12, no. 4 (1927), p. 250.

some coping stones to integrate into their modern work. However, similar to the Saltire Society's stance, Wheeler & Sproson did not agree with the preservation of buildings simply based on the period of their construction, and looked for particular features, important placement, or historical significance when deciding whether they warranted retention.⁵⁰ An example of this, is Dysart's Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 2, which despite being a 19th century building, was retained due to its cultural connections to the explorer John McDouall Stuart. Wheeler viewed himself as a conservationist, but considered it 'unhealthy to preserve old buildings, not on merit, but just for the sake of preservation.'⁵¹ As their Saltire Society colleague Robert Matthew put it, rather than creating an entirely new town, or depending only on preservation, architects should design schemes for towns that both 'faced life, and the progression of life.'⁵²

This approach was most clearly seen in Burntisland, where despite the local determination to remove much of the existing townscape, Wheeler & Sproson were successful in protecting several the town's most significant historic buildings. At Somerville Street, the original plan by the local authorities was to demolish the street completely. However, with the help of the National Trust, the Ministry of Works, the County Planning Officer, and conservation architect Iain Lindsay, they managed to convince the Town Council of the importance of the row of buildings on the southern side of the street.⁵³ Their protection was then secured through the application of a grant from the Historic Buildings Council.⁵⁴ Wheeler & Sproson saw this street

⁵⁰ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 41.

⁵¹ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' pp. 66-87.

⁵² Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, pp. 284-285.

⁵³ Gomme, 'Counter-Attack New Among the Old,' pp. 353-354; Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

as the most significant in the area, with its connection to Mary Somerville and its architecturally significant representation of 16th century local construction.

Although Wheeler remembered a 'real battle' to save these buildings, he explained that 'once the cause became established, it became easier to do so with other schemes.'⁵⁵ This can be seen most clearly at Dysart, where he was faced with an even more reluctant Council, whose primary objective was to reach their housing targets within budget.⁵⁶ Wheeler spoke of the struggles he had with the councillors of Dysart who grew up in the area and were determined to 'get on with the Brave New World' and demolish the townscape they had become sick of.⁵⁷ Although Wheeler knew that he had to take these views into account, it was here that he was particularly interested in identifying and safeguarding building of both architectural and historic interest.⁵⁸ This included significant 16th and 17th century houses such as The Towers and St David's, but also 'a house owned by the first man to walk from one end of Australia to the other.'⁵⁹

Although Wheeler & Sproson fought for the preservation of buildings that they considered most significant, there were also buildings of importance that were either too structurally damaged or difficult to convert that they wanted to integrate into the scheme but could not be retained through traditional conservation methods. It was buildings such as these that sat at the epicentre of the argument between conservationists who wanted exact replicas and

⁵⁵ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁵⁶ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 115.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 112.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 113.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

local authorities who had a set of standards for housing to be upheld.⁶⁰ Wheeler & Sproson's approach sat somewhere in the middle of this argument and although unusual for the period, tied in with that of previous architects, such as Ebenezer Macrae with his 1920s and 30s Grassmarket and Canongate work discussed in Chapter 2. This method involved constructing building as similarly as possible to the original, whilst attempting to modify them to contain the maximum number of flats within the given budget. This can be seen best at Harbour Place in Burntisland, where it was clear that the building required an additional floor in order to make it financially worthy of retention. It was also necessary for additional windows to be added to the property to allow it to function as modern housing. This facsimile approach was popular amongst key figures within the Saltire Society, such as Robert Hurd, who took the top storey off the house where Elgin lived in Culross in order to make the building more functional.⁶¹

Wheeler & Sproson paired this use of conservation and facsimile reconstruction with an interpretation of Patrick Geddes' 'Conservative Surgery' approach in both Burntisland and Dysart. As put by architect and former lecturing colleague of Wheeler, Sinclair Gauldie, the settlements showed 'deft handling of the vital dissonance of old and new upon which Patrick Geddes set such value.'⁶² Described as 'urban renewal in the true sense' by the *Architectural Review* in 1965, Wheeler & Sproson's work attempted to bring life back into the towns without erasing their existing character.⁶³ This was done in both Burntisland and Dysart by retaining the existing urban structure as much as was possible. Throughout both settlements, roads were either kept intact, truncated by new buildings, or transformed into squares in an attempt

⁶⁰ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 77.

⁶¹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁶² Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 41.

⁶³ 'Stop Press,' pp. 169-170.

at preserving the street network where possible in a way that was both practical and modern. Only one road, South Street in Dysart, was erased entirely. This narrow lane, where Phase 1 Block A was eventually situated, was removed as its location only metres from Howard Place made the construction of housing difficult to achieve without its removal (see Figures 6.4 and 6.5). By blending historic buildings and road layouts with modern architecture and standards, Wheeler & Sproson's work was successful in making the towns individual places and appreciating that they were, as Sharp put it, 'living organisms.'⁶⁴

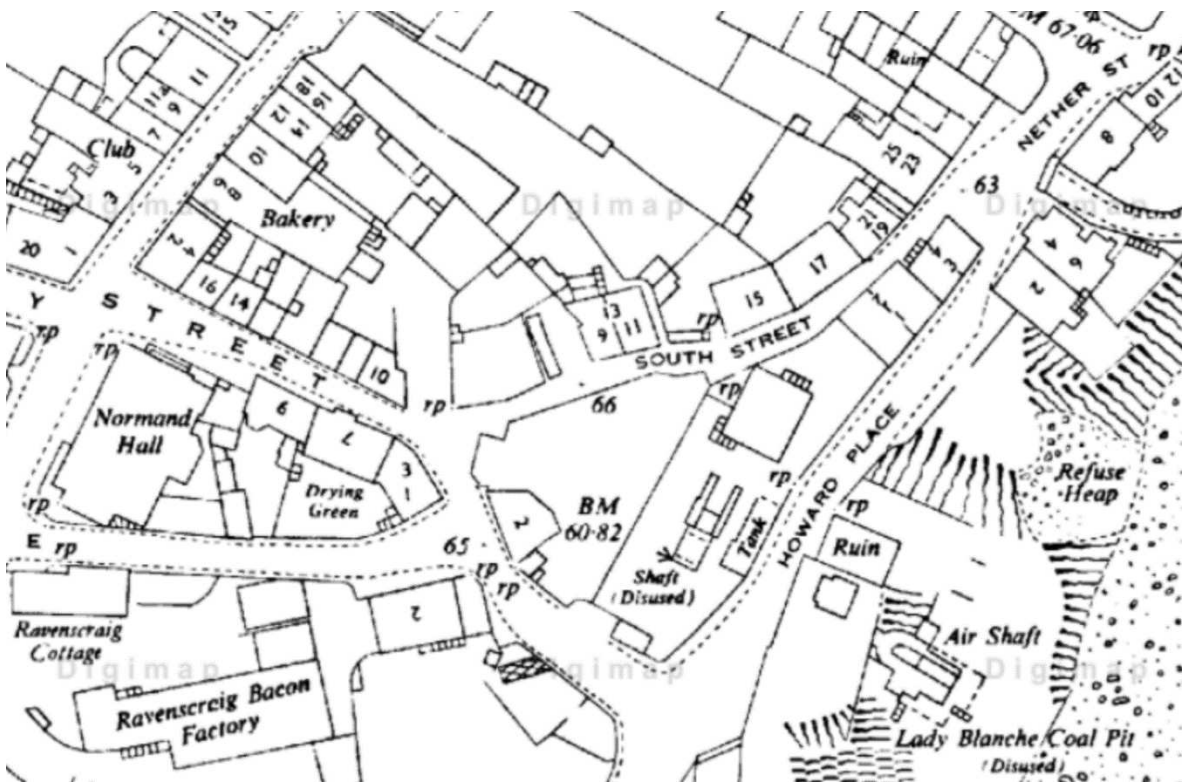


Figure 6.4. Map of the Phase 1 area of Dysart from 1950, showing the narrow South Street.

⁶⁴ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, pp. 64-65.



Figure 6.5. Map of the Phase 1 area of Dysart from 1960, showing how Block A covered the original South Street. However, pedestrian access to the rear of the buildings was still provided, enabling passage roughly along the route of the original street. A children’s playground was also placed within this area.

‘Spheres of Influence’

As we have already noted, where new building was required, local authorities had little overall plan for the areas in mind, other than a specified number of housing units that needed to be built. This left Wheeler & Sproson with almost free reign in designing the areas. With the existing environment in mind, the practice’s primary approach for tackling these areas was to base each phase around what Wheeler called ‘spheres of influence’ of significant older buildings.⁶⁵ The practice shaped the layout of each phase around particular buildings. In doing

⁶⁵ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 111.

so, Wheeler & Sproson aimed to design buildings which avoided disrupting the architectural scale of the area.

In the 1967 *Scottish Field* interview, Wheeler discussed this method, stating that 'it's a gift to have some fine old buildings as a focus and something to key the whole scheme to.'⁶⁶ This approach to historic burghs is something which can be linked back to the interest Wheeler had in Camillo Sitte during his university years.⁶⁷ Sitte believed that significant architecture, such as churches and monuments should be at the focal point of the urban environment.⁶⁸ Surrounding architecture, in his mind, should then be gathered around these important buildings.

Wheeler's interpretation of Sitte's work can be best seen in Dysart, where he identified several buildings on which he formed 'spheres of influence.'⁶⁹ This included buildings which the practice fought to save for the Council and the National Trust for Scotland, such as The Towers and the Anchorage, as well as other key landmarks such as the Tolbooth and Pan Ha.⁷⁰ When discussing his work in Dysart, Wheeler was keen to note that although he aimed to respect these buildings and preserve the architectural scale and aesthetic of the area, he was keen not to copy them as it was first and foremost a 'Modern development.'⁷¹ This can be seen best at Fitzroy Square, which was surrounded by 'The Towers' to the north, St. David's to the west and the Tollbooth to the south/east. Throughout the square, Wheeler & Sproson various glimpses

⁶⁶ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 30.

⁶⁷ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 111.

⁶⁸ Peets, 'Famous Town Planners: II. Camillo Sitte,' p. 251; C. Sitte, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (London, 1965), p. 54.

⁶⁹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 112.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 112.

of these historic focal points through gaps between buildings. In a 1961 letter, Wheeler explains that the six small modern towers were 'arranged in such a way that long visual penetrations can be achieved from the privately owned house in East Quality Street', referring to 'The Towers.'⁷² Dysart's Phase 1 – Block A can also be seen as a modern interpretation of the nearby the National Trust for Scotland's restoration area at Pan Ha' (see Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.6. Dysart Phase 1, Block 'A' (top right) can be seen in comparison to the historic 16th Century Pan Ha' below. A series of angular, stepped housing, topped with pitched pantile roofs can be seen in both examples. Photograph from April 2008.

Similarly, in Burntisland, Wheeler & Sproson chose to use 'spheres of influence' to form the redevelopment primarily around the row of 16th and 17th century houses on Somerville Street and the nearby 16th century Rossend Castle (see Figure 6.7). These became the main focal points of the area, with Somerville Street's location at the centre of the redevelopment and Rossend Castle on a neighbouring hill. These sites helped to inspire the materials and forms of the modern buildings Wheeler & Sproson designed for the scheme. At the Leven Street area on the highest point of the development, for example, Wheeler & Sproson made clear use of

⁷² 'Dysart Redevelopment – Phase 2,' (April 1961).

squat towers to mirror Rossend Castle, that can clearly be seen across the valley between (see Figure 6.8).



Figure 6.7. Rossend Castle, Burntisland. Restored by Wheeler & Sproson in 1970. Photograph taken May 2011.



Figure 6.8. View of West Leven Street from Rossend Castle showing all six blocks of the West Leven Street development, highlighting the relationship between the two hill sites.

However, unlike Dysart, Burntisland had a higher concentration of Victorian architecture which was mainly located along the High Street. With parts of the redevelopment facing on to the High Street, in particular the Somerville Street/High Street and Lothian Street/High Street phases, Wheeler & Sproson had to take into consideration the pull between these two contrasting architectural styles.⁷³ This manifested itself architecturally in several ways. The most notable example the Victorian architecture of the High Street being reflected in their work can be seen through the more regular use of fenestration on the blocks facing on to the street, whilst a much more irregular and traditional approach was taken with window placement elsewhere. Materially, a higher use of stone and slate can also be seen on the High Street blocks, whilst elsewhere harling and pantiles dominated. In terms of public space, in the High Street sections of the development the blocks were designed to abut existing architecture and the pavement in a regular terrace form, whilst elsewhere the modern blocks were stepped back from the street to allow for increased space for landscaped public squares and communal areas.

The Use of Public Squares

In 1995, Wheeler admitted in interview that one of the biggest influences on his approach to public space was Gibberd's neighbourhood at Lansbury, which he visited during the 1951 Festival of Britain.⁷⁴ In the years after the Second World War, Gibberd represented a sensitive and romantic attitude to building form, landscape and use of external spaces. He argued that buildings should be designed in connection to the site around them, leading to a 'fusion

⁷³ Gomme, 'Counter-Attack New Among the Old,' pp. 353-354.

⁷⁴ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

between house and site', with buildings and landscaping designed in harmony.⁷⁵ Gibberd was approached to be the lead architect for the Festival of Britain's exhibition on London's South Bank, but turned it down as he saw himself more as an architect and planner than an exhibition designer. Instead, he suggested that a bomb-damaged area of East London be rebuilt as a 'Live Architecture' exhibition, so that valuable post-war resources went towards something permanent rather than a show.⁷⁶

The Lansbury area of Stepney Poplar was chosen for this purpose and was divided up between several architects, with Gibberd chosen to design the shopping centre and marketplace area.⁷⁷ Similar to the succession of squares designed by Wheeler & Sproson in Burntisland, the Lansbury area was formed of a series of zones linked by open spaces with the aim of creating a visually unified neighbourhood (see Figure 6.9).⁷⁸ Many of those involved directed much of their focus into the planning and design of the public areas. In particular, Gibberd proved to be the dominant force in ensuring the Lansbury Estate met his aesthetic requirements.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Manley, *Frederick Gibberd*, p. 34.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ E. Harwood, 'Lansbury,' *Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, vol. 5 (2001), pp. 140-154.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

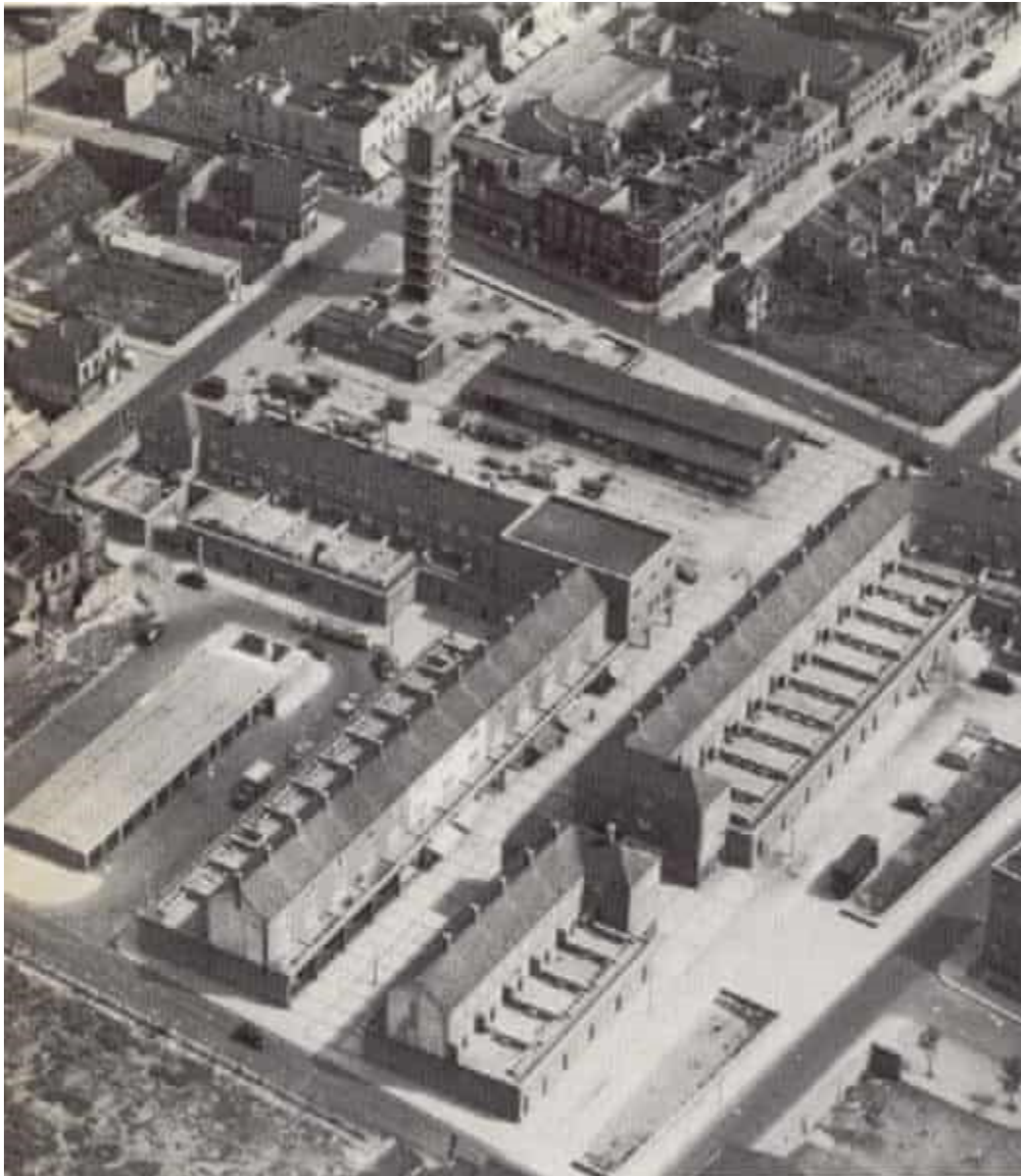


Figure 6.9. Aerial view of Gibberd's section of the Lansbury estate, 1951, showing use of squares and pedestrian areas.

Wheeler & Sproson shared many of their ideals with Gibberd. Like Wheeler, Gibberd had a keen interest in aesthetic.⁸⁰ He believed that the space between buildings was just as important as the buildings themselves and was unusual in his ability to visualise the 'picture as a whole' from as early as the 1930s.⁸¹ Gibberd explained later on in his life that he was 'more

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. xii.

concerned with the aesthetic expression of place than that of the individual building.⁸² Both Burntisland and Dysart demonstrate the similar intricacy with which Wheeler & Sproson tackled their aesthetic and layout. The two developments contained mostly 3 or 4 storey blocks and they included pends and squares.

These squares became one of the most representative features of Wheeler & Sproson's work in Burntisland and Dysart. The most complex of the succession of small squares that they designed in Dysart was Fitzroy Square, which acted as the central hub of the second phase of the development (see Figure 6.10). The original area was described by Wheeler as 'an inward-looking district of convoluted alleys and broken-down old walls', surrounded on three sides by historic buildings and suffered from what the *Architectural Review* described as 'tortuous lines of the old road pattern' which created a 'considerable layout problem.'⁸³

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ 'New Town and Old Town,' *The Architectural Review*, vol. 141, no. 842 (1967), pp. 271-279.



Figure 6.10. Aerial photograph of Fitzroy Square in Dysart taken in 1997 (cropped).

Like for their 'spheres of influence', much of Wheeler & Sproson's inspiration for Fitzroy Square originated from Camillo Sitte. Sitte wrote of 'enclosed square' systems and was opposed to the classical fashion of wide streets connected by large squares, which were often set out in symmetrical geometric patterns.⁸⁴ Instead, Sitte argued that a better option was the irregular medieval style square which acted more as a room formed by enclosed space.⁸⁵ In Wheeler's 1995 interview he spoke of carrying around a paperback copy of Sitte's work, acknowledging him as an inspiration for many of his square designs.⁸⁶ This enclosed irregular 'room' can be seen as a solution to the problem at Fitzroy Square, where the practice formed an inward looking narrow communal space with paved and grass areas that were safe for children to play in. This area was contained by three and five story slab blocks, with six small towers carefully positioned throughout as to avoid mine underworking and to allow for the required lighting

⁸⁴ Peets, 'Famous Town Planners: II. Camillo Sitte,' pp. 251-252.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

levels.⁸⁷ Although open public spaces are not a particularly traditional form in the area, the irregular nature of Fitzroy Square allowed it to feel sheltered and intimate whilst simultaneously creating ‘interesting glimpses’ to the surrounding historic buildings.⁸⁸ This imitates the inward looking private courtyard design of surrounding 16th century historic houses such as The Towers and St David’s (see Figure 6.11).



Figure 6.11. The high-walled courtyard of St. David’s, Dysart, with Phase 2 – Part 1, Block 2 forming one side of the square (to the left). Gateways and portals in the courtyard wall provide views out to the surrounding area.

⁸⁷ Nairn, ‘Over the Bridge to the Burghs,’ p. 24.

⁸⁸ ‘New Town and Old Town,’ pp. 271-279.

Described by Charles McKean as being both ‘small scale and monumental’, public spaces like Fitzroy Square were designed to maintain the urban atmosphere of the existing settlement without appearing out of place.⁸⁹ They used high-density blocks to provide a similar feel to the surrounding historic architecture, whilst also carefully planning for light infiltration and secluded spaces.⁹⁰ Squares such as this, as Sharp argues, provide areas of psychological refuge that allow inhabitants to have an inward-looking perspective of the area they inhabit. This allows for a calmer and more controlled environment, away from busy roads and vast open views.⁹¹ Discussing Fitzroy Square, Wheeler commented that they could have created a more piecemeal scheme with multiple smaller spaces, but they felt that ‘concentrating the drama in one large hole’ was more appropriate.⁹² The use of the five-storey block and the small towers created a space that was simultaneously theatrical and sheltered in nature.

The Landscaping of the Developments

The use of landscaping within public spaces such as these was high on Wheeler & Sproson’s list of priorities when designing Burntisland and Dysart. In order to combat the lack of ‘compact unity’ brought about by Garden City principles, discussed in Chapter 1, Wheeler argued that large gardens were not needed if there were play areas that could be overlooked by parents.⁹³ These play areas included both formal playgrounds with play apparatus such as the one seen in Phase 1 of Dysart, which contained a ‘concrete boat and harbour to climb over’ (see Figure 6.12), but also included the variety of open spaces found throughout both developments.⁹⁴ By

⁸⁹ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 114.

⁹⁰ ‘New Town and Old Town,’ pp. 271-279.

⁹¹ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, pp. 64-65.

⁹² McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 115.

⁹³ ‘Building a New Scotland,’ p. 31.

⁹⁴ ‘Saltire Society Award for Kirkcaldy,’ p. 338.

utilising an assortment of ground treatments, *Scottish Field* magazine complimented Wheeler for creating a ‘complete place with character and human feel’ at Burntisland.⁹⁵

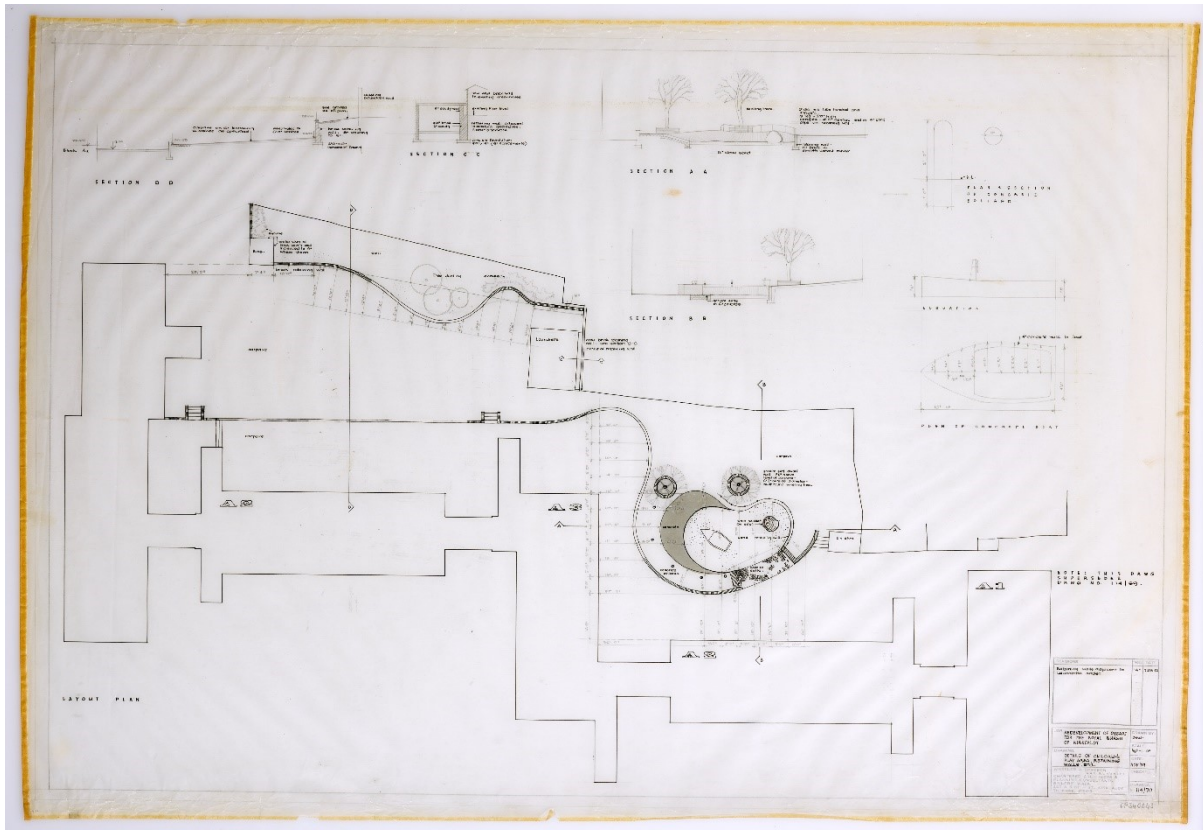


Figure 6.12. Play area at the rear of Dysart Phase 1 – Block A, with its concrete boat and landscaped imitation harbour.

This was achieved using a combination of hard and soft landscaping, including grass, shrubs, paving, cobbles and textured concrete.⁹⁶ Wheeler believed that the colour pallet he used in the developments would be most successful if kept simple, arguing that too many different coloured materials would be harmful in historic areas.⁹⁷ He spoke of the paving in the High Street of Perth as an example of over design, where an ‘over-abundance of colours and geometric shapes’ had a negative impact on the area.⁹⁸ Instead, in Burntisland and Dysart,

⁹⁵ ‘Building a New Scotland,’ p. 30.

⁹⁶ ‘New Town and Old Town,’ pp. 271-279.

⁹⁷ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 115.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Wheeler & Sproson used simple and plain paving to compliment the modest aesthetic of the surrounding buildings. In some areas cobbled surfaces were also used to reflect the historic nature of the settlements. Semi-mature trees were also planted in addition to shrubs and roses, and in Dysart the only existing tree on site, an old pear tree, was purposefully preserved in the plan (see Figure 6.13).⁹⁹ The use of landscaping can also be seen to vary depending on the phase of development and area within the settlement. In Burntisland a softer, more traditional aesthetic is achieved in the areas closer to the high street using grass, cobbles and limited paved areas. By contrast, Wheeler & Sproson created a much harder and modern aesthetic on top of the hill at West Leven Street, where large expanses of paving and parking areas are used.

⁹⁹ 'New Town and Old Town,' pp. 271-279.



Figure 6.13. The only tree standing on the Dysart Phase 1 site when work began was this pear tree. Wheeler & Sproson designed Block A around the tree to protect it. Sadly, the tree has since been lost.

Wheeler & Sproson's creative use of a limited palette of robust materials such as these is a strong example of a kind of economies that architects and planners had to make when developing local authority funded housing schemes in the post-war era. It was through the inspiration of the selection of prominent figures discussed, that the practice successfully created a unique and varied form of urban design in Burntisland and Dysart. Wheeler & Sproson's interest in working around the existing settlements led to developments that were distinctly 'Fife' in nature. From the scale of the housing to the creation of ponds and squares, the public spaces they created within Burntisland and Dysart feel at home within their historic

environments and are a fitting contribution to the region. In the following section, a more detailed examination of the housing itself will explore Wheeler & Sproson's approach to the unique architecture of this corner of Scotland, and how they incorporated it into their work.

6.3. The Materials and Colours of Burntisland and Dysart

One of the most noticeable ways in which Wheeler & Sproson attempted to merge the old and the new in their architecture was through the careful selection of materials and colour. Although not present in every block, each development contained a combination of vernacular materials, such as random rubble, contrasting coloured harl, timber, slate and pantiles. This was then juxtaposed against the more modern concrete, metal, glass and areas of slabbing.

Materials Used

As discussed in Chapter 2, there was a growing support for the use of traditional materials in the years following the Second World War. Their implementation was recommended in contemporary policy documentation, such as the report of the Scott Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas of August 1942, which formed the first comprehensive review of rural issues in England and Wales. In the report, it is suggested that the most appropriate way of building in rural areas was to:

‘...require that buildings shall be in good material which is sympathetic in colour with the traditional colourings of the landscape in which it is situated.’¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Sharp, *Anatomy of the Village*, p. 66.

It goes on to state that if used carefully and situated in appropriate settings, materials such as stone, wood, brick, and concrete could be successful, and even complement the existing architecture of the settlement in question. Despite this, however, the use of such high-quality traditional materials remained relatively unusual across the post-war era. According to Frank Mears, 20th century housing in Scotland had failed to adopt the lessons of the past due to materials in rural areas being too expensive for the Treasury to fund.¹⁰¹ This resulted in buildings which he described as a 'ready-made box enlivened by traces of chromium and plastic.'¹⁰² Wheeler & Sproson became one of the earliest architectural practices to balance out the budgets they were provided for the redevelopments in favour of more expensive traditional materials and distinctly vernacular colours. Few others had attempted this in the 1940s and 1950s, with Basil Spence's Dunbar housing (1948 and 1953) a rare example which predates Wheeler & Sproson's work.

The primary surfacing used on the facades of Wheeler & Sproson's blocks was a traditional material to the local area, known for its use in 17th century architecture. Harling, a local form of roughcast made of a base of lime render with small pebbles and stones thrown on and pressed in, was also beneficial in offering rain proofing to buildings.¹⁰³ Wheeler & Sproson appreciated the 'crisper and more clean-cut character' of harling, as it provided a more modern aesthetic to the buildings, whilst blending in with the vernacular roots of the areas.¹⁰⁴ This sharp appearance can be seen most clearly in the small towers of Dysart Phase 2 and at Burntisland's West Leven Street development. Whilst it was certainly not unusual for 'Modern-

¹⁰¹ Mears, *A Regional Survey and Plan*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ 'Building a New Scotland,' p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 80.

Vernacular' architects to use this distinctly Scottish material (being prominent in buildings by Hurd, Reiach, and Spence, among others), Wheeler & Sproson's use of the harling is a central component of their overall aesthetic, being prominent in many of their works. Other key materials used on Wheeler & Sproson's facades includes random rubble and decorative marriage lintels reclaimed from the demolished tenements (see Figure 6.14), pantile roofing, timber and slate accents, as well as a more modern injection of concrete in some places.



Figure 6.14. Example of a marriage lintel dating from 1585 used within the new buildings at Dysart's Phase 1, Block D.

In the 1964 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs' article in *The Observer*, Wheeler is praised for his ability to ensure that there were 'no details that have been done just for their own sakes.'¹⁰⁵ The Somerville Street/High Street development demonstrates this best, with its precise combination of a variety of materials. Stone, harling, concrete, and pantiles are used to varying

¹⁰⁵ Nairn, 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs,' p. 24.

degrees throughout the development. Stone is primarily used on the ground floor facades, with coloured harling above to reflect the use of harling on the 16th century buildings on the street (see Figure 6.15). While many of the roofs in the development are flat, the most prominent block that punctuates the street is topped with a pitched pantiled roof, similar to those on nearby historic properties. Finally, a starkly modern skeletal concrete staircase acts as a visual anchor at the end of the street, simultaneously reflecting the traditional external stairwells seen in the historic buildings, and firmly placing the development within the 20th Century (see Figure 6.16).



Figure 6.15. A combination of rubble masonry, harling and pantiles is used at Burntisland's Somerville Street/ High Street Development.



Figure 6.16. Staircase at the end of Somerville Square, used to access the deck and bridge areas above.

Use of Colour

One of the most unique and significant elements of Wheeler & Sproson's work was their addition of a diverse use of colour to this harling. Both the Burntisland and Dysart redevelopment projects used various shades of pale rust and cream throughout. As we have seen, Wheeler & Sproson intended to keep colours simple, believing that 'over-use of colours would be very dangerous.'¹⁰⁶ In Burntisland, he made use of primarily pale or subtle colours to blend more sensitively into the surrounding environment.¹⁰⁷ It was in Dysart, however, that Wheeler & Sproson made the most creative use of colour. The Dysart Redevelopment saw the

¹⁰⁶ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 111.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

use of pale blues, deep reds, pinks, mustards, and charcoals across different areas of the settlement.

The location of colour is significant in Dysart (see Figure 6.17). The one place where pale blue was used in the redevelopment was in the most modern section, Phase 1, Block D. The use of blue here reflects the maritime nature of this block as the gateway between the settlement and the waters of the Firth of Forth. Phase 2, being situated in the original back-streets of the burgh is more reserved in colour, using a monochrome palette of primarily creams, but also charcoals where Wheeler & Sproson wanted to add definition and variety. Phase 3 Parts 1 and 2 were the more romantic areas of the redevelopment along the High Street between the centre and the sea, where deep reds and ochres were used to create a rich and earthy aesthetic. Lastly, the reconstructed buildings at 43-67 High Street and 67-71 High Street act as the picture-postcard heart of the settlement, with the use of cheery pinks and yellows and greens.



Figure 6.17. Distribution of colours in Dysart, with blocks or substantial sections of blocks shown in a similar shade. There are also several instances where small strips of colour have been used, but it was not possible to show these here.

Whilst there is a clear spatial distinction of where individual colours were used, it can also be observed that overall, larger buildings were primarily painted in lighter colours such as creams and biscuits, whilst smaller buildings were picked out in either darker or brighter colours such as charcoals, reds and yellows. It is possible that this was done for two reasons. Firstly, the use of paler colours on larger blocks helped them to appear smaller and less obstructive, whilst bold colours made smaller buildings appear larger, visually balancing the areas. Secondly, the darker colours helped to add definition to the area and pick out individual buildings or parts of buildings as more visually significant than others. This can be seen most clearly in the six little

towers at Phase 2, Block 3, which were painted in creams and blacks. The two charcoal towers were located at the centre of Fitzroy Square, and acted as the focal point of the Phase. These two charcoal towers are also positioned in significant locations which could be glimpsed through streets and passageways, using the dark colours to help visually connect the various phases of the redevelopment. Similarly, sections of Phase 3, Part 2 above the pends were painted in deep reds to draw the eye through to the view beyond (see Figure 6.18).



Figure 6.18. Several pends in Dysart have been highlighted in a bold colour, such as this deep red example at Phase 3 – Part 2.

One of the most interesting factors about the use of colour in the two developments is the fact that Wheeler & Sproson approached them in such different ways. Whilst Burntisland was relatively neutral in colour, Dysart was more saturated and varied. There are several reasons why this variation in approach came about in two developments which mostly took place during the same timeframe. One of the simplest reasons for this difference is that photographic evidence of the settlements from the 19th century appear to show a larger variation in colour in the buildings restored or reconstructed in Dysart than those in Burntisland. Figure 6.19

shows a black and white photograph of the High Street in Dysart, where the variation in tone suggests that the buildings were painted in more diverse colour range than was apparent in photographs of Burntisland from a similar period. Another possible reason was that the local authorities in Dysart were less involved in the aesthetic outcome of the redevelopment process than the more engaged council in Burntisland. In Dysart, the primary focus of the local authority was to achieve the allocated number of homes within budget, and additional aesthetic matters were of less interest.¹⁰⁸ This allowed Wheeler & Sproson more say over the overall appearance of the settlement, and as a result, they were able to make a more diverse use of colour.



Figure 6.19. Although only black & white photographs remain of the original 43-67 High Street buildings, contrasting shades and evidence of wearing paint suggest that the site had been painted in a variety of colours before the redevelopment.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 115.

Wheeler & Sproson's use of colour stands in contrast to the classic crisp pale appearance of many buildings by early Modernists, such as Maxwell Fry or Connell, Ward and Lucas¹⁰⁹ Fry in particular, was known for his elegant white mid-1930s houses, such as Sun House and Miramonte. However, several of Wheeler's key influences and contemporaries were also known to experiment with colour. Gibberd's 1933-35 Pullman Court used remarkably similar colours to Wheeler, with warm browns, creams and pale blues originally used on the façade. Equally, work done at the Canongate Development in Edinburgh, such as Basil Spence, Glover and Ferguson's 1961-69 Brown's Close blocks, made use of various shades of red to connect them to the aesthetic of the Old Town. Although similar colours were used on occasion by other architects such as these, what differentiated Wheeler & Sproson's approach was the importance of the spatial distribution of colour across large schemes, and the use of dark and light shades to identify buildings of visual significance.

Diverse Use of Glazing

Another element of the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects was Wheeler & Sproson's varied approach to fenestration. While in some areas, large expansive glazing was used, such as in connecting sections like stairwells, elsewhere the practice used a combination of regular and 'random' window spacing. The large, glazed connecting sections were used to differentiate circulation cores from flats, but also provided an element of verticality to balance out otherwise horizontal tenement blocks, such as in Burntisland's Somerville Street' High Street development (see Figure 6.20). In contrast, windows were kept for the most-part relatively small in size for bedroom, kitchen and bathroom areas, while living room areas

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

tended to receive slightly larger areas of glazing. Application alternated between stiff regular placement and more traditional 'random' location, characteristic of Scots vernacular architecture. Wheeler & Sproson made the most of this 'random' fenestration, arguing that while it fitted in with the historic nature of the settlements, it also suited Modern architecture as openings could be placed to suit the layout of interiors.¹¹⁰ This random placement can be best seen in the High Street/Lothian Street development in Burntisland, where what at first glance appears to be a haphazard distribution of square and horizontal windows was used to produce a vernacular aesthetic (see Figure 6.21).



Figure 6.20. Glazed stairwells were used throughout the Burntisland and Dysart Developments. This example at Burntisland's Somerville Street/ High Street adds a sense of verticality to an otherwise horizontal building.

¹¹⁰ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 114.



Figure 6.21. A ‘random’ distribution of fenestration at the corner of the High Street/ Lothian Street blocks in Burntisland reflected similar window placement seen in Scots Vernacular architecture.

Despite its connections with the vernacular, irregular fenestration was not something that was commonly used at the time, even by many members of groups like the Saltire Society. The closest example of one of Wheeler’s influences to work against the trend of standard, regular fenestration was his professor, William J Smith, who was instrumental in proposing Wheeler for RIBA associateship in 1948.¹¹¹ Although he had a limited career as an architect, he was known for making use of classical features such as kneelered gables and bay windows in his 1920s housing in Riddrie, Glasgow.¹¹² This was done in protest of the ribbon windows that were becoming increasingly popular at the time. While Modernism aimed for the identity of rooms to be masked by flat facades, Smith insisted on using bay windows to make a clear distinction of internal space. Like Smith, Wheeler purposefully worked against the standard regular fenestration of his time to create something that more closely conformed with the irregular

¹¹¹ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Anthony Wheeler.

¹¹² *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, (Professor) William James Smith (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=201070).

appearance of the historic buildings in Burntisland and Dysart. However, although irregular fenestration is a defining feature of Wheeler & Sproson's work, it was not universally used across the developments. It can most commonly be seen in smaller blocks where variations in internal layouts were most suitable for their use.

The diverse use of glazing, colours and materials at Burntisland and Dysart are some of the most significant elements that make Wheeler & Sproson's work so distinctive in appearance. The carefully managed blend of colours and textures help to unify the old and the new, but also aid in connecting the various modern phases into a single design. However, the large array of unique forms used across the two developments is equally critical in making Burntisland and Dysart two of the most significant developments of their kind.

6.4. Wheeler & Sproson's Use of Form

The following section will explore the various ways in which Wheeler & Sproson approached form and the inspirations that led to the creation of their characteristic approach. There are several ways in which Wheeler & Sproson went about creating their diverse structures. As previously discussed, Wheeler admired Camillo Sitte's ability to create environments that generated an element of surprise and intrigue. One of the ways in which Wheeler & Sproson attempted to recreate this in Burntisland and Dysart was by blending a combination of forms to create a varied, organic, and interesting environment. Over the course of the two redevelopment projects, the practice made use of a variety of different building types. These

can broadly be categorized by their basic form, with vertical towers, and horizontal 'slabs' and terraces. Many of the building types were used on several occasions across the two development projects, as well as in other Wheeler & Sproson sites. Survey maps of Burntisland and Dysart in Appendix 4, show the distribution of towers, 'slab blocks' and terraced housing across Wheeler & Sproson's developments.

Slabs, Terraces and Horizontality

One of the types of building developed by the practice were their 'slab blocks', which were similar in form and interior layout to the traditional tenements seen in Burntisland and Dysart. There are several variations of these, but they were largely between three and five storeys in height, with an access stairwell and two flats per floor. They varied in scale and configuration, with some blocks being accessed from a central core, and others from a connecting stairwell between two separate blocks. One of the most noteworthy form of these were the three-story blocks connected at right angles to one another by glazed stairwell sections, seen in Dysart Phase 1 Block A and at Burntisland's Somerville Street Phase 2 area (see Figure 6.22). The layout of these blocks was most likely inspired by architecture in the local areas, with the distribution of the blocks closely resembling the 18th Century Pan Ha' situated at Dysart's port, close to the Phase 1 development area, discussed previously.



Figure 6.22. The Somerville Street Phase 2 development consists of two blocks of tenements connected and accessed through a central glazed stairwell.

A second type of building designed by Wheeler & Sproson were the conventional terraced houses, which are similar to those built in Wheeler's Woodside area of Glenrothes (see figure 6.23). These were unlike anything built in the heart of the settlements previously, being an unusual depart from the sympathetic take on vernacular burgh architecture seen elsewhere in Wheeler & Sproson's work. These houses catered for larger families than the traditional flatted blocks did, reaching the quota of spacious family homes required by the local authorities. There were two different varieties of terraced house in the developments. The first are the compact stepped houses with covered entrance areas, which can be found in both West Leven Street and the eastern half of Somerville Street in Burntisland (see figure 6.24). The second type are the more traditional and larger houses with front and rear garden space seen in the Somerville Street development and in Phase 3 Part 2 of Dysart (see Figure 6.25).



Figure 6.23. Terraced housing at the Woodside area of Glenrothes, designed by Wheeler during his time acting as Senior Architect at the Glenrothes Development Corporation.



Figure 6.24. Mono-pitch terraced housing at the West Leven Street, Phase 2 development in Burntisland. These houses are almost identical in design to those in the 'unknown' phase on Somerville Street.



Figure 6.25. This example of Wheeler & Sproson’s more traditional terraced housing design can be seen here in Dysart’s Phase 3 – Part 2, but also in Burntisland’s Somerville Street/ High Street. Though there are distinct differences between these two examples, the blocks were generally topped with pitched pantile roofs and benefit from front and rear garden areas.

These horizontally emphasised blocks originated from a combination of inspirations, ranging from traditional tenement and terraced streets, to Modernist Movement principles of horizontality. Wheeler spoke of the necessity he saw in keeping up to date with current trends and in having a solid grounding in Modern Movement concepts.¹¹³ With a similar emphasis on horizontality within their work, Connell, Ward & Lucas were one of the leading practices Wheeler referred to when designing his own work.¹¹⁴ Their 1934 Concrete House at Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol is a key example of their emphasis on streamline slabs (see Figure 6.26).¹¹⁵ The clear separation of individual floors in the Concrete House can be seen in several of Wheeler & Sproson’s works, no more so than in Burntisland’s Somerville Square, where the prominent slab block punctuating the street is divided into four bands of colour and material

¹¹³ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ A. Powers, ‘Connell, Ward & Lucas,’ *Grove Art Online* (<https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T019059>).

(as discussed above); with its stone section at ground floor level, a recessed deck at first floor, a harled façade at second floor and a final band of pantiled roofing (see Figure 6.27).



Figure 6.26. The horizontally emphasised Concrete House in Bristol by Connel, Ward & Lucas, 1934.



Figure 6.27. Three of the four bands of colour and texture used at Somerville Street/ High Street can be seen here, creating a horizontally emphasised block.

The emphasis on horizontality seen in these tenement-like ‘slab blocks’ and terraced houses helped Wheeler & Sproson to achieve the ideal level of density which they had sought for the areas. The large slab blocks allowed the practice to create a balance in density, whilst still retaining roof heights that were suitable to the surrounding historic environment. As Wheeler explained, the practice used this series of ‘slab blocks’ and terraces as a ‘foil’ to the nearby towers.¹¹⁶ By focusing the bulk of the housing in larger blocks, they were then able to be more creative in the development of their smaller statement buildings. In Dysart, Wheeler & Sproson utilised this approach in Phase 3- Part 1 and Phase 3 – Part 2. However, this was most notably done at Fitzroy Square in Phase 2, where a large 5-storey slab block was used at the north of the site to allow for the more sculptural small towers to be created in the central area (see Figure 6.28). These small towers would otherwise have been too low-density to meet the council’s requirements for housing numbers if they had been used alone.



Figure 6.28. Dysart’s Phase 2, Block 5 (the long slab block towards the middle of the image) was used so that Wheeler & Sproson to concentrate much of the population of the area in a small footprint, allowing for smaller towers to be implemented elsewhere.

¹¹⁶ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ p. 113.

Towers and Verticality

The modern towers of Burntisland and Dysart came in a variety of shapes and sizes across different areas of the two developments and stand out as the most unusual and romantic of the building types developed by the practice. Three main types of these towers were created, each emphasising verticality in different ways. As we have seen, large cubic chamfered blocks were used in Burntisland's West Level Street development, smaller towers containing two stacked duplex flats were integrated into Fitzroy Square and the High Street in Dysart, and a final twinned block of two joined smaller towers was used in Dysart's Phase 3 Part 2. These blocks were used for their strong visual impact in both settlements. Large, chamfered blocks were positioned at the top of the hill in Burntisland to be seen from across the settlement, while in Dysart smaller towers were positioned as almost statuesque additions within the public squares.

There are several clear sources of inspiration for these vertical structures. One of the most significant came from the settlements' often tall and narrow historic properties, such as tower houses, church steeples and towers, and castles. Most notably, the 16th century St Serf's Tower in Dysart and Rossend Castle in Burntisland, both restored by the practice in 1970, act as the most unmistakable local inspirations for Wheeler & Sproson's new towers (see Figure 6.29). However, these local buildings were not the only source of inspiration for the practice. As stated in the 1964 *Observer* article on his work, like many architects of the time, Wheeler was also keen to relate the slender and detached nature of his towers to the 13th century fortified tower houses of San Gimignano (see Figure 6.30).¹¹⁷ As evidenced within the Historic

¹¹⁷ Nairn, 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs,' p. 24.

Environment Scotland archive collections, Wheeler visited the town on multiple occasions.¹¹⁸

He saw the towers of San Gimignano as ideal family structures that ‘commanded space’ and avoided the settlement being ‘chopped up into little gardens.’¹¹⁹



Figure 6.29. St. Serf's Church (photographed here in 1953) is located just south of 'The Anchorage' in Dysart and acts as an influence for Wheeler & Sproson's small towers seen throughout the settlement.

¹¹⁸ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Manuscript Box 467-471,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹¹⁹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',', p. 114.



Figure 6.30. The Towers of San Gimignano in Tuscany date from the 13th century and are quoted as being an influence for Wheeler & Sproson's small residential towers.

Many architects in the 1960s also quoted the San Gimignano towers as inspiration for their tower blocks set within parkland, or academic buildings in the case of Louis Kahn's Richards Research Building (see Figure 6.31).¹²⁰ However, it is significant that Wheeler & Sproson's adaptation of these medieval towers is particularly similar to the originals, retaining a similar slender form, dense urban setting and residential purpose. Wheeler & Sproson's towers were not, however, as tall as those in Italy. Instead, their versions had a different kind of presence, described by the *Observer* as 'compact, tough and witty', with their height appropriate for the scale of the local area.¹²¹ This 'purely Scots' aesthetic worked well with the adjacent 17th

¹²⁰ C. Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style* (New York, 2007), p. 104.

¹²¹ Nairn, 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs,' p. 24.

century tower architecture such as The Towers and St Serf's Tower in Dysart, and helped to maintain a similar height and density to the surrounding developments.¹²²



Figure 6.31. Louis Kahn's 1965 Richards Research Building at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia is one of the best-known examples of post-war architecture inspired by San Gimignano.

The Flexible Application of these Typologies

According to the *Architectural Review* in 1967, this combination of the horizontal and the vertical created an 'ideal contrast' between forms.¹²³ By developing a large range of different shapes and sizes of block, the practice injected variety and interest into the areas. This combination also helped Wheeler & Sproson's developments fit in with the existing local architecture, as it too was of varying height, scale, and design. While combining towers and

¹²² Glendinning and MacKechnie, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 243.

¹²³ 'New Town and Old Town,' pp. 271-279.

slab blocks was not unusual within the architecture of the period, doing so at the scale and density seen in Burntisland and Dysart was less common. Even within the Saltire Society housing awards, a similar cohesion between the horizontal and the vertical was rare, with examples such as Spence's Dunbar development and Moira and Moira's Heddel's Park in Lerwick (discussed in Chapter 7) being two of the few developments that come even close in terms of variety of height and scale.

Over the course of the two developments, Wheeler & Sproson created a substantial catalogue of different building types. With this portfolio of basic structures at their disposal, they were able to mix and match the various building types to create environments that felt unique. Using the basic forms as a template, the practice was able to use the same type across different phases and in different developments without producing carbon copies. Even if the structures were similar in mass and internal layout, the practice utilised variations in fenestration, orientation, and colouring to ensure that each block, or group of blocks, was unique. This can be seen best when examining Wheeler's beloved 'zig-zag blocks' in both Burntisland and Dysart. While the projecting volumes of the original 'zig-zag blocks' in Dysart are comprised of stacked layers of interior living room spaces and external balconies overlooking landscaped gardens (see Figure 6.32), the equivalents in Burntisland are positioned directly on a busy street, and as a result do not include balcony areas.



Figure 6.32. The 'Zig-Zag' flats in Dysart were the first of their kind used by Wheeler & Sproson. They faced on to a landscaped green where families appear to have left their prams with babies inside!

Connecting the Structures

The tapestry of differing building types in Burntisland and Dysart was often knit together by a series of linking spaces and connections. Connections can be seen in most phases of the redevelopment projects, ranging from buildings abutting others, to bridges, stairwells, and single storey linking sections. These connections were made in some areas between new and old, and in other areas between two of Wheeler & Sproson's additions, such as the concrete bridge connecting two sections of Burntisland's Somerville Street (see Figure 6.33 and 6.34). The first and most striking impact of the series of connections within the developments is their ability to help to generate an intimate and linked environment, unlike the isolated tower blocks

or private housing seen elsewhere.¹²⁴ This closely linked environment shares similarities with the original settlements, with their narrow wynds, back alleys and pends. The connecting sections also help the development to appear as a single scheme, rather than a separate grouping of disconnected buildings.

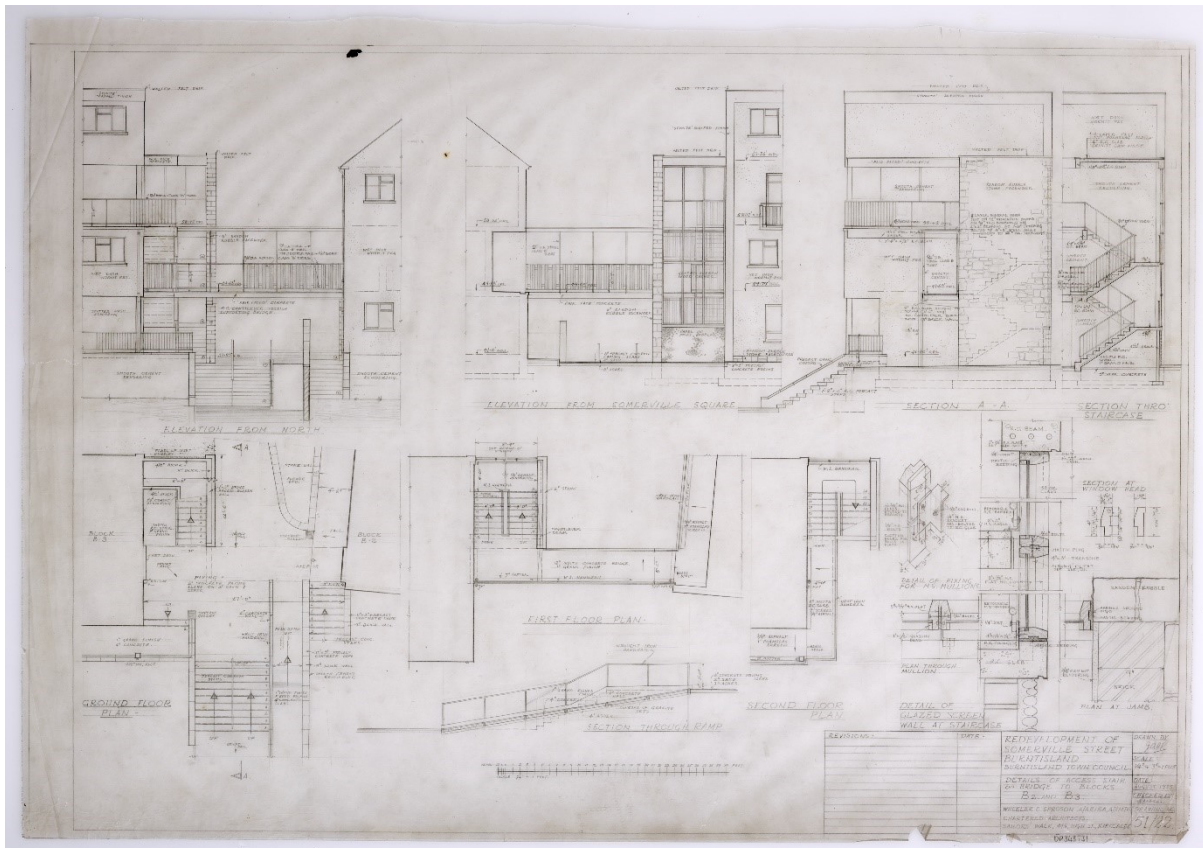


Figure 6.33. 'Details of Access Stair and Bridge to Blocks' at Somerville Square, August 1955.

¹²⁴ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 39.



Figure 6.34. Photograph of the rear of Somerville Street/ High Street block 'B3' showing the access bridge linking to Block 'B2' and the semi-exposed stairwell tower.

One of the most prominent connecting sections seen in Wheeler & Sproson's work is the link between Dysart's Phase 2, Block 1 and the neighbouring restored The Towers (see Figure 6.35). In his 1995 interview with Miles Glendinning, Wheeler argued that you could unite the 16th and 20th centuries.¹²⁵ He believed that links like this should be 'uncompromisingly modern' and noticeably different from the original historic building.¹²⁶ He did this at The Towers through the implementation of a two-storey section, cut through at ground floor level by a pend.¹²⁷ Timber cladding was used to provide a link that was both clearly modern, yet in a material

¹²⁵ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹²⁶ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', pp. 112.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

sympathetic to the surrounding area. The linking section also bridged over one of the main pedestrian routes in the settlement, which connected the centre of Dysart to the main road above. By joining the two buildings over such a significant route, Wheeler & Sproson formed a prominent gateway to the development. This also made it clear to the public that the Towers was part of the broader scheme, and that their new architecture was inspired by the old.



Figure 6.35. Undated photograph of the linking bridge between Dysart Phase 2, Block 1 to 'The Towers'. Although the bridge did not physically connect through to 'The Towers', it tied the historic house into the remainder of the scheme and formed a sheltered pend which would be passed through on approach to the Redevelopment site.

The Use of Varied Roofing

This connection between the old Towers and the new of Block 1 was further emphasised by a clear contrast in roofing types. While the Towers maintained its existing gabled roof, the

connecting section and block were purposefully given flat roofs to highlight mixed nature of the development. This juxtaposition is something which can be seen throughout the two developments. Across Burntisland and Dysart roofing was used to create specific effects. There were several unusual additions to the developments, including Dysart Phase 1's butterfly roof and Phase 3's pyramidal roof, however, roofing types largely varied between flat roofs and gabled roofs topped with pantiles.

Many of the new housing blocks in Burntisland and Dysart were topped with flat roofs. These roofs gave the developments an uncompromisingly modern aesthetic and helped Wheeler & Sproson to avoid the 'phony' reproduction appearance that Wheeler disliked.¹²⁸ In some areas of the developments, such as in Burntisland's Somerville Street/Kirkgate, flat roofs also allowed the practice to match the height of surrounding historic buildings without losing vital living space to empty attics or smaller usable areas. However, like several of his contemporaries, Wheeler disliked the overuse of flat roofs in the context of historic burghs, and carefully combined them with traditional pitched roofing. Wheeler & Sproson were not unusual in this view, with support for mixed roofing types from across the Saltire Society. Robert Matthew, for example, argued that by learning from the vernacular, architects could escape the 'tyranny of the flat roof.'¹²⁹

Phase 1 of the Dysart Redevelopment project is one of the earliest jobs taken on by the practice and marks a period when they were trialling different methods and working to find their own

¹²⁸ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹²⁹ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, p. 157.

style. Unsurprisingly, Phase 1 contains one of Wheeler & Sproson's most experimental and bold uses of roofing, the butterfly roof at Block D (see Figure 6.36). Wheeler described this roof as a 'disruptive shape on the skyline' and explained how it helped to provide a 'dramatic sequence, [when] climbing up from the shore into the main group.'¹³⁰ However, the butterfly roof seen in Block D is one of the most unusual additions to the developments. A more common example of the pitched roofing Wheeler & Sproson used across their work was at Block A of the same phase, which consisted of six linked traditional tenement style blocks positioned at right angles to one another. These blocks were topped with a traditional pantile roof, which helped it to emulate the nearby 18th Century Pan Ha', as previously discussed.



Figure 6.36. The 'dramatic' Dysart Phase 1, Block D formed a bold junction between the town and the coast.

¹³⁰ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context', p. 112.

6.5. Conclusion

Over the course of twenty years, Wheeler & Sproson created two of Scotland's most interesting and extensive 'Modern-Vernacular' developments. This was largely done through a determination to protect and emulate the historic environment, whilst ensuring that the developments remained distinctly modern in appearance. By creating a diverse 'catalogue' of building types, materials, colours and roofing types, the practice was able to manipulate and arrange their modern additions in and around the existing buildings. This was done in a way that mitigated disruption to the environment yet resulted in something new and unique. By adopting Patrick Geddes' Conservative Surgery Approach, Wheeler & Sproson were able to retain a sense of the original settlements, through street layouts and key historical buildings, whilst updating and modernising the areas. The practice sought inspiration from many nineteenth and twentieth century architects and planners, such as Geddes, Sitte, Sharp, Gibberd and Matthew. However, it was Wheeler & Sproson's talent in combining these ideas into their own distinctive approach that led to the creation of two of the most significant developments of their kind. The following chapter will examine Wheeler & Sproson's place within Scottish post-war 'Modern-Vernacular' architecture and examine the achievements they gained across the Scottish housing awards of the time.

Chapter 7: Wheeler & Sproson's Significance within Scottish Post-war Architecture

7.1. Introduction

In 1997, Charles McKean declared that '...this Wheeler & Sproson style couldn't be mistaken for those of other architects' burgh redevelopments.'¹ Wheeler and McKean went on to discuss how each historic burgh redevelopment of the period was different, explaining that neither of their examples of Spence and Hurd's schemes at the Canongate or Lindsay's at Inverary fell 'exactly into the same category as [...] Dysart.'² Modernism was rich and varied in approach, with each architect adopting their own personal, regional, and nationally based methods. Now that we have explored the planning and architectural context in Chapter 1 and 2, the early years of the practice and their work at Burntisland and Dysart in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, and Wheeler and Sproson's methodology at Burntisland and Dysart in Chapter 6, we can now examine their work within the broader context of the period in which they operated. The following chapter will investigate how Wheeler & Sproson's work equated to those of similar practices working at the time Burntisland and Dysart were being built. It will then explore how consistent the approach of the practice was across its half-century of operation. To better understand the place Wheeler & Sproson took within this community of Modern-Vernacular practices, we will also examine the achievements of the practice within the Saltire Society and Civic Trust awards. Finally, to gain a full picture of this history of the practice, its evolution from

¹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context',' p. 113.

² Ibid.

the heyday of local authority housing work in the 1950s and 1960s to its closure in the mid-2000s will be examined.

7.2. Scottish 'Modern-Vernacular' Architecture

In his 1975 book *Scottish Townscapes*, Colin McWilliam branded Wheeler & Sproson's Burntisland redevelopment as 'adventurous and significant', arguing that the 'deliberate combination of new and old [was] for the first time successfully attempted.'³ Though this act of blending the modern and the vernacular had been attempted by other practices of the same era, such as at Basil Spence & Partners' 1950 development at Dunbar, McWilliam's view was that Wheeler & Sproson's purposeful combination of a sensitive modern-vernacular architectural style in their new buildings with the preservation of existing buildings went beyond what had been done before. Through the examination of how a variety of architectural practices of the period approached form, materials, conservative surgery and conservation within their developments, a better understanding of where Wheeler & Sproson sat within the context of Scottish architecture of the period can be achieved. Appendix 5 contains a map of some of the key modern-vernacular schemes in Scotland to be built between 1948 and 1979.

Use of Form

Across the 1950s and 1960s in Scotland, a growing number of architects became interested in developing their own take on modern-vernacular housing, spurred on by publications like *Building Scotland* and various related organisations. Partner at the practice from 1975, Bill

³ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 205.

McLeod spoke of how he was 'aware of there being a degree of 'cross pollinisation' between the practices of a similar standing, particularly in the residential field.'⁴ He was also conscious of 'Wheeler's involvement in such bodies as the Saltire Society, Civic Trust and the Scottish Housing Advisory Group' and how this 'bore testament' to these connections.⁵ Job lists of practices like Sinclair MacDonald & Son, Baxter Clark & Paul, Ian G Lindsay & Partners and James Parr and Partners contain examples of housing that modified traditional building forms and materials to create a modernised version of vernacular Scottish housing. Although these were built in a variety of layout configurations, this body of work primarily included steep mono-pitch roofs, pale sharp harling and large windows. Examples of this kind of building include the 1978 Commercial Street development in Perth by MacDonald J F Stephens of James Parr and Partners (see Figure 7.1), and Baxter Clark & Paul's Churchill Court Housing in Aberfeldy (see Figure 7.2). However, although there are several examples of Wheeler & Sproson jobs designed in this style (such as their 1956 Bowery area in Leslie or their 1962-65 Broxburn Redevelopment), Wheeler & Sproson are best known for taking their adaptation of modern and vernacular forms to a greater extreme.

⁴ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7.1. MacDonald J F Stephens of James Parr and Partners, Commercial Street Development, Perth, 1978.



Figure 7.2. Baxter Clark & Paul, Churchill Court Housing, Aberfeldy, 1964.

By the 1960s this approach of combining the traditional with the modern began to pick up traction, with developments such as Peter Womersley's Church Square in Galashiels, Moira and Moira's Heddel's Place in Lerwick, and Basil Spence & Partners' Canongate in Edinburgh taking shape. Like Wheeler & Sproson's earlier work in Burntisland and Dysart, these projects made attempts to create an architecture that was modern in its avoidance of pastiche yet indebted to the vernacular forms of the past. In particular, Spence's 1959-1969 Canongate (see

Figure 7.3) shared several similarities to Wheeler & Sproson's 1957-59 Dysart Phase 1 Block D (see Figure 7.4), with both developments consisting of low tenements segmented into bold angular sections with gable ends facing the street, juxtaposed with sections of traditional pends. In the rear area of the Canongate Redevelopment, a concrete access staircase can also be related to the similar one in Wheeler & Sproson's Burntisland Phase 1, with contrasting sharp angled concrete against a softer backdrop of rubble masonry and harling. Equally, Womersley's Church Square (see Figure 7.5) and Moira and Moira's Heddel's Place also blended modern and vernacular forms through combinations of blocky exteriors and pends in the case of Church Square and traditional pitched roofs with dramatic overhanging sections in the case of Heddel's Place. These early examples helped to spur on later work in the 1970s and 1980s across Scotland, such as Anderson Roland Wedgwood Associates' Lynedoch House in Edinburgh (see Figure 7.6). Designed to resemble collection of dramatic chamfered tower houses, Lynedoch House bears a strong resemblance to Wheeler & Sproson's West Leven Street housing in Burntisland (1972-73).



Figure 7.3. Presentation drawing of the Canongate development by Basil Spence & Partners (1959-69), dated 1965.

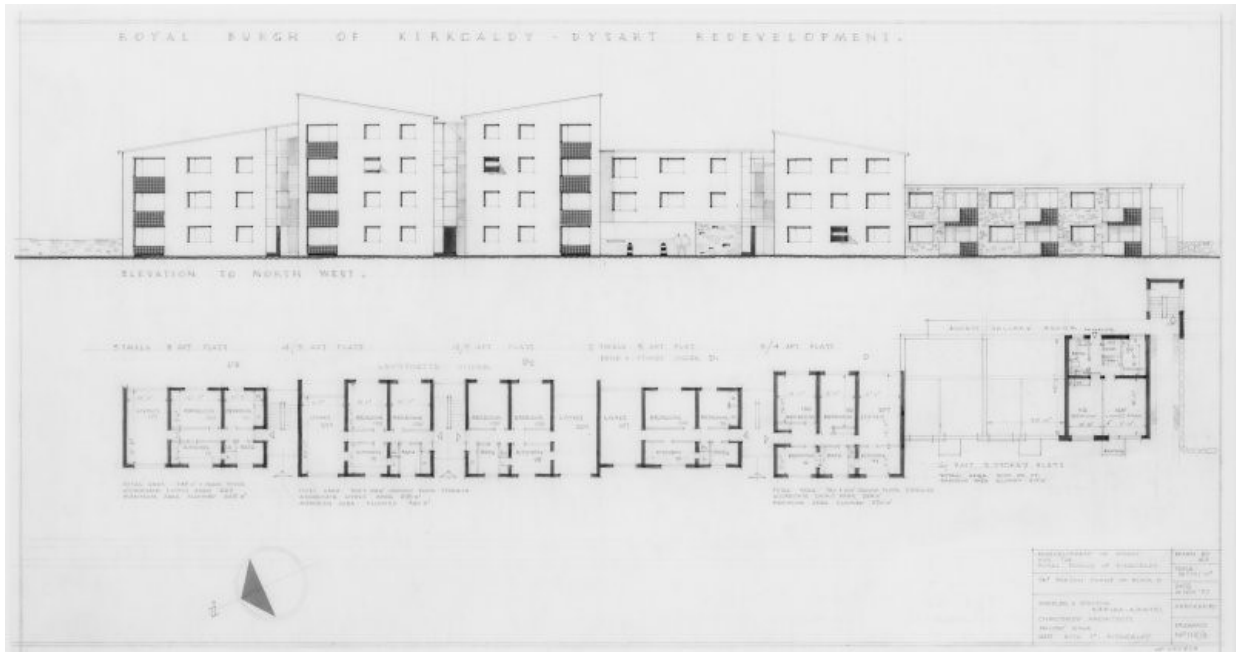


Figure 7.4. Plans and Elevations of Wheeler and Sproson’s 1957-1959 Dysart Phase 1, Block D, dated 16 November 1957.



Figure 7.5. Peter Womersley’s Galashiels Central Area Redevelopment Project site at Church Square, 1963.

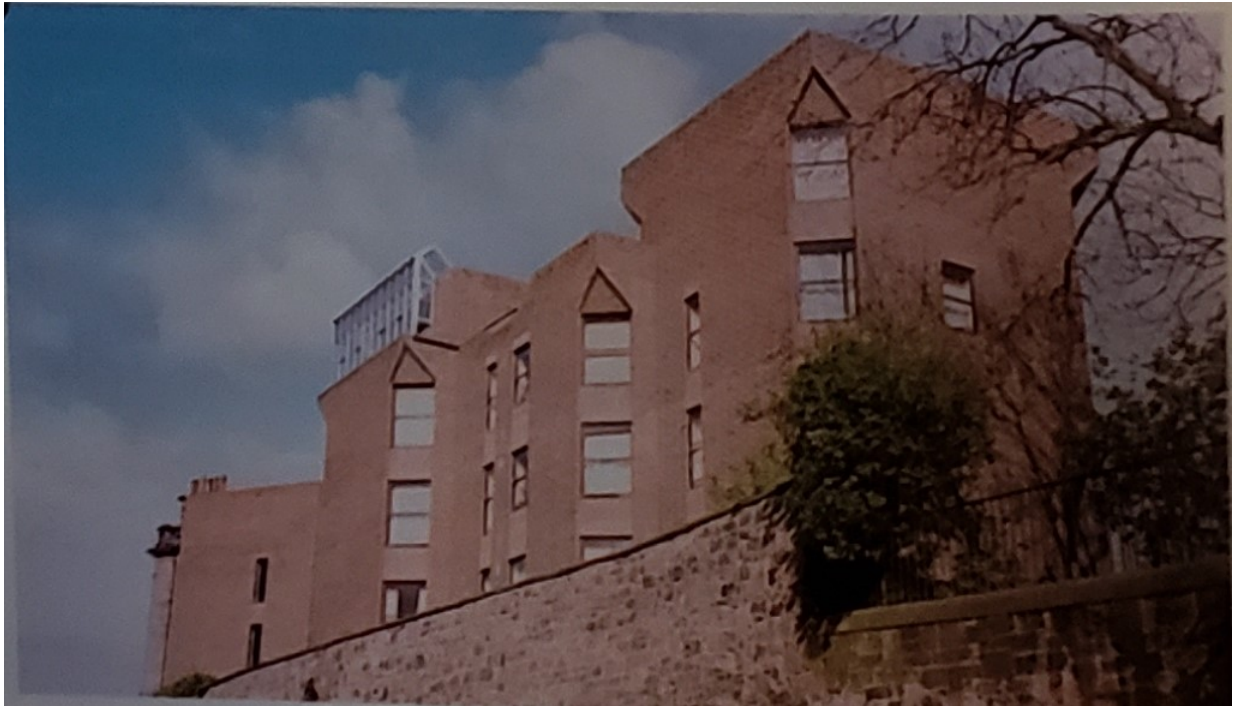


Figure 7.6. Lynedoch House Edinburgh by Anderson Roland Wedgwood Associates, 1979.

Use of Materials

As they had done with their use of form, the majority of the more sensitive Saltire Award winning architects of the era leaned towards the traditional in their use of materials.⁶ Practices like Sinclair Macdonald & Son and Baxter Clark & Paul almost universally utilised vernacular materials in their jobs. At Baxter Clark & Paul's 1977 Harbourlea development in Anstruther (see Figure 7.7), the practice maintained a simple palette of materials of primarily pantiles, harling, and plaster. In their Central Area Redevelopment in Thurso (1969-75), Sinclair Macdonald & Son used Caithness flagstones to tie their work to the surrounding environment and existing cultural heritage (see Figure 7.8).⁷ There are several instances throughout Wheeler & Sproson's career where similar limited palettes of traditional materials were used.

⁶ Petzsch, *Architecture in Scotland*, p. 129.

⁷ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 204.

In Fife pantiles were a significant cultural element that tied Wheeler & Sproson's buildings to the history and aesthetic of the region. Phase 3 Part 2 of Dysart is an example of such a scheme, where materials were kept largely traditional and to a minimum. However, the work that Wheeler & Sproson is best known for is where they made experimental and artistic use of materials. As discussed in Chapter 6, the practice regularly used large, glazed sections to connect more traditionally constructed blocks, integrated concrete staircases juxtaposed against a backdrop of rubble masonry, and incorporated shuttered concrete balconies into traditionally harled facades. Of the community of similarly sensitive architectural practices, Wheeler & Sproson were relatively unusual in this approach. In 1972, Wheeler commented that although of a high standard, the 1971 Saltire Awards 'lacked a regional awareness of architectural expression and that this problem seemed to arise through the use of concrete and its products.'⁸ This overuse of concrete was present in several of the winning schemes of that year, including those by Baxter, Clark & Paul and Moris & Steedman.

⁸ 'Saltire Housing Awards,' *Building Design*, vol. 127 (1972), p. 4.



Figure 7.7. Baxter, Clark & Paul's 1977 Harbourlea sheltered housing in Anstruther made use of timber, steelwork and harling to blend in with surrounding buildings.



Figure 7.8. Sinclair Macdonald & Son's Thurso Central Area Redevelopment made use of local Caithness Flagstones to connect their work to the surrounding historic architecture.

However, there are several examples of architects whose work more closely matched Wheeler & Sproson's balanced approach to material. Practices such as Basil Spence & Partners, Moira and Moira and Peter Womersley adopted a similar method of modern-vernacular material usage, but unlike Wheeler & Sproson, this approach was not a consistent feature in their work. While the Canongate was a clear example of this, Spence's other schemes tended to lean either towards the vernacular (such as his housing at Dunbar or Newhaven) or towards a heroic Corbusianism (Hutchesontown C Development or Claremont Court) in his use of materials. Likewise, Moira and Moira's Heddel's Park area Lerwick , 1959 (see Figure 7.9) and Womersley's Galashiels Central Area Redevelopment (1961-65) used a clear combination of modern and vernacular materials, which was out of the ordinary for their usual form of work.⁹ Womersley in particular was best known for the 'ferociously articulated facades' and 'sculptural form' seen at sites such as his 1963-5 Fairydean Stadium or his 1965-8 Nuffield Transplantation Surgery Unit, with his Galashiels housing an anomaly in his work (see Figure 7.10).¹⁰

⁹ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 602.

¹⁰ Glendinning (ed), *Rebuilding Scotland*, p. 36.



Figure 7.9. Moira and Moira Heddel's Park area Lerwick, 1959.



Figure 7.10. Peter Womersley, Nuffield Transplantation Surgery Unit, Edinburgh, 1965-8.

Use of Conservation

Another key feature of Wheeler & Sproson's work was their adoption of Conservative Surgery where possible in their work. Although this could not be achieved in all their jobs due to the varying geographical composition of sites, the practice appeared keen to follow this principle of retaining the best of the existing environment and replacing the rest where possible. Wheeler & Sproson were not alone in embracing this method, with several other practices such as Ian Lindsay & Partners, Robert Hurd & Partners and Sinclair Macdonald & Son known for taking on complex sites of mixed restoration and reconstruction. At Chessel's Court on Edinburgh's Canongate (1958-66), a blend of tenement preservation and new infill were achieved by Ian Begg for Robert Hurd & Partners, demonstrating how effectively the method could be adopted on a relatively small site (see Figure 7.11). Like Wheeler & Sproson, however, Sinclair Macdonald & Son tended to work on schemes that covered more complex sites spanning town centres and involved a greater number of historic buildings. In Thurso, their Central Area Redevelopment (1969-75) covered much of the northern portion of the town and centred on several key historic restorations, just as Wheeler & Sproson had done in Burntisland and Dysart (see Figure 7.12).¹¹

¹¹ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 204.



Figure 7.11. Chessel's Court, Edinburgh by Ian Begg for Robert Hurd & Partners, photograph taken 1995.



Figure 7.12. Sinclair Macdonald & Son's careful placement of new housing around the existing historic environment in Thurso, such as the Old St Peter's Church seen here.

While most of Wheeler & Sproson's restoration projects took place as part of broader schemes, as we have seen in Burntisland and Dysart, many were taken on as separate jobs. This includes the work the practice did for the National Trust for Scotland at The Gyles in Pittenweem and Rumford in Crail, but also individual jobs such as Rossend Castle in Burntisland in 1970 for the Links Housing Association (see Figure 7.13).¹² One Burntisland resident, Isa Duncanson, recalls the heated battle to save Rossend Castle. Her husband, a long-term advocate for the castle, noticed a bulldozer arriving one day so immediately called Wheeler & Sproson 'who'd always been fighting, wanting to keep the castle as well.'¹³ Fortunately '[they] stopped them knocking it down, but it was as near as that to being knocked down...'¹⁴ Wheeler's Scottish Civic Trust, National Trust for Scotland and Saltire Society backed proposal for restoration was supported by conservationist Ian Begg, and behind the scenes by Robert Matthew.¹⁵

Despite this clear interest in the restoration of historic properties though, Wheeler argued that he was never a 'diehard conservationist.'¹⁶ In his 1995 interview, Wheeler explained that there was 'an element of flux' in his work, with some restoration projects receiving harsher treatment than others.¹⁷ In particular, Wheeler mentioned how he 'wanted to take a storey off Kinmount' in Lockerbie in 1980. This approach was not uncommon, with Robert Hurd following the same approach in Culross several decades earlier, in 1954, 'at the house where Elgin lived' (see Figure 7.14).¹⁸

¹² Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

¹³ Sommerville (ed.), *Burntisland Voices*, p. 155.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, p. 1075.

¹⁶ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.



Figure 7.13. Rossend Castle was restored by Wheeler & Sproson in 1970 for the Links Housing Association.



Figure 7.14. Abbey House Culross 1953, showing the removal of the top storey by Robert Hurd & Partners.

However, this kind of method was far outweighed by projects which followed a more sensitive approach, similar to those done by Wheeler & Sproson at The Towers and The Anchorage in Dysart. Such restoration projects can be seen in several other modern-vernacular architectural

practices of the era. Ian G Lindsay & Partners, who were also involved in the Little Houses scheme for the National Trust for Scotland, were known for the slew of restoration projects they conducted across their career, including their 1964-68 restoration of New Lanark village (see Figure 7.15).¹⁹ Despite their invasive work at Abbey House, Robert Hurd & Partners were also specialists in the restoration of historic properties, with a focus on tenement restoration from early on in the history of the practice. Unlike for Wheeler & Sproson though, restoration work was the primary focus for such practices, with little of their work being dedicated to new construction.

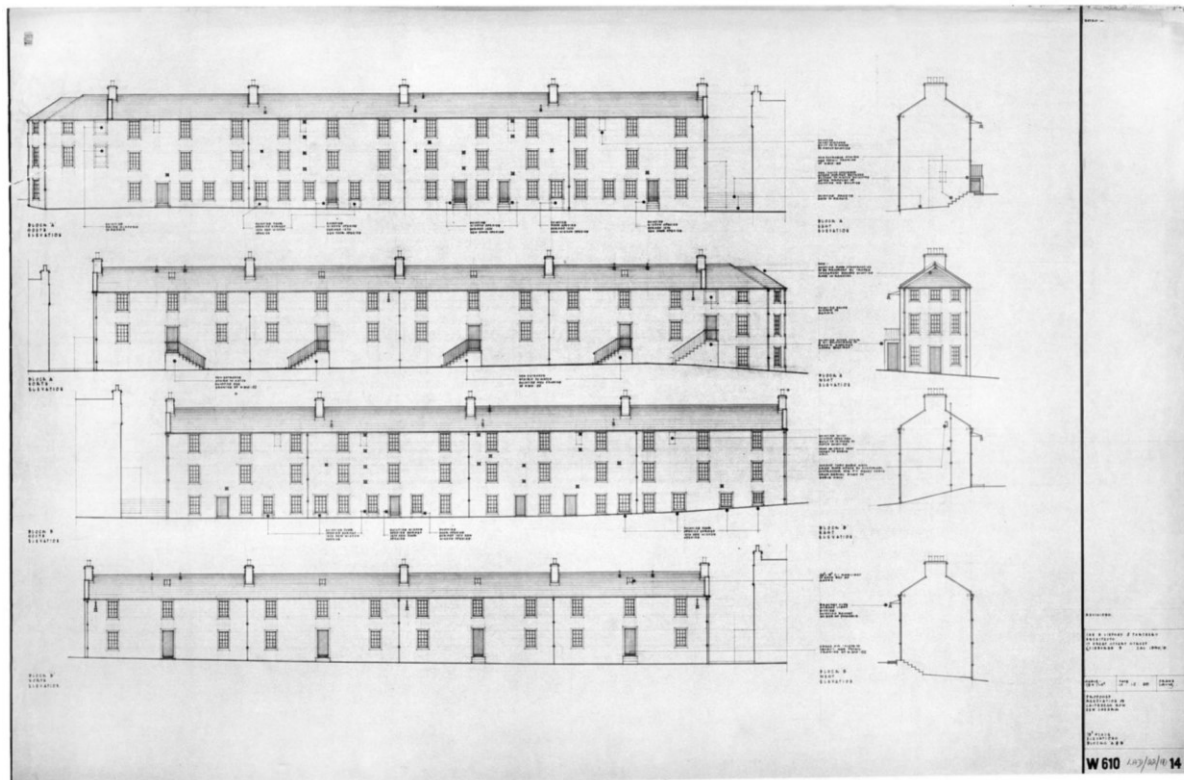


Figure 7.15. Drawing of Caithness Row Elevations by Ian G Lindsay, 1965.

¹⁹ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Ian G Lindsay & Partners (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=202412); L. Esher, *The Continuing Heritage: The Story of the Civic Trust Awards* (London, 1982), pp. 103-4.

In both the 1967 *Scottish Field* article and Wheeler's 1995 interview with Miles Glendinning, Wheeler expressed an admiration for the traditional tenement structure and a desire to fight local councillors for their retention.²⁰ There are several examples of 18th and 19th century tenements being preserved as part of the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects. Overall, 8 jobs were either dedicated to or included the restoration or reconstruction of tenements across the two developments in this period, the earliest job being the 1961-1962 restoration of the 19th century Leven Street East tenements in Burntisland.²¹ There had been campaigns for a revival of tenements as far back as Ebenezer MacRae's call for the retention of density and disapproval of suburban sprawl in Edinburgh in 1925.²²

However, the dedication Wheeler & Sproson put into the protection of tenements of this era can be viewed as a precursor to prominent work in that took place in this field just a decade later. In Glasgow, for example, a growing movement of tenement preservation developed in the early 1970s. This was spearheaded by ASSIST, a group of Strathclyde Architecture students who helped organise a participatory tenement improvement scheme in Govan from 1971, culminating in the recognition of tenements in 1974 Housing Act.²³ Although the work Wheeler & Sproson did in Burntisland and Dysart did not include the 'community' element adopted by ASSIST, the early tenement restoration work conducted by Wheeler & Sproson and others set a foundation for the practical and social understanding of tenement conservation that followed.

²⁰ 'Building a New Scotland', p. 30.

²¹ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

²² Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p .392.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 478.

The Siting of Developments

Whilst part of Wheeler & Sproson's aim for tenement restoration was to safeguard significant historic properties, it was also intended to benefit the visual cohesion of an existing area. The more existing buildings could be saved, the more the practice could reflect on them and create a sympathetic response. In new buildings, this was often done through echoing architectural form, such as the incorporation of chamfered corners or clipped gables, but it could also include using similar materials and layouts to buildings in the surrounding area. While Wheeler & Sproson specialised in this form of work, most of the architects discussed above also attempted to create architecture that was sympathetic to its surrounding. This was done on a varying scale between the traditional and the modern, but their work always took their surroundings into consideration to one degree or other.

This approach stood in contrast to many other historic burgh redevelopments of the time, including those that took place elsewhere within local authorities the practice worked for. The Links Street area of Kirkcaldy is one of the most notable of these, where huge areas of original housing were cleared to be replaced with three 8-storey tower blocks designed by national house builders, Wimpey.²⁴ This demonstrates the significance of intervention from architects such as Wheeler & Sproson in swaying the minds of Council members when it came to the partial protection of existing environments.

²⁴ *Tower Block*, Esplanade (<https://www.towerblock.eca.ed.ac.uk/development/esplanade>).

Successful examples of this include the multi-stage redevelopment of the Newhaven area of Edinburgh by Ian G Lindsay and Partners between 1960 and 1972 (see Figure 7.16), adjacent to Basil Spence & Partners' earlier 1950s redevelopment area.²⁵ Like Wheeler & Sproson's Burntisland and Dysart, Lindsay took the surrounding area into consideration in the design of his scheme. Combining restoration and reconstruction, Lindsay contrasted restored properties to the north of the Main Street with a long terrace of new housing to the south.²⁶ Despite this difference in form, he created a cohesion of design between the two halves of the scheme using matching harling, pantiles roofs, and cobbled driveways to the garages and fisherman's stores below the modern blocks (see Figure 7.17).



Figure 7.16. Newhaven Comprehensive Redevelopment Area by Ian G Lindsay & Partners, showing restoration work to the right.

²⁵ 'Newhaven Rebuilt,' *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 173, no. 2 (1981), pp. 62-63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 7.17. Newhaven Comprehensive Redevelopment Area by Ian G Lindsay & Partners, showing fisherman's stores built into the ground floor of the new flats.

In both Burntisland and Dysart, Wheeler & Sproson were able to demonstrate their ability to manage large central area redevelopments in 'urban' sites. This allowed them the opportunity to experiment with landscaping, layouts, positioning of public areas and relationships between new properties to existing historic buildings; effectively reshaping entire town centres. This became a trend for the practice, developing a reputation as a practice who specialised in this form of work. Most of their other town centre housing developments were large enough in scale to allow them to include some element of inventive layout and design, such as at Buckhaven, Kinghorn and Broxburn. While most developments in the modern-vernacular style by other architects of the era tended to be of a smaller scale, there are several examples of larger areas and multiphase schemes from this era. As discussed previously, Sinclair Macdonald & Son's Thurso scheme and Ian Lindsay & Partners' Newhaven scheme are good examples of this.

While the scale of Wheeler & Sproson's developments was one of the most notable features

of their business, the other was their dedication to one geographical area across the span of the practice's work. Much of the work the practice undertook was focused on East Central Scotland, with their work in the Fife region in particular amounting to 52% of their overall jobs.²⁷ This focus on one geographical region highlights the importance that local connection would have made for the practice, particularly through public sector bodies who were behind their most significant schemes.²⁸ This locally based approach was common amongst practices who began operation outside of the central belt. Prominent examples of this were Sinclair Macdonald & Son in Caithness, James Parr and Partners in Dundee, and Baxter, Clark & Paul along the East coast in Dundee, Angus and Aberdeenshire.²⁹ This stood in contrast to larger and more ambitious practices such as Basil Spence & Partners, Robert Hurd & Partners and Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall who took on jobs across Scotland and often beyond.

Wheeler & Sproson shared many similarities with other practices operating in a similar Modern-Vernacular approach. As we have seen, several other architects of the period were developing work that paralleled Wheeler & Sproson's use of form, such as Basil Spence & Partners and Moira & Moira. Similarly, a diverse use of materials was also used in works by Peter Womersley and Baxter, Clark & Paul. The conservation work conducted by Wheeler & Sproson also was matched by practices like Robert Hurd & Partners and Sinclair Macdonald & Son. However, what distinguishes Wheeler & Sproson was the way in which they combined these traits into one set of consistent principals that the practice followed across the span of its operations.

²⁷ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, pp. 203-210.

7.3. Wheeler & Sproson's 'Consistent, Long-Term Effort'

In 2010, Diane Watters described Wheeler & Sproson's work as a 'very consistent, long-term effort, spanning over a quarter of a century', acknowledging the dedication the practice had to their approach across the 50s, 60s and 70s.³⁰ She did, however, also note that although broadly consistent, their work did include 'detailed variations.'³¹ These variations occurred where certain phases or parts of their developments contained stylistically different elements, and can be grouped into four general trends. Although most of their work remained broadly consistent across Burntisland, Dysart and beyond, their early work tended to be more aesthetically traditional, their late 50s and 60s work stepped towards the modern, the 1970s witnessed a move to the picturesque, and their work culminated in a more postmodern response in the 80s and 90s.

'Detailed Variations' Across the Decades

As we have seen, the first projects completed by Wheeler & Sproson in the mid-1950s were their housing developments at The Bowery in Leslie, and their Somerville Street/High Street development in Burntisland. These two jobs represent the first tentative steps towards their signature modern-vernacular style that the practice took in this era. The developments were both enclosed and inward-looking sites, using muted colours and including elements of traditionalist form and material. In particular, the areas of the developments dedicated to housing stand out as the most typically traditional, with sections of artificial stone cladding used to create a rustic effect (see Figure 7.18). The Somerville Street/High Street site did,

³⁰ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 33-48.

³¹ Ibid.

however, include sections where attempts were made to introduce more modern elements. Most notably, the concrete staircase and bridge on the Somerville Street flats, seen in Chapter 6, marks Wheeler & Sproson's first move towards the modern.



Figure 7.18. Wheeler & Sproson's 'The Bowery' in Leslie, with rusticated porches, built 1952-1955.

By the late 1950s, the practice had begun to experiment more ambitiously with form. The bold roofline of Dysart's Phase 1, Block D, and the 'zigzag' flats seen in Burntisland and Dysart were some of the most prominent examples of this, designed between 1957 and 1960. These sculptural forms were some of the most extreme moves towards modernism conducted by the practice in its housing projects. A similar enclosed variation of the 'zig-zag' blocks was used again by the practice in the early 1960s at their development at Broxburn, West Lothian (see Figure 7.19).



Figure 7.19. Wheeler and Sproson's Broxburn redevelopment project (1962-1969), showing a slightly altered use of their 'zig-zag' blocks.

As Bill McLeod argued, 'design work carried on by the Kirkcaldy office took certain of the elements forward', listing the housing at Langlee in Galashiels as an example of this. Figure 7.20 shows the 'Type G' blocks used at Langlee, between 1964 and 1977.³² These flats were an evolution of the individual towers designed for Dysart's Phase 2 between 1961 and 1964, and closely resemble the structure proposed for Dysart's Phase 3 – Part 2, Block 10, which was never completed. As with Langlee, sites such as Grangemouth and St Monans also used similar towers like those seen at Dysart to similar effect. These towers, though a clear reflection of traditional tower houses, were unusual in structure and through connection sections, balconies, and occasional flat roofs, were able to act as focal points within the developments. The work Wheeler & Sproson did in this era stands out as the boldest step towards the most

³² Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

sculpturally modern work the practice did, with a move back towards the vernacular taking place by the end of the 1960s.

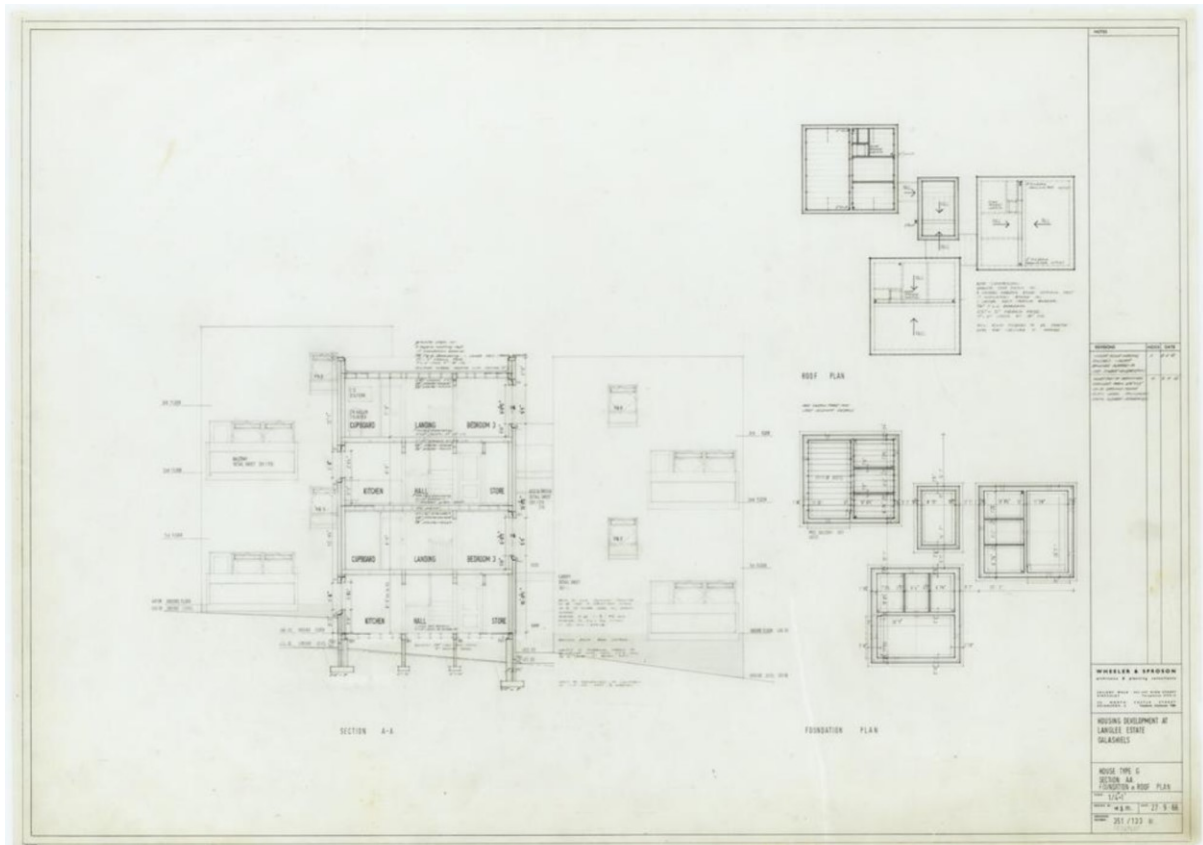


Figure 7.20. Type 'G' flats at Langlee, Galashiels. Composed of a cluster of four storey towers linked by a central stairwell. Drawing dated 27 September 1966.

This shift moved the practice towards the picturesque, where a greater use of saturated colours, curved pends, and chamfered corners beginning to become features of their work. The most significant example of this period is Dysart Phase 3 Part 1, where the use of deep red harling, chamfered corners and a unique four storey tower with a pyramid roof not seen elsewhere in Dysart stood out. This kind of work was also notably seen at the 1973 North of Kerse Road site in Grangemouth (see Figure 7.21), where an unusual, hipped roof structure was employed to punctuate a terrace of traditional housing. By the early to mid-70s Wheeler & Sproson's work they had morphed closer to what would become postmodernism, with these

examples being the most prominent steps towards this. Most significantly, the Dysart project contained two examples of early Scottish postmodernism. The reconstruction of 43-7 High street in 1971-2 and the small tower of Dysart's Phase 3 – Part 1, Block 5 mentioned above, with its exaggerated pyramidal roof and two-tone colouration, are examples of this.³³



Figure 7.21. Wheeler and Sproson, North of Kerse Road Grangemouth.

By the 1980s the practice further developed this stylistic shift, potentially driven by new staff members, changing fashions or demands of clients. The period between 1980 and 2003 was particularly distinguished by the large number of contracts for the Lothian Health Board and several medical practices, with 49 such jobs completed between these dates.³⁴ Notable examples of this were at the 1985-89 Eyre Crescent surgery and housing (see Figure 7.22), and

³³ D. Watters, 'Scotland's Postmodern Architecture,' *Historic Environment Scotland Blog* (<https://blog.historicenvironment.scot/2020/05/scotlands-postmodern-architecture>).

³⁴ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

at the 1993-4 Springwell House (see Figure 7.23), both in Edinburgh.³⁵ These sites demonstrate the ways in which Wheeler & Sproson responded to Edinburgh's architecture across this period, developing a more exaggerated use of form when compared to their 1970s work. At Eyre Crescent, the pyramidal roof of the surgery was used to reflect the symmetrically positioned triangular features on the housing section of the development and respond to the symmetry of the crescent itself. Equally, Wheeler & Sproson reflected upon Edinburgh's architecture more broadly through the use of a variety of shapes and roof structures which created visual drama at their 1993-4 Springwell House, with circular motifs within the entrance gate used to contrast the adjacent portico.



Figure 7.22. Wheeler and Sproson, Eyre Crescent surgery and housing, 1985-1989.

³⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7.23. Wheeler and Sproson, Springwell House, Ardmillan Terrace, Edinburgh, 1993-94.

Adapting Their Approach to Different Settings

Despite these minor shifts, the core principles of the practice of attempting to blend into the existing surroundings whilst continuing to include a modern spin remained consistent throughout the history of the practice. In a 1982 statement in the *Scottish Review*, Charles McKean argued that Scottish towns and cities had begun to lose their sense of ‘urban monumentality’, caused by the ‘Neukery...a transitory, neo-vernacular fishing-village imagery’ which had ‘now started to invade our major cities.’³⁶ While this very fishing village imagery was the basis of Wheeler & Sproson early career, it is clear that when faced with differing environments and building types, they were able to adapt their approach whilst continuing to create architecture that was sensitive to its surroundings. As Bill McLeod put it, ‘the original design process based on the ‘Fife’ housing principles remained in place for work of that nature,

³⁶ MacKechnie, et al., *Building a Nation*, pp. 115-116.

but as new types of projects evolved, the basic design philosophy naturally changed to reflect the varying functions of these buildings.³⁷

This can be seen most clearly by examining two of the projects Wheeler & Sproson designed outside of Fife. Within the context of Edinburgh, the 1968-76 Hunter Building development for Edinburgh College of Art demonstrates Wheeler & Sproson's ability to adapt their sensitive approach to different environments.³⁸ At the Hunter Building, Wheeler & Sproson played with the relationship between his new addition to the College and the Main Building behind, using a bold red-sandstone façade to turn the imagery and composition of the classical building on its head. As an extension of an existing college, Wheeler & Sproson experimented with their response to the earlier Classical Main Building using a projecting top floor with slots that reinterpret the cornice and triglyphs, a recessed entrance to mirror the Main Building's projecting portico, and 'small slot window rooms [...] to counter noise from the proposed dual carriageway' below (see Figure 7.24).³⁹



Figure 7.24. Wheeler & Sproson's Hunter Building for Edinburgh College of Art, 1968-1976.

³⁷ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

³⁸ C. Richards, 'Work of Art,' *Building Design*, vol. 416 (1978), p. 19.

³⁹ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

Similarly, when faced with an open expanse without existing architecture to respond to, Wheeler & Sproson opted to add their own sense of monumentality to the area. This can be seen at Grangemouth but is best exemplified by their Abronhill Development in Cumbernauld (see Figure 7.25), where an imposing axial pedestrian boulevard was formed, flanked by four-storey terraces on either side and terminated with a set of towers framing a pedestrian bridge. In both of these developments, it is clear that the practice sought to create architecture that was appropriate to its surroundings, with a sympathetic approach for the Hunter Building in within Edinburgh's historic city centre, and a dramatic axial canyon in Abronhill to counter the open forest to the north.



Figure 7.25. Wheeler and Sproson, Abronhill 4 Development in Cumbernauld, built between 1965-70.

This monumental use of the long slab of tenement-like housing at Abronhill is something that can be seen across several of Wheeler & Sproson's developments.⁴⁰ This use of monumentality is likely to have derived from Wheeler's Beaux Arts training and remained a consistent staple of the practice's work throughout its history. As we have seen with Dysart in Chapter 6, the large slab blocks were simultaneously used to create a backdrop to the sculptural towers, whilst also turning Fitzroy Square into a dramatic 'large hole.'⁴¹ This method of 'monumentality' was used across many of their sites, such as Buckhaven and Grangemouth, but can be seen best at Langlee, where a colossal 300m long wall of 5-storey flats was used to create a bold backdrop to the cluster of small towers and courtyard housing spread out on the hill below (see Figure 7.26). In each of these sites, these large blocks allowed the practice to introduce a sense of drama, whilst remaining sensitive to the scale and unique features of their surroundings. In Dysart and Burtisland the slabs were kept quite short and used to frame squares, while in more open greenfield or clearance sites such as Langlee, Grangemouth and Buckhaven much larger stretches were used to form grand tenemental walls.

⁴⁰ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 458.

⁴¹ McKean, 'The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in 'Context'', p. 115.



Figure 7.26. Wall of Tenements at Wheeler & Sproson’s Langlee development.

Another area in which Wheeler & Sproson were consistent in their approach was their ability to blend the modern with the vernacular. Although for Wheeler & Sproson the term ‘vernacular’ referred best to the domestic, functional architecture of the Fife region, over the course of 50 years the practice were able to adapt this initial style to include all forms of existing historic architecture in the areas surrounding their sites. This could include anything from the neo-classical, as seen in many of their Edinburgh developments, to the Victorian, as seen in parts of Grangemouth. With each of these architectural styles, the practice made attempts to develop an architecture that was sympathetic, whilst remaining unmistakably modern.

Despite this consistency of approach in their housing, educational and healthcare work, there were several development types that did not adhere to these methods. These are likely to have occurred where costs were being kept to a minimum, where a client requested a different aesthetic, where the type and location of the project demanded a different approach, or where the practice were simply not as interested in investing as much time for design work. This

generally occurred in their industrial and retail work and can be seen at their 1960s Rejects department store in Kirkcaldy (see Figure 7.27), where a simplified warehouse form was created with minimum detailing and poor-quality materials.⁴² Their expansion of the Hillend Industrial Estate in Dalgety Bay from 1968 to 1976 is also noteworthy.⁴³ Most of these cases this occurred when the practice ventured outwith their comfort zone of public sector housing, education, and healthcare, where they were more likely to be committed to overall the aesthetic outcome.



Figure 7.27. Rejects Department Store in Kirkcaldy, designed by Wheeler & Sproson.

While Wheeler & Sproson were not unique in their creation of architecture that simultaneously represented the modern and the vernacular, they combined elements that other architects were doing to develop their own individual style. Despite small variations in their approach, throughout the 50-year lifespan of the practice, they used their dedication to their aesthetic to become one of the most influential architectural practices of their kind. Wheeler & Sproson

⁴² Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

⁴³ Ibid.

had one of the largest outputs of any architectural practice doing similar work, something which was reflected in their ultimate dominance of the awards dedicated to this form of work.

7.4. Wheeler & Sproson's Awards

Across almost 50 years that Wheeler & Sproson were active, they were successful in gaining the attention and respect of critics from a range of sources, from local newspapers through to national architectural journals.⁴⁴ As one of the trailblazing architects of the post-war conservation movement in Scotland, jobs for organisations like the National Trust for Scotland helped to bring the practice to the attention of the national media and fortified their reputations as capable of handling work in sensitive historic environments. The high regard the press and contemporaries alike had for Wheeler & Sproson was matched by their awards successes. Between 1956 and 2003, Wheeler & Sproson won 39 Civic Trust and Saltire Society Housing Design Awards and Commendations (see Appendix 6 for a map and table of these awards). Of these awards, 4 were dedicated to various phases of the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, while Dysart Redevelopment Project proved to be the most successful of their projects, winning 8 awards and commendations in total (Figure 7.28).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ 'Building a New Scotland', p. 30.

⁴⁵ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design; Civic Trust Awards, Schemes in Scotland* (<https://www.civictrustawards.org.uk/benet/region/Scotland>).



Figure 7.28. Plaque embedded on the street-facing wall of Dysart Phase 1 Block D, highlighting its 1960 'Commendation for Good Design by the Saltire Society.'

Remarkably, Wheeler & Sproson won more Saltire Society Housing Design awards and commendations than any other architectural practice in the twentieth century, beating Baxter Clark & Paul by two.⁴⁶ Similarly, Wheeler & Sproson also won more Civic Trust Awards than any other major Scottish architectural practice in the twentieth century who were also recipients of Saltire Society Housing Awards.⁴⁷ While Wheeler & Sproson were successful in achieving 6 awards and 7 commendations, the closest of their peers in the Saltire Society to receive Civic Trust awards was Robert Hurd with 2 awards and 1 commendation.⁴⁸ This demonstrates the high regard that these awards bodies had for Wheeler & Sproson and their work within the field of housing in Scotland.

⁴⁶ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁴⁷ Ibid; Esher, *The continuing heritage*, pp. 103-104.

⁴⁸ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

According to Lionel Esher, only four architectural awards existed in the 1950s that were recognised by the RIBA, with only three of these solely for housing.⁴⁹ The Saltire Society Housing Design Awards and the Civic Trust Awards were two of these and offered built environment awards of the 1950s onwards. The Saltire Society Housing Awards were first brought about in 1937 as a means of improving the standard and design quality of housing across Scotland at a time of often poor living conditions.⁵⁰ Unlike the Saltire Society, the Civic Trust Awards catered to a much larger remit, with entries covering the span of the United Kingdom, as opposed to Scotland alone.⁵¹

The Civic Trust Awards began in 1959 as an independent built environment awards scheme for projects that delivered a positive environmental, social, cultural and economic benefit to the areas in and around the entries.⁵² The Civic Trust was also interested in examining all forms of architecture and urban design, so long as they helped to enhance the quality of life for local areas.⁵³ Although the Saltire Awards were much coveted by architects across Scotland and drew entries from many of the leading practices at the time, winning a Civic Trust Award was likely viewed as an impressive feat given the triennial basis in which they operated. From 1959 until 1974, the Civic Trust awards alternated from 'the Counties, then the County Boroughs, for the third year in the London County Council area, then back to the beginning again.'⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

⁵⁰ J. Deffenbaugh, 'Test of Time: 70 years of the Saltire Housing Award,' *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 226, no. 8 (2007), p. 46.

⁵¹ Esher, *The Continuing Heritage*, p. 22.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Breakdown of Awards

Of the 39 awards won by the practice across its lifespan, thirteen were Civic Trust Awards and twenty-six Saltire Society Awards. Burntisland and Dysart proved to be especially successful projects for the practice, winning 12 of these awards collectively.⁵⁵ As demonstrated in Figure 7.29, the practice achieved a greater number of awards than they did commendations. However, to fully understand the significance of these awards to the practice, it is first important to assess their type and geographical distribution. Of the 39 awards, the vast majority were for developments based in Fife, with 35 in Fife, 1 in Clackmannanshire, 1 in Falkirk, 1 in North Lanarkshire and 1 in West Lothian.⁵⁶

This initially appears to be a staggering number of Fife based awards for a practice that worked on an almost even split of Fife based and non-Fife based jobs across its lifespan (677 in Fife, 624 outside of Fife and 127 unknown).⁵⁷ However, when comparing Figure 7.30 (Awards Success 1956 to 2003) with Figure 7.31 (Wheeler & Sproson Jobs by location) it is clear that the peak of their awards successes coincided with the period from the 1950s to the 1970s when Fife was the primary geographical focus for the practice. This Fife based focus of their work in the early decades is not surprising, as the main office for the practice was based in Kirkcaldy at the time and most of their local authority connections were in the surrounding region. It was during this heyday for the practice that their larger developments such as Burntisland and Dysart dominated the workload.

⁵⁵ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design; Civic Trust Awards, Schemes in Scotland*

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

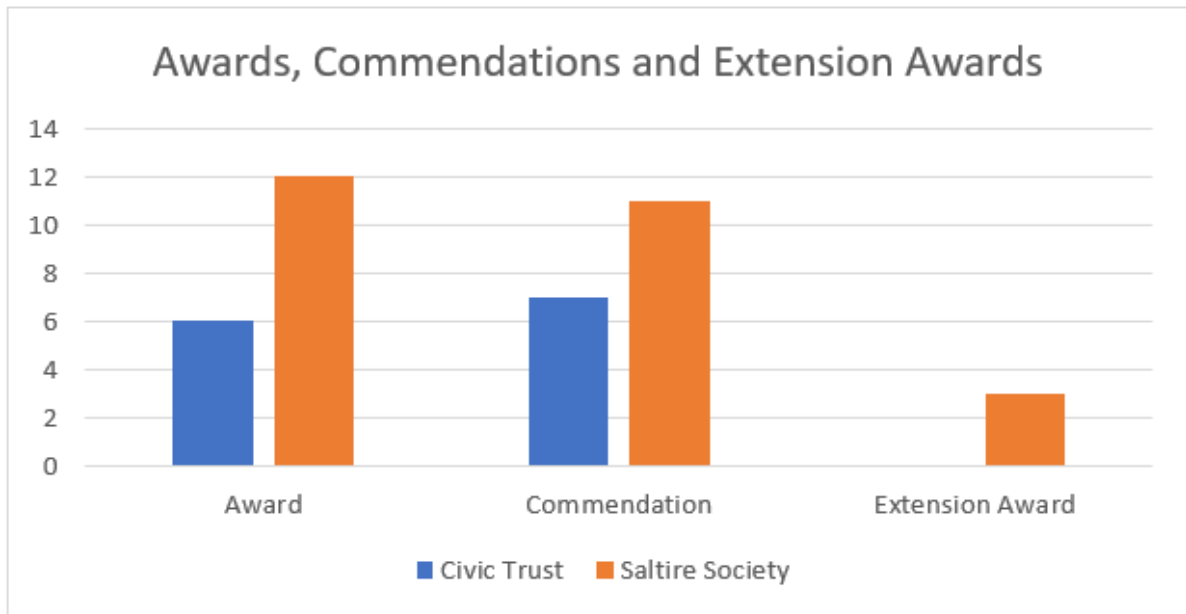


Figure 7.29. Quantity and origin of awards, extension awards and commendations achieved by Wheeler & Sproson across the lifespan of the practice.⁵⁸

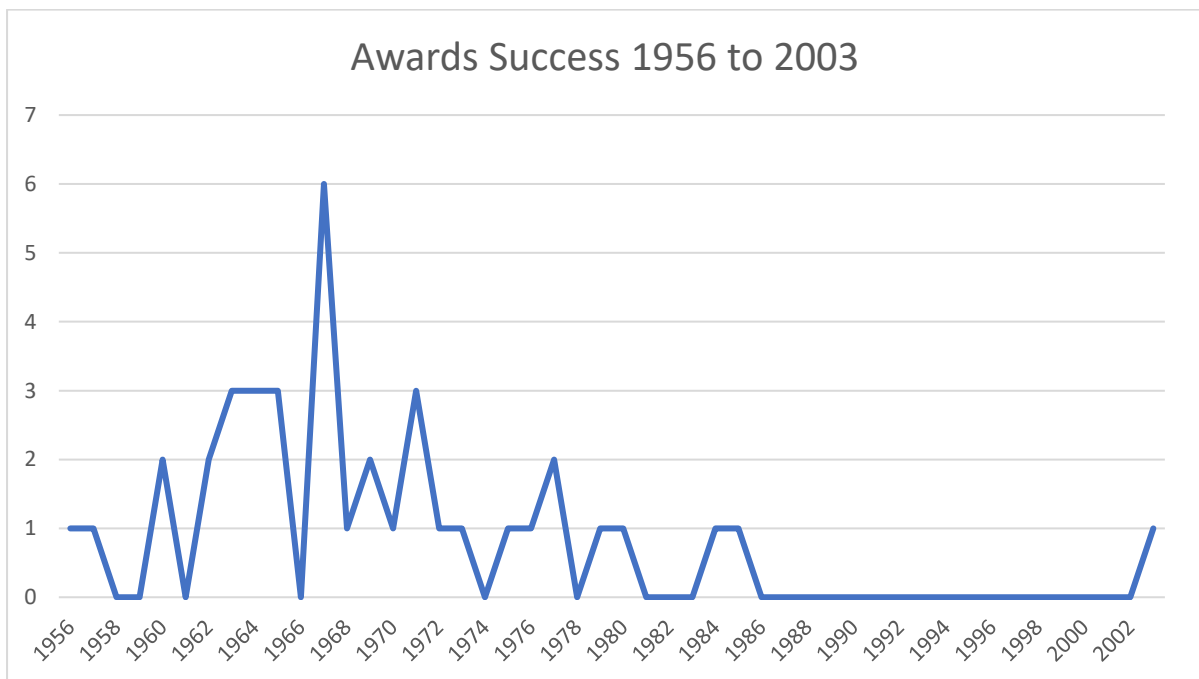


Figure 7.30. Wheeler & Sproson awards successes 1956-2003, including all Saltire Society and Civic Trust awards and commendations.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List'; Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁵⁹ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List'; Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

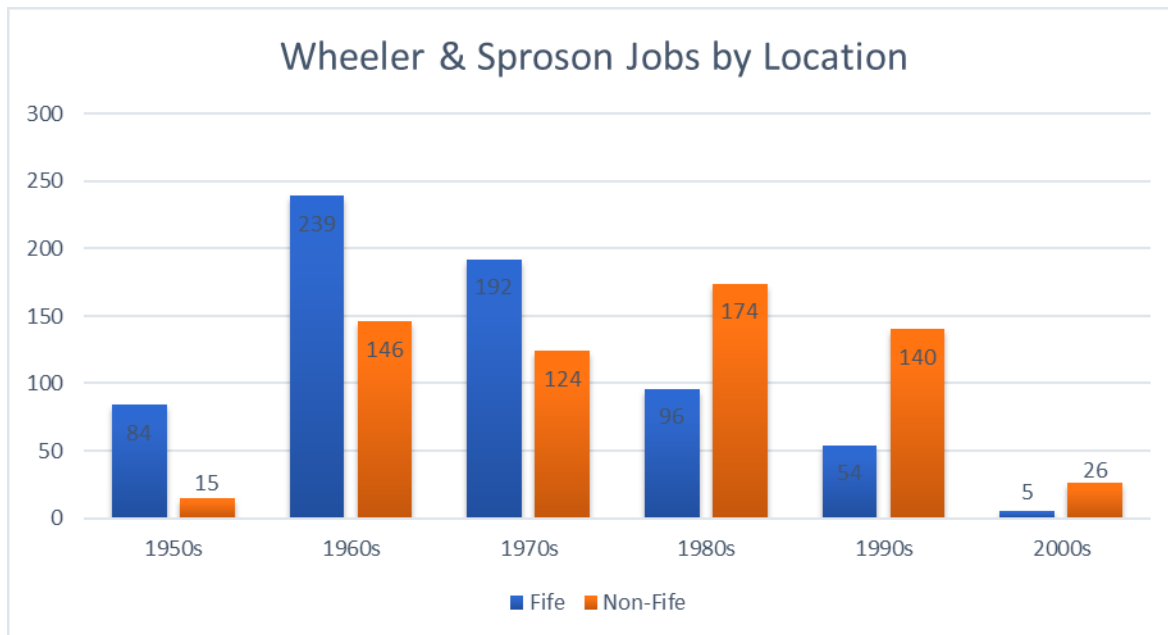


Figure 7.31. Wheeler & Sproson distribution of jobs between Fife and outwith Fife by decade, 1950s to 2000s.⁶⁰

There are several other key trends that are noteworthy within Wheeler & Sproson’s awards wins, such as the dominance of housing wins, their situation within existing urban cores, and the multi-phase nature of the winning schemes. Out of the 39 awards and commendations received by the practice, most of their successes (62%) stemmed from their work on large multiphase redevelopment projects, as opposed to work on individual buildings. These successes primarily centred on their large and long spanning projects of the 1960s and 1970s which followed their urban ensemble planning approach, in Burntisland, Dysart, Buckhaven and Lochgelly. Dysart came out as most successful of these, with 2 awards, 5 commendations and 1 extension award.⁶¹ These large developments differed from their individual buildings, as the multiphase redevelopment areas made best use of Wheeler and Sproson’s education and training by combining large numbers of housing units with elements of planning and

⁶⁰ Wheeler & Sproson, ‘Job List.

⁶¹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

management of the public realm. This emphasis of awards for the larger-scale developments helped to bolster their reputation as specialists in multiphase redevelopment schemes.

Similarly, in line with Wheeler & Sproson's reputation, the practice was most successful in achieving awards and commendations for projects relating to the historic environment, whether it be restoration projects on historic properties or modern developments within a historic setting. Of the 39 awards, 15 were for purely modern developments, whereas 21 were for developments with involving the historic environment.⁶² This includes restoration, reconstruction, modern development within and relating to the surrounding historic environment and one Townscape Heritage Initiative. Figure 7.32 shows that jobs based within the historic environment were most successful at achieving awards and commendations when compared with solely modern developments.⁶³ This recognition for Wheeler & Sproson's work highlights the significance of their place-sensitive, conservative surgery-based work in historic burghs and their dominance as a leading restoration practice in Fife. Burntisland and Dysart both obtained a combination of awards for restoration, reconstruction, and modern development within an existing historic setting, and are key examples of the type of development that brought the practice success from the awards bodies.

⁶² Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List'; Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁶³ Developments that were built on largely greenfield land away from existing settlements.

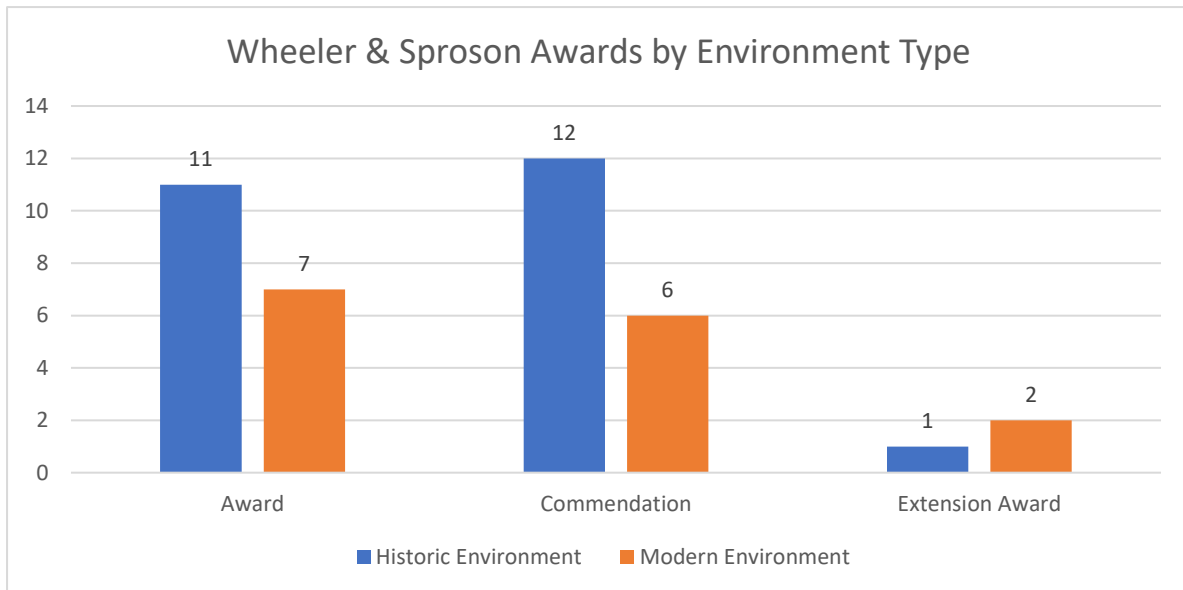


Figure 7.32. Distribution of award category by type of environment, demonstrating the dominance of historic environment work in achieving awards success.⁶⁴

The most significant aspect of the awards that Wheeler & Sproson won, however, was the dominance of their housing work. Out of the awards and commendations, 87.12% were for housing projects.⁶⁵ This is surprising considering just 43% of Wheeler & Sproson's overall jobs were dedicated to the creation of homes (see Figure 7.33).⁶⁶ While this can be partially explained by the Saltire Society Awards being devoted to housing at the time, 13 of their awards were delivered by the Civic Trust Awards which had no specific focus on housing alone. This is significant, as not only were Wheeler & Sproson's housing developments seen as particularly noteworthy by the Civic Trust compared to their other work, but to win a Civic Trust Award also required competing against entries from across the whole of the United Kingdom. This made the Civic Trust awards and commendations that Wheeler & Sproson won particularly valuable.

⁶⁴ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List'; Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁶⁵ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁶⁶ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

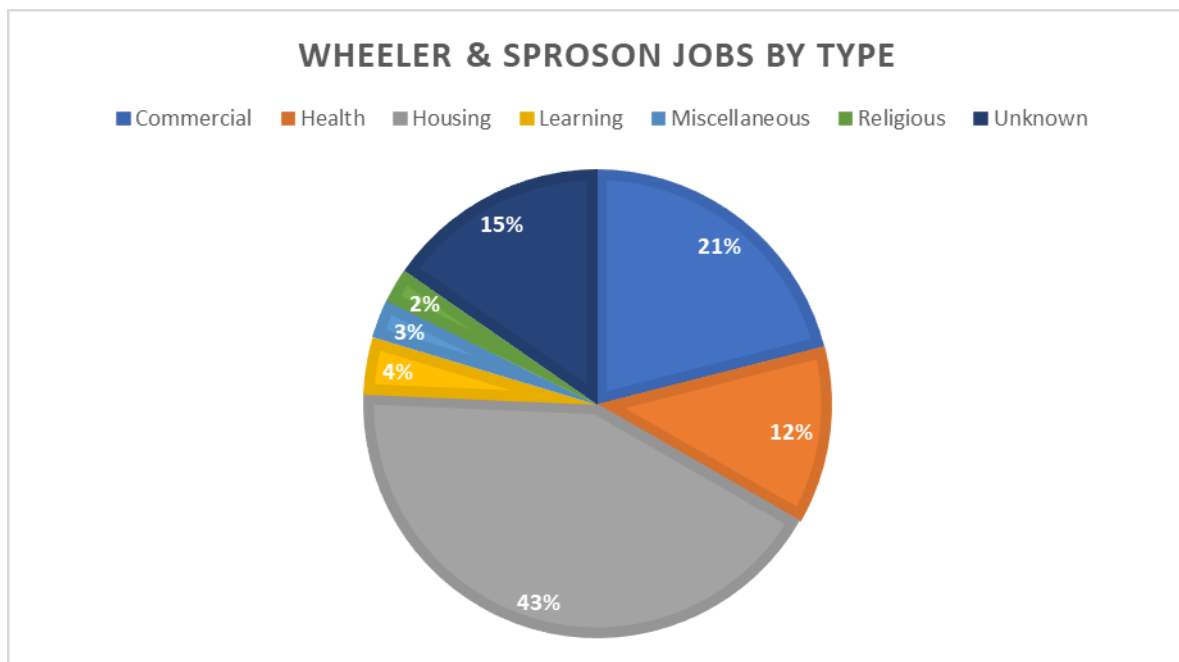


Figure 7.33. Division of Wheeler & Sproson overall jobs by type, showing the focus the practice had on delivering housing. The miscellaneous category includes any building whose type does not fit into the other defined categories, and Unknown refers to jobs where information on what the type of work was is unclear within the database.⁶⁷

Wheeler & Sproson were particularly recognised for their multi-phase housing projects in existing urban settings. Being representative of this specific form of the practice’s work, Burntisland and Dysart are key examples of what made Wheeler & Sproson successful in winning awards and bolstering their reputation as architects capable of handling modern projects within the historic environment. Dysart proved to be Wheeler & Sproson’s most successful development in terms of awards. While their redevelopment projects in Burntisland, Buckhaven and Lochgelly achieved an impressive 4 awards each, it was Dysart that stood out with 8 awards in total.⁶⁸ Four out of the five phases of the Dysart Redevelopment Project were in receipt of awards. This included Phase 1, Phase 2, The Towers, The Anchorage and Phase 3 Part 1.⁶⁹ Several of these phases achieved awards from both the Saltire Society and the Civic

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 33-48.

⁶⁹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

Trust. The only phase not in receipt of an award was the final stage, Phase 3 Part 2, which was situated further away from the historic core of the settlement than the other phases and was less innovative in its design.

The Objective of the Awards

There are several factors that the Saltire Society in the Civic Trust were looking for when deciding who to award. As we saw in chapter 2, Robert Hurd wanted the Saltire Society to reward developments that adhered to his particular vision of the Scottish environment and design traditions.⁷⁰ One example of work that the Society awarded for this were those that focused on the inner city as opposed to the expansion of suburbia which was prevalent at the time.⁷¹ They were also keen on architectural practises preserving frontages within the historic environment; activating the street and creating a unique sense of neighbourhood in historic settings.⁷² The juxtaposition of ordinary dwellings historic buildings and heritage within a proposed development was also sought after when applications were considered.⁷³ What they wanted to avoid were grey houses in repetitive developments and areas with roads of a constant width.⁷⁴ Features such as this were seen by the awards bodies as unauthentic and unnatural.

However, the focus of awards bodies adapted and shifted over the decades of the 20th century to reflect changes in government policy and broader culture. In particular, the changing approaches in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s are most interesting when considering

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Lewis, 'Past and Future: The Last Seventy Years of the Saltire Housing Awards.'

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

why Wheeler & Sproson were so successful at the time. There are several elements of Wheeler & Sproson's designs that helped them to comply with the vision the judges on the Saltire Society and Civic Trust panels had for contemporary design in the United Kingdom. By examining each decade up until the 1970s through the lens of Wheeler & Sproson's most successful developments, we can begin to understand how the practice were able to reflect the values of the Saltire Society and Civic Trust Awards.

A frequent feature of 1950s Saltire Awards and 1960s Civic Trust Awards was the restoration of historic towns with infill housing. The awards bodies worked to select developments which made use of colour, grouping of homes and materials to create interest and sense of space.⁷⁵ They approved of traditional form and traditional materials to preserve character of the area. As Lionel Esher put it, out of the whole of the UK, 'undoubtedly the most extensive and satisfying re-creation of a vernacular tradition is in lowland Scotland.'⁷⁶ These traditional features, such as external stair access balcony access and pends, were prominent within awards during this period, such as in Basil Spence & Partners' Saltire award winning harbour development at Dunbar.⁷⁷ Wheeler & Sproson's 1956 award for their housing development at the Bowery in Leslie is a key example of this form of architecture. In 1957 Hurd praised the Bowery viewing it as:

'...significant, particularly as a new development much more closely and skilfully integrated into the fabric of an old burgh than is common in new housing; for its

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Esher, *The continuing heritage*, p. 44.

⁷⁷ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

intimate closely-knit character, and for its intelligent domestic planning. It is an honest attempt to develop the Scottish tradition.’⁷⁸

The development was a good illustration of the aspirations of Saltire Society awards at the time as it was a modern development of national tradition, it was sensitive to the area and recognised the lie of land.⁷⁹ They managed to persuade the local authority to invest in good housing design and that they were able to be more innovative with their approach to housing. A comparatively higher density also allowed the development to have a more urban character suitable to historic burgh. Hurd saw The Bowrey as a ‘courageous and intelligent attempt at good modern architecture in Scotland.’⁸⁰ This approach was consistent in Wheeler & Sproson’s work at the time, with their flats at Cartmore Road in Lochgelly receiving the 1957 Saltire Society Award. Wheeler described these as ‘compactly planned to create a truly urban not suburban core.’⁸¹

Ideas of openness and community dominated both successful Saltire Awards entries and Civic Trust Awards in to the 1960s, with concepts such as open landscaping, traffic segregation and pedestrianised car free areas key staples of the period.⁸² This type of urban environment work can be seen best through the Dysart Redevelopment Project. Wheeler & Sproson’s efforts in Dysart in the 1960s won them 6 awards for Phase 1, The Anchorage, The Towers and Phase 2. Dysart encapsulated the concept of a ‘modern development of a national tradition.’⁸³ The Saltire Society particularly approved of the sea views and prominence of Phase 1, and the

⁷⁸ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

⁷⁹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*

⁸⁰ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Esher, *The continuing heritage*, p. 22.

⁸³ Begg and Lewis, ‘Saltire at 70: Building Scotland.’

‘tower house’ influence, castellated wall-heads and round staircases in Phase 2.⁸⁴ The infill nature of the development complied with the Saltire Society’s visions and resulted in Dysart’s status as Wheeler & Sproson’s most awarded development.

Like most Saltire Awards in the 60s, Wheeler & Sproson’s housing developments, such as Dysart, make use of traditional construction methods.⁸⁵ However, what made Dysart so successful was the inclusion of restoration projects and focus on safeguarding street frontages. The fact that many buildings in Dysart were saved by Wheeler & Sproson tied in with the Saltire Society’s other priority, to preserve Scottish domestic architecture through a series of ad-hoc campaigns. While traditionalist ideas were deeply unpopular across the Society, several Saltire panellists lobbied local authorities to take better care of their historic buildings. This drive for the protection of historic environments led to the Saltire Society’s sponsorship of *A Future for the Past* in 1961, which stood out against the destruction of historic towns.⁸⁶ Similarly, one of the remits of the Civic Trust was to reward ‘creative excellence in the restoration and adaptation old [buildings] for new uses.’⁸⁷ Out of the thirteen awards won by Wheeler & Sproson in the 1960s, eight went towards conservation projects, including the work on their office at Sailor’s Walk in Kirckaldy and their work for the Little Houses Improvement Scheme at The Gyles in Pittenweem.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁸⁵ Begg and Lewis, ‘Saltire at 70: Building Scotland.’

⁸⁶ Harris and Kelsall, *A Future for the Past*.

⁸⁷ Esher, *The continuing heritage*, p. 22.

⁸⁸ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

By the late 1970s the Saltire Panel had reached a period of frustration with the quality of architecture being produced. In 1977, the decision was made to give no awards at all. Speaking about this judgment in later years, Wheeler commented that,

‘The panel was aware of the new vogue which is gradually emerging, whereby new houses are designed in an almost self-consciously 'folksy' idiom to court popular appeal. From the architectural point of view, this style is really a backwards step, contributing nothing to the advancement of housing design.’⁸⁹

Instead, as in the 1960s many of the decade’s housing awards went to restoration instead.⁹⁰ Across the 1970s, most Wheeler & Sproson’s awards went to restoration projects.⁹¹ Most notably, Wheeler and Sproson's Harbour Place in Burntisland is representative of their new approach to the 'preservation' of historic architecture in the 1970s through reconstruction, as opposed to traditional restoration. Harbour Place was commended for both a Saltire Society Award and a Civic Trust Award in 1977, and alongside their reconstruction of 43-67 High Street in Dysart, demonstrated a desire to protect significant historic architecture, even if restoration was not a viable option.

Equally important to the Saltire Awards, however, was their preference for dispersed settlements built in a medium-to-low density.⁹² Expressions of individuality within winning entries was also a key factor of the 1970s awards, with unique blocks and front entrances prominent across the period. This approach is most notable at Dysart Phase 3 Part 1, which

⁸⁹ ‘No Award for ‘Folksy’ Housing,’ *Building Design*, vol. 372 (1977), p. 1.

⁹⁰ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁹¹ Wheeler & Sproson, ‘Job List.’

⁹² Begg and Lewis, ‘Saltire at 70: Building Scotland.’

utilised small scale and unique blocks to create an individual and dispersed feel across Dysart's central area. However, although individuality was a prominent feature within 1970s awards, this did not encompass fenced front gardens, with more awards continuing to embrace communal spaces at the front of each block. Communal parking areas were also praised in the awards of this era, with parking in paved mixer courts becoming a staple of most winning entries.⁹³ This can be seen best at Wheeler & Sproson's Abrohill 4 development, where rows of terraced houses faced on to grass promenades with parking areas on either side.

Across the 50s, 60s and 70s, the focus of the awards bodies altered from the inclusion of character within modern developments, to preservation and community, and eventually to individuality within design. Across this time, Wheeler & Sproson were able to consistently gain the attention of these bodies and adapt to changing focuses and trends. Questions can be raised about the impact that Wheeler's role as a judge for the Saltire Society had on the success of Wheeler & Sproson across this period. Wheeler joined the Saltire Society panel as a judge in 1951 and succeeded Robert Matthew as chairman in 1972, a position which he held until 1983.⁹⁴ This period coincides almost exactly with the peak of Wheeler & Sproson's awards successes. Whilst it was unlikely that the other judges treated Wheeler & Sproson's entries with anything less than impartiality, Wheeler would have been well positioned to both guide the general vision of the Society and also be conscious of elements that would aid in the creation of a successful development from early on in their making. However, most of the practice's developments which were in receipt of Saltire Awards were also successful in

⁹³ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

achieving Civic Trust awards. This suggests that although Wheeler held a powerful position within the Saltire panel, their work was not exclusively appreciated by that group alone.

It was not just in the Saltire Society where Wheeler held a prominent position, with roles in organisations such as the Scottish Housing Advisory Group.⁹⁵ Wheeler was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (FRIAS) in 1959, later becoming representative of its Edinburgh chapter in 1964.⁹⁶ He was also elected Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA) in 1967 after he was proposed by Robert Matthew, Alan Reiach and John Hardie Glover for his significant contributions to the profession.⁹⁷ Similarly, Frank Sproson was made FRIBA in 1970, recommended by Wheeler himself.⁹⁸ Significantly, Sproson also held a prominent position within the Civic Trust, acting as assessor for the Clackmannanshire area in 1968 and the City of Dundee in 1969.⁹⁹

With these prominent roles within the Scottish and UK wide architectural community, it is unsurprising that their work attracted the attention of critics. Whilst the practice saw great success in their awards and were applauded by commentators such as Charles McKean and Colin McWilliam for its use of materials and reflection of the vernacular, they were not devoid of criticism. In his 1987 article 'The McYuppies Re-point History', Bruce Walker criticised the restoration project undertaken by architects such as Wheeler & Sproson and Ian Lindsay for

⁹⁵ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

⁹⁶ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Anthony Wheeler.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Frank Sproson.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

the National Trust for Scotland for their use of thick whitewashed harl.¹⁰⁰ According to Walker, white-washed harl was a 19th century invention popularised by David Bryce and Robert Lorimer's restoration of Baronial country houses.

Instead, he argued that a slate roofing would have been used, only replaced by pantiles in the 19th century, and that thinner layer of yellow or ochre, 'barely thick enough to hide the stonework joints' was standard.¹⁰¹ To illustrate this misuse, Walker contained images of Wheeler & Sproson's Sailor's Walk offices before and after restoration. He does, however, acknowledge that such restoration work 'changed public conception of Scottish vernacular buildings', generating interest in the burghs.¹⁰² However, whether this approach to restoration was authentic or a fictitious notion, it is undisputable that Wheeler & Sproson's work was successful in safeguarding buildings which would otherwise have been lost. Their interpretation of Scots-vernacular in their modern work was also undeniably successful in making the practice one of the most celebrated of their time within the Saltire Society and beyond.

7.5. The History of the Practice Post-1975

1975 was marked with the announcement of two new partners in the practice, Alan James Clark and William Hughes McLeod. As discussed in Chapter 3, an interview with Bill McLeod was conducted as part of the research for this thesis which provides great insight into the

¹⁰⁰ D. Walker, 'The McYuppies Repoint History', *Architects Journal*, vol. 185, no. 18 (1987), p. 13.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

functioning of the practice across its latter years. When asked about his knowledge of the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects, McLeod remembered how much of his early years with the practice were spent working on schemes ‘outside of the umbrella of the ‘Fife’ projects.’¹⁰³ However, he was ‘fully aware of the significance of these projects in terms of evolving design progress and appreciated the advance that [Wheeler & Sproson] had made in this respect.’¹⁰⁴ Despite this, McLeod recalls how the gradual decline in mainstream local-authority housing projects such as these across his time working for the practice ‘gave way to new design concepts in specialised housing.’¹⁰⁵

The Decline of Local Authority Housing

This decline in local authority housing contracts can be seen in Figure 7.34. The practice peaked in the 1960s, with the decade proving to be their busiest in terms of job numbers.¹⁰⁶ However, across the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, a steady decline in housing contracts gradually eroded their most active market. This decrease in housing work is significant, as it was the housing work that gained them most of their contracts throughout the history of the practice, accounting for 43% of their overall jobs.¹⁰⁷ Without this work bolstering the finances and reputation of the practice, they became more dependent on the work generated by their other areas, such as education and healthcare. As Sproson explained in a 1990s interview, local

¹⁰³ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting, that examining Wheeler & Sproson’s career by job is not a true representation of the time and financial input they took, as the scale of each job is not consistent. Some jobs were small (such as an extension to a house), while others are larger long-spanning redevelopment jobs. However, we are still able to gain some insight from examining job numbers as a way of understanding the broader trends within their work.

¹⁰⁷ Wheeler & Sproson, ‘Job List.’

government reorganisation in 1976 was, ‘a big blow for us’, as the burghs they had worked closely with became incorporated into broader districts.¹⁰⁸

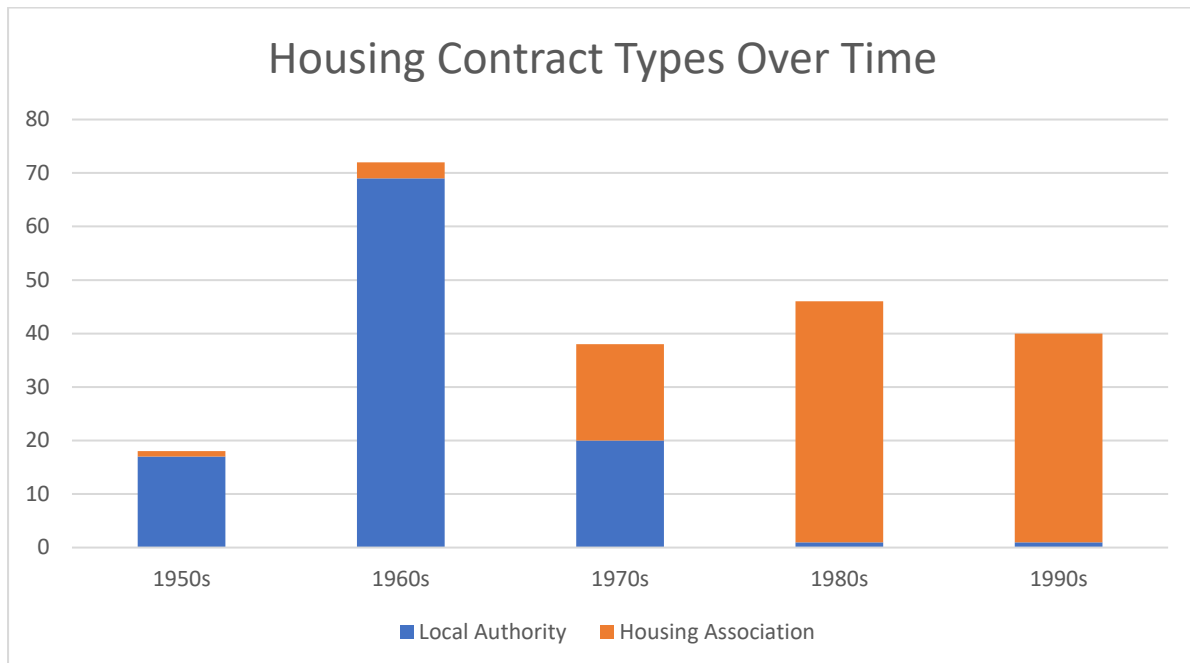


Figure 7.34. Wheeler & Sproson’s local authority and housing association jobs by decade compared.

In-house architect departments also expanded, making it harder for private practices to gain local authority contracts.¹⁰⁹ This decline in local authority housing contracts can be seen in Figure 7.33 (above) dropping from 69 jobs across the 1960s to just one job per decade in the 1980s and 1990s. Many saw the modernist ideal, including the state provision of homes, as naïve and even oppressive.¹¹⁰ The impact of this spawned a growth of private development across the 1960s and 70s that began to overtake the decades-long tradition of publicly managed housing development across Scotland.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Watters, ‘Frank Sproson FRIAS.’ pp. 96-97.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 476.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Housing associations also began to surpass local authorities in construction figures. In the 1960s, housing associations played a supplementary role to local authority housing, but across the 1970s and 1980s, they began to receive increasing amounts of their funding from local and central government.¹¹² By the 1990s, housing association schemes had become Wheeler & Sproson's busiest field of housing jobs, with only one local authority job completed that decade, a housing development in Guardbridge for the North East Fife District Council built in 1993. As McLeod explains, 'from the late 70's the traditional [local authority] mainstream housing was largely replaced by a range of projects for a large number of Housing Associations.'¹¹³ This kind of work ranged from comprehensive sheltered housing to nursing homes and smaller specialist needs developments for 'the frail elderly, mentally and physically handicapped.'¹¹⁴ The most prominent of these was the practice's 1984 sheltered housing development at 26-42 High Street Edinburgh for Castle Rock Housing Association, which included shop units and an extension of the practice's Museum of Childhood (see Figure 7.35). However, projects like were not enough to counter the decline in housing jobs the practice had experienced since the 1960s.

¹¹² P. Balchin, 'An Overview of Pre-Thatcherite Housing Policy' in P. Balchin and M. Rhoden (eds), *Housing: The Essential Foundations* (London, 1998), p. 19.

¹¹³ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 7.35. Museum of Childhood by Wheeler & Sproson, with their sheltered housing development to the left hand side of the image.

The hold Wheeler & Sproson had on housing construction was further weakened across the 1970s as a growing focus on 'community' involvement in projects began to dominate and there was a move to a system of greater public involvement in the planning process.¹¹⁵ 'Community' was no longer seen as something that could be created by architecture and was instead something that needed to be protected from new development.¹¹⁶ In 1969 Andrew Gilmore of the Edinburgh University Architectural Research Unit argued that earlier attempts to build 'for the good of the people' ignored convenience for the user and made no attempt to question what they wanted or needed.¹¹⁷ Prominent community-based projects such as Glasgow's ASSIST tenement improvement scheme (discussed above) spearheaded this change of

¹¹⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 476.

¹¹⁶ Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 307.

¹¹⁷ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 476.

approach.¹¹⁸ Fitting with this standard approach of the time, there is no evidence that consultation work within communities was attempted within Wheeler & Sproson's work. Although attempts, such as the 1969 Skeffington Report's promise of 'participation in planning', were made to smooth over objections to this paternalistic approach, they were not seen to be enough by critics.¹¹⁹

The gradual decline in housing jobs across the practice experienced from the 1960s and 1970s onwards was further compounded by a growing conservation movement. While under modernism there was a mainstream approach of balancing the new whilst also addressing the context and tradition of places, work on the preservation of existing buildings was still peripheral.¹²⁰ Although 'modern vernacular' architects like Wheeler & Sproson did incorporate historic architecture into their designs where possible, they were rare within the architectural community. Although Wheeler & Sproson had adopted this approach earlier than most, by the 1970s interest in preservation began to grow, with increasing numbers of practices expanding into the field.¹²¹ Glendinning views this ability to now focus on preservation as an outcome of the efforts that modernism made to rehouse and reconstruct at a fast rate.¹²² More attention could be paid to smaller, individual conservation projects once much of the essential new housing had been completed.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 478.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 476.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

¹²² *Ibid*.

The 1969 and 1972 Town and Country Planning Acts brought about the statutory listing of historic building in Scotland through the adoption of Ian Lindsay's lists by the Scottish Development Department.¹²³ This is best illustrated in Wheeler & Sproson's work by their June 1969 survey of listed buildings in Burntisland.¹²⁴ In 1970, Robert Matthew's appointment as Conservation Adviser to the Secretary of State allowed him to bring his ideas of using 'imagination to link up the best of the past with things of the present' to the mainstream of Scottish politics.¹²⁵ While alongside Matthew, Wheeler & Sproson can be viewed as a precursor of this movement, by the 1970s the market faced a growth of specialist conservation architects, creating ever growing competition for Wheeler & Sproson.

Wheeler & Sproson's Other Jobs

Housing and conservation were, however, not the only sectors explored by the practice. While the height of their industrial work occurred primarily in the 1960s, with the expansion of industrial estates in areas such as Hillend Industrial Estate in Dalgety Bay and Greendykes Road, Industrial Estate, Broxburn. This success in obtaining industrial and commercial work continued throughout most of the 1970s, but as can be seen in Figure 7.36, Wheeler & Sproson saw a sharp decline in this kind of work across the 1980s and 1990s. This drop in industrial contacts is consistent with the economic crisis that Scotland faced throughout this period.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 477.

¹²⁴ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Survey of High Street, 515/10,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹²⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 477.

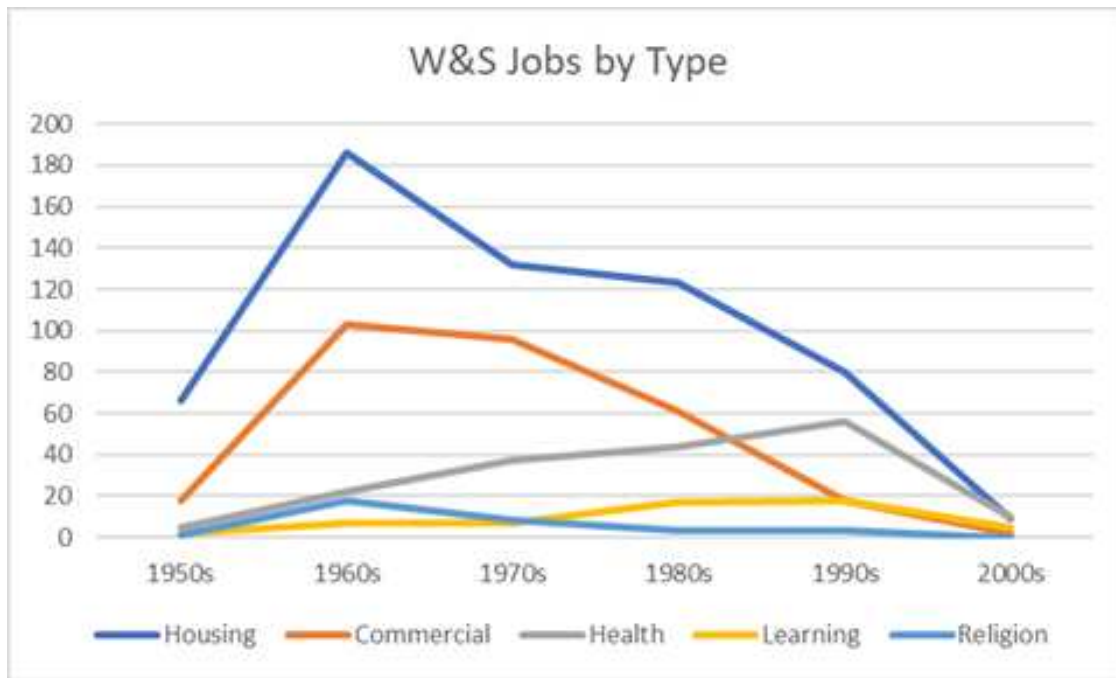


Figure 7.36. Wheeler and Sproson jobs by type per decade.

The late 1970s saw economic turmoil on a global scale, with a steep increase in oil prices, but this was particularly sorely felt in Scotland. Between 1977 and 1981 North Sea Oil doubled in price, pushing up the pound and further reduced exports to international markets that Scotland was dependant on.¹²⁶ The situation for Scottish industry further worsened with the introduction of a new Conservative government in 1979, whose radical economic strategy aimed to control the escalating problem of public debt.¹²⁷ This 'Thatcherism' evolved over the course of the 1980s, using a combination of monetary control and privatisation, and results were catastrophic for large sections of Scottish Industry. Between 1976 and 1987 manufacturing output dropped across the UK, but this was felt most sorely in Scotland, which faced a 30.8 percent decline.¹²⁸ Within this setting of economic decline, it is unsurprising that

¹²⁶ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation* (London, 1999), p. 591.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 592.

Wheeler & Sproson struggled to obtain the same levels of industrial and commercial work that was seen in the previous decades.

Alongside their industrial work, Wheeler & Sproson were also heavily involved in the development of commercial architecture. There was a growing movement of shopping centre construction in Scotland across the 1950s to the 1970s, with the construction of Dundee's Overgate Centre and Edinburgh's St. James Centre by Ian Burke and Hugh Martin among some of the first purpose-built shopping centres in the country.¹²⁹ Intended to counter the decline of the traditional high street, these shopping centres could offer large open units and were connected to car parks to improve accessibility. Colin McWilliam, however, argues that the most successful commercial developments of the post-war era were those centred on 'the sprawling urban wastes' of areas like Lanarkshire and West Lothian, where a mixture of shops and housing in local authority-built projects led to some of the 'finest new centres.'¹³⁰ This can be seen at Cambuslang, where the county council built an area of 'mixed shops and houses and excellent landscaping' in 1958 (see Figure 7.37).¹³¹

¹²⁹ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 182.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 183.

¹³¹ *Ibid*.



Figure 7.37. Cambuslang Shopping Centre, since demolished. Image taken in 1991 – cropped.

McWilliam, however, argues that local authority shopping centres by commercial architects proved equally effective, citing Wheeler & Sproson's Blackburn development of 1966 as 'one of the best' (see Figure 7.38).¹³² McWilliam praised its 'canopied shopping street of a very modest scale' and 'handy carpark, which also serves the circular public library and other community buildings nearby.'¹³³ It was incidentally this public library that became McLeod's first job at the practice. He recalls its 'continuous clerestory windows and a floating inverted conical roof' that proved a challenge for a student.¹³⁴ The Blackburn scheme, argues McWilliam, shows how successful a partnership between local authorities and commercial architects could be.¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

¹³⁵ McWilliam, *Scottish Townscape*, p. 184.



Figure 7.38. Blackburn Shopping Centre by Wheeler & Sproson, since demolished.

This successful relationship is further exemplified by Wheeler & Sproson's 1967-1970 Grangemouth shopping centre (see Figure 7.39), built as part of their extensive redevelopment of the town centre for Grangemouth Burgh Council.¹³⁶ However, this rapid expansion of town centre retail developments reached its peak by the end of the 1970. A combination of the previously mentioned economic crisis and a diminishing market for local authority commissioned shopping centres led to a drop in retail centre construction for the practice across the 1980s.¹³⁷ By the 1990s shopping centre architecture had changed entirely from primarily small urban open-air centres to large and expansive malls such as the 1999 Buchanan Galleries and the 2000 Livingston Designer Outlet Mall.

¹³⁶ Wheeler & Sproson Collection, 'Isometric View of Layout: Grangemouth Central Area Redevelopment,' *Historic Environment Scotland*.

¹³⁷ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'



Figure 7.39. Grangemouth Shopping Centre by Wheeler & Sproson, 1967-1970.

However, unlike the decline of jobs with housing, commercial and industrial work, jobs for the healthcare and education sectors proved to be one of Wheeler & Sproson most productive fields across the 1980s and 1990s. As McLeod argues, ‘although from its commencement the Practice had undertaken a wide range of projects outwith it’s renowned residential work, from the later seventies another range of commissions appeared.’ The practice saw a steady expansion in the number of jobs taken on in the healthcare sector by decade from the creation of the practice until its completion (see Figure 7.36, above). Wheeler & Sproson became one of the primary architectural practices to work on Kirkcaldy’s Victoria Hospital, with the practice working 24 jobs dedicated to the hospital from the 1970s onwards. These jobs varied in scale, from larger contracts such as the Chest and Infectious Diseases Unit down to a variety of refurbishment projects and access improvement studies.

The 1980s and 1990s were the most successful decades for healthcare work for the practice. As McLeod discussed, 'from the early 80's a nationwide programme to upgrade/extend/rebuild these facilities commenced.'¹³⁸ The first of which was a new building for the West Granton Medical Practice from 1980-81, which 'was to be the forerunner of many projects over the following years.'¹³⁹ Across the 1980s and 1990s, Wheeler & Sproson were involved in the creation of thirty-seven GP surgeries in the City of Edinburgh, including surgeries in Davidson's Mains, Leith, Broughton and Merchiston. This is increasing number of healthcare related jobs up until the 2000s is consistent with the growth of investment in NHS facilities across this period. While the expansion of local-authority housing had diminished by 1975, as Alistair Fair notes, the expansion of healthcare architecture 'was only just beginning.'¹⁴⁰

Similarly, the work Wheeler & Sproson did on educational buildings was also one of their more positive areas of work, with a relatively consistent number of jobs taken on by the practice in each decade (see Figure 7.36, above). The first educational building the practice took on was the 1960-68 Whitburn Academy (see Figure 7.40). Expansion into this area is unsurprising, considering the connections Sproson would have gained as senior assistant in the new school department section within Fife County Council where he was involved with of Auchmuty High School, Glenrothes (1954-57) and Kirkcaldy High School (1958) respectively.¹⁴¹ However, most educational contracts taken on by Wheeler & Sproson from 1975 onwards were related to higher education institutions. This included work done for the University of Edinburgh, The University of St Andrews, Jewel and Esk Valley College, Queen Margaret College, Napier College

¹³⁸ Bill McLeod, Interviewed by K. Breen.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ A. Fair, "'Modernization of Our Hospital System': The National Health Service, the Hospital Plan, and the 'Harness' Programme, 1962-77", *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2018), pp. 547-575.

¹⁴¹ Watters, 'Frank Sproson FRIAS.' pp. 96-97.

and Edinburgh College of Art.¹⁴² However, one of the most significant multi-stage projects they did for the higher education sector was for Heriot-Watt University. At Heriot-Watt's Riccarton Campus, they were responsible for the development of the Phases 1, 3, 4 and 5 halls of residence, as well as the student's union building (see Figure 7.41).



Figure 7.40. Wheeler & Sproson's 1960-68 Whitburn Academy in West Lothian, seen here in this souvenir brochure from its opening.

¹⁴² Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'



Figure 7.41. Heriot-Watt University Student Union

Expanding Their Geographical Field

This combination of criticism by community and conservation activists, and the resultant retreat by local authorities led to a drop in demand for architectural work, especially for those specialising in local authority housing contracts. When opening the practice, Wheeler and Sproson's primary aim was to carve out a market for themselves by being the primary practice offering their services to local authorities for the development of historic burghs in southern Fife. Across the 1950s to the 1970s, they contributed to the redevelopment of almost every historic burgh in the region. Unfortunately, by the 1970s, Wheeler & Sproson had exhausted this market, with opportunities for further burgh redevelopments in the region reducing as they gradually worked their way through each of its towns. This, coupled with the deterioration of the economy in the 1970s, forced the practice to expand further afield, with increasing numbers of developments in New Towns and the cities. This alteration from the original geographic goals of the practice demonstrates the natural necessity for change that is

unsurprising for any long spanning practice. The result of this change was the opening of the practice's Edinburgh office in 1968, with the office eventually becoming headquarters of the practice in 1982.¹⁴³ Along with this came an increased focus on obtaining jobs outside of Fife, as we have seen above in Figure 7.30.

Factors Leading to the Closure of the Practice

Little has been written on the mass closure of post-war practices between the late 1980s and mid-2000s. It was in this period that many of the practices who had become prominent in the boom years of the Welfare State (1950-75), met their end. In 1987 Chamberlin, Powell & Bon was incorporated into Austin Smith: Lord.¹⁴⁴ Howell, Killick, Partridge & Amis closed after Partridge's retirement in 1995.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Powell & Moya became insolvent in 1997 after an unfortunate fee bid on Birmingham Children's Hospital, where rising costs for the development crippled the practice.¹⁴⁶ By the late 2000s, many of these practices had been operating for upwards of 50 years, and most original partners had since retired. Coupled with the decline in local authority work, turbulent market, and successive recessions in 1990-91 and 2008-9, few practices of that era have survived to the present day.¹⁴⁷

In the case of Wheeler & Sproson, the number of jobs taken on by the practice dropped dramatically from 407 across the 1960s down to just 200 across the 1990s (see Figure 7.42). The loss of their specialist focus on burgh redevelopment due to the decline of local-authority

¹⁴³ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Wheeler and Sproson.

¹⁴⁴ E. Harwood, *Chamberlin, Powell and Bon: The Barbican and Beyond* (London, 2011), p. 24.

¹⁴⁵ G. Franklin, *Howell Killick Partridge & Amis* (Swindon, 2017), p. 17.

¹⁴⁶ K. Powell, *Powell & Moya: Twentieth Century Architects* (London, 2009), pp. 104-5.

¹⁴⁷ Franklin, *Howell Killick Partridge & Amis*, p. 17.

investment in housing diluted the impact of the practice and they struggled to shift purpose in the decades that followed. The practice as we know it finally closed after a '50-year pioneering legacy on Scotland's built environment' in 2005 after it was acquired by JM Architects.¹⁴⁸ The practice continued to trade as part of the JM Architects Group and was based at JM Architects' Edinburgh office in Duddingston.¹⁴⁹ JM Architects have maintained the essence of Wheeler & Sproson's work to this day. Founded in 1962 by Percy Johnson-Marshall, Percy Johnson Marshall & Partners was rebranded to JM Architects in 2003.¹⁵⁰ The practice has a long connection to the Modern-Vernacular movement. Brother of Robert Matthew's partner, Stirrat, Percy Johnson-Marshall held strong connections to Matthew through their time working together in the Planning Division at London County Council and their collaborative work in later years.¹⁵¹ Johnson-Marshall was also heavily influenced by the work of Patrick Geddes, using his theories on planning to shape much of his work.¹⁵² He was even called upon to provide the introduction to a new edition of Geddes' *Cities in Evolution* in 1968.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ *JM Architects*, Brand (<https://archello.com/brand/jm-architects?fbclid=IwAR0z3hSg-54gcdylCeygcHyUCboy40BqLzAxXhlQcrgNP6gAZ--jJ2i46Gc>); Urban Realm, *February 2006: Briefs* (https://www.urbanrealm.com/news/105/sendtofriend/Briefs.html?fbclid=IwAR3GaFTLnEC2JdKyZ5RCZPOYP6NRJK5S9k9lwkX2zVIDc_75KyLY555vUmU).

¹⁴⁹ *JM Architects*, Brand.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Dictionary of Scottish Architects, *Percy Johnson-Marshall & Associates* (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=402060).

¹⁵² A. Fair, 'Marshall, Percy Edwin Alan Johnson,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2019) (<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-109716>).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

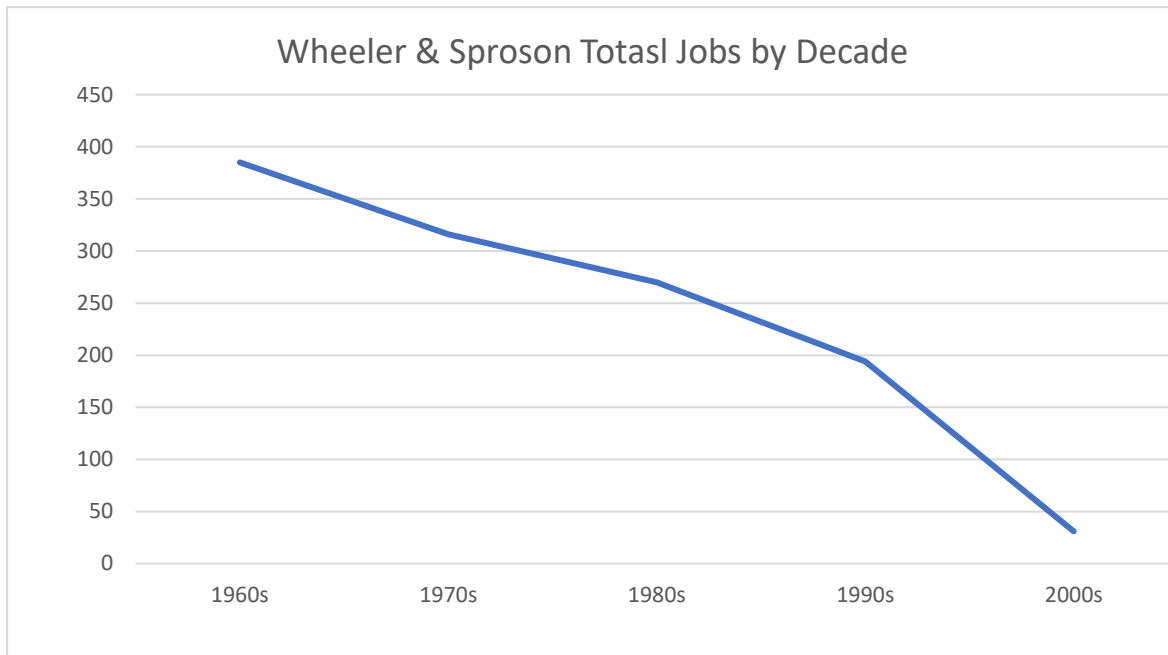


Figure 7.42. Decline of jobs taken on by Wheeler & Sproson by decade, 1960s to 2000s.¹⁵⁴

It is unsurprising then, that JM Architects have continued to adopt similar principles to these in their work to the present day. Their 2016 University of Edinburgh Accommodation and Outreach Centre is significant in its continuation of the work to redevelop of Edinburgh's Canongate area, begun by Hurd, Spence and Lindsay sixty years before (see Figure 7.43). Alongside Oberlanders Architects and HarrisonStevens Landscape Architects, the practice 'sought inspiration from the particular context of the Old Town, from its closes and wynds, vennels pends and courts', to create a densely clustered grouping of long narrow buildings built at a scale similar to its neighbouring historic buildings.¹⁵⁵ The Building blends a range of materials, from stone and wood, to its abundant use of brick to reflect the brewery which once stood on the site.

¹⁵⁴ Wheeler & Sproson, 'Job List.'

¹⁵⁵ *JM Architects*, University of Edinburgh Accommodation and Outreach Centre, Edinburgh (<http://www.jmarchitects.net/projects/university-of-edinburgh-accommodation-and-outreach-centre/>).



Figure 7.43. JM Architects' University of Edinburgh Accommodation and Outreach Centre, 2016.

7.6. Conclusion

From 1959 to 1982, 13,738 entries were received by the Civic Trust Awards for what Esher points out was simply a paper certificate. The fact that in the 20 years between 1960 and 1980, Wheeler & Sproson were presented with 5 awards and 7 commendations for such a popular award demonstrates the positive reception of their work. Wheeler & Sproson's position as the most successful practice within the Saltire Society Awards across the twentieth century further highlights their significance within the history of Scottish architectural history. Wheeler & Sproson demonstrated an ability to combine a series of approaches which were prominent in the work of several practices and adapt them to form their own distinct aesthetic. Like most practices, the economic, social, and political shifts of the latter half of the twentieth century

had huge impacts on the way they were able to operate, and often led to substantial shifts in the work they did. However, it has become clear that throughout the decades the practice operated, their approach of blending modern and traditional forms and materials, small-scale monumentality and sensitivity to the surrounding environment remained intact.

Conclusion

In 1964, Ian Nairn wrote that 'Fife is very lucky, for the firm of Wheeler and Sproson is at hand in Kirkcaldy...'¹ Over the course of fifty years, the practice transformed the southern portion of the region and developed a reputation for their ability to carry out complex schemes in the area's dilapidated historic burghs. Through their ambitious housing-driven work, Wheeler & Sproson went on to dominate the Saltire Society awards of the period. This thesis has focused on the examination of two of the practice's most successful schemes that are characteristic of their approach to urban planning and design.

The redevelopment projects at Burntisland and Dysart demonstrate Wheeler & Sproson's 'sensitive' approach to urban infill development. The practice adopted a 'conservative surgery' method, whereby they replaced the areas with the most damaged and poor-quality buildings, whilst restoring or reconstructing those of architectural, historical, or social significance. A series of 'spheres of influence' were formed around these structures, where the design of modern infill would reflect certain key materials and features. In these replacement areas, a mosaic of individual and unique blocks were inserted into the settlements, ranging in scale and composition. Whilst in some areas long, dense slabs were employed to house the bulk of the population, small towers were used elsewhere to act as sculptural focal points. Between these would be a series of interlinking public spaces, connected by traditional pends, alleyways, bridges and squares.

¹ Nairn, 'Over the Bridge to the Burghs', p. 24.

As we discovered in Chapter 7, this approach to housing design was used by the practice throughout its fifty years. This was done by the practice in other historic burgh infill sites in Fife, such as Kinghorn and Lochgelly, where housing was knit into an existing settlement. They also carried these concepts over to their greenfield sites, as seen at Langlee or Abronhill, where they adapted their approach to suit the expansive scale of the sites. Equally, when expanding into the Edinburgh area, Wheeler & Sproson altered their use of materials and forms to suit the city's own unique setting.

However, as we have seen, Wheeler & Sproson were part of a broader network of architects operating along similar lines in the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporaries such as Baxter, Clark & Paul, Moira & Moira and Peter Womersley were creating comparable urban infill schemes across Scotland's towns and cities. Together, these practices evolved a concept of 'modern-vernacular' that was championed in Scotland in the decades before they rose to prominence and produced a form of work which continues to be adapted to this day.

The Legacy of Post-War Modern-Vernacular Architecture

While Wheeler & Sproson's work has rarely been acknowledged as a specific inspiration for the work of later architects, the kind of 'sympathetic-yet-Modern' architecture produced by the practice and their contemporaries has made a lasting impact on architecture in Scotland – an impact that continues to this day. In each decade since the completion of Burntisland and Dysart, award winning practices such as Baxter, Clark & Paul, Wren Rutherford and Collective Architecture have followed a similar approach. Some projects, especially during the 1980s,

pushed the 'vernacular' element to an extreme, and were criticised as a result. However, Wheeler & Sproson's work did not simply involve new development. Their multifaceted approach of combining modern infill with conservation work was one of the most significant elements of their practice. We will now look at how early efforts by practices like Wheeler & Sproson to enhance the vernacular architectural environment within Scotland's historic burghs contributed to a broader growth in conservation work across the second half of the 20th century.

Conservation

Wheeler & Sproson's interests and involvement in the conservation of historic buildings began right from the outset of the practice, with the restoration of the 15th - 17th century former customs house at Sailor's Walk in Kirkcaldy into their offices from 1954 to 1959.² The practice then went on to become the first to work under the newly founded Little Houses Improvement Scheme by the National Trust for Scotland in 1960.³ Although restoration of historic buildings was not a new concept, the Little Houses Improvement Scheme was one of the first major schemes to systematically protect Scotland's most vulnerable historic houses and continues to the present day, with the most recent example being the 2016-17 restoration of Bennet House in Culross.⁴ However, while projects such as those by Wheeler & Sproson and Little Houses Improvement Scheme were a significant alternative to the often *tabula rasa* approach of modernism in the 1950s and 60s, preservation of existing buildings was still peripheral.⁵ It was

² Historic Environment Scotland, 443-449 (*Odd Nos*) *High Street and Malcolm's Wynd, Sailor's Walk with Boundary Walls* (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB36358>).

³ Glendinning and Watters, *Little Houses*, p. 6.

⁴ National Trust for Scotland, *A Study House in Culross* (<https://www2.nts.org.uk/Site/LHIS/Bennet-House/>).

⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 476.

not until a series of state led mechanisms were introduced from the late 60s to mid-70s that the preservation and the reuse of historic buildings began to become more mainstream.

The late 1960s saw a cluster of Acts that encouraged reuse of existing buildings. The Civic Amenities Act came into place in 1967, introducing Conservation Areas as a means of preserving groups of buildings across a specified area.⁶ Shortly after, the 1969 Housing (Scotland) Act was also introduced, providing payment for the upgrade of older houses that were deemed suitable for rehabilitation.⁷ Although perhaps too late for many areas, the Act was the first time when the adaptation of older buildings for use as 'new' housing was supported by Government. Most significantly though, statutory listing was introduced by the mid-1970s as a result of the 1969 and 1972 Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts. The Acts had resulted in a shift in attitude by the public, with advertisements for demolitions coming under increasing criticism.⁸ This change in public opinion can be seen most clearly through the participatory tenement improvement schemes, notably the pioneering project 'enabled' by 'ASSIST', as discussed in Chapter 7.⁹ As a result, tenements like these turned from 'dystopia to utopia' at a time when the post-war housing stock was itself beginning to fall into disrepair.¹⁰

⁶ D. Smith, 'The Civic Amenities Act: Conservation and Planning,' *The Town Planning Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1969), pp. 149-162; Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3-48.

⁷ Niven, *The Development of Housing in Scotland*, p. 78.

⁸ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 477.

⁹ Urban, *The New Tenement*, p. 107.

¹⁰ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 477.

The 1970s is defined as the first, and possibly only, decade when the main driving force in Scottish architecture was not new construction, but preservation.¹¹ Conservation began to win a victory over redevelopment, with the 'old' becoming more highly valued than the 'new'.¹² As we have seen, Glendinning views this shift in focus from rapid construction to preservation as an outcome of efforts to rehouse and reconstruct at great speed across the 1950s and 1960s.¹³ While Wheeler & Sproson and others were taking the time to integrate preservation into their work from the 1950s onwards, this was not as possible in higher population areas, where there was pressure on local authorities to reach increasingly high housing figures within short time-frames. By the 1970s, this steep demand for housing had diminished, allowing for design and construction to be done more slowly. This change of approach is clearest in the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975, when half of the Saltire Society awards went to restoration work.¹⁴ Coincidentally, 1975 also saw David Walker's debut as the Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings within the Scottish Development Department, and resultant official figurehead of the Scottish Conservation Movement. Walker's work in this role led to an increase in research and listing of historic buildings.¹⁵ A growth of specialist conservation architects also began in this period, with still-active practices such as Simpson & Brown, Benjamin Tindall Architects and (slightly later) Page & Park following in the footsteps of their predecessors, such as Wheeler & Sproson and Robert Hurd & Partners.¹⁶

¹¹ Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' p. 35; M. Glendinning and A. MacKechnie, *Scottish Architecture* (London, 2004), p. 208.

¹² Watters, 'Modernity in Context,' pp. 3-48.

¹³ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 476.

¹⁴ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

¹⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 478.

¹⁶ Ibid; *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Simpson and Brown (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=401384); *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Benjamin Tindall (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=402359); *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Page & Park (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=402920).

As with the conservation sector, the design of new architecture saw a corresponding shift in attitude across the second half of the 20th century.¹⁷ At a point when ‘stylistic’ reconstruction of war-damaged historic cities and *tabula rasa* clearance was common across Europe, the 1964 Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites was signed by representatives of 61 nations.¹⁸ The outcome was a move away from focus on the restoration of individual monuments and toward an emphasis on broader areas.¹⁹ The Venice Charter’s focus on ‘setting’ led to the recommendation that new architectural interventions neither copy nor ignore the surrounding historic environment.²⁰ Instead, it proposed an architecture that blended these concepts, as was done in Wheeler & Sproson’s work a decade earlier. In 1965 the signatures of the Venice Charter formed ICOMOS as an international non-governmental body that has since become a source of guidance for conservation officers and architects worldwide.²¹ The consequences of the Venice Charter and ICOMOS was an increased interest in the creation of an architecture that was sensitive to its surroundings. Mainstream architects began to design buildings that attempted to be in-keeping with their surroundings and made a balance between the modern and the historicist.²²

¹⁷ MacKechnie, et al., *Building a Nation*, p. 115.

¹⁸ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 22.

¹⁹ J. H. Stubbs, E. G. Makas, and M. Bouchenaki, *Architectural Conservation in Europe and the Americas* (Hoboken, 2011), pp. 2-3

²⁰ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, pp. 197-198.

²¹ Stibbs, Makas and Bouchenaki, *Architectural Conservation*, pp. 2-3.

²² Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 478.

Continuation of the Modern-Vernacular

Simultaneously, the United Kingdom was experiencing a period of breakdown in 'state led discipline' and a decline in the authority of planners after 1968.²³ Although the reconstruction drive was still active, in 1977 a Labour government green paper sparked a gradual collapse of local authority monopoly housing.²⁴ In Scotland, this provided radical critics with a platform from which to question Modern architecture.²⁵ Many saw the Modernist ideal, including the mass provision of housing, as naïve and oppressive.²⁶ As Glendinning argues, the easiest way for architects to distance themselves from mainstream Modernism in their housing work was to revisit the work of modern-vernacular practices from the 1950s and 60s, such as Wheeler & Sproson.²⁷ As we saw in Chapter 7, the 1978 Commercial Street development in Perth by J F Stephens of James Parr and Partners, the 1979 Lynedoch House in Edinburgh by R. Anderson of Roland Wedgwood Associates, and The Quilts in Leith by the Scottish Special Housing Association are prominent late 70s examples of this form of architecture.²⁸

However, by the start of the 1980s many practices had begun to take the Modern-Vernacular approach to an extreme. In Chapter 7, we saw that Charles McKean's accusation of 'Neukery' in some of the architecture of the period did not hold true for Wheeler & Sproson's work. However, for some building this was an apt description, with Ian Begg's 1988-9 Scandic Crown Hotel in Edinburgh (see Figure C.1) and 1990-3 St Mungo's Museum of Religion in Glasgow being prominent examples of this. However, there are several examples of work which were

²³ Ibid, p. 475

²⁴ Dennison, *The Evolution of Scotland's Towns*, p. 272.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ MacKechnie, et al., *Building a Nation*, pp. 115-116.

²⁷ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 480.

²⁸ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

praised by the awards bodies. In the early years of the 1980s, this ranged from the richly coloured hill-slope housing of L. Davidson for Dundee Council's Watson Street CDA in 1980, to the peak of Baxter, Clark & Paul's historicist work with their 1981 Harbourlea development in Anstruther, and through to the dense urban infill of Richard Gibson Architects' 1982 John Jamieson's Closs in Lerwick.²⁹ By the late 1980s Baxter, Clark & Paul had reverted back to a simpler form of vernacular as at Dorward Gardens, Montrose (1988-89), a move which is described in *A History of Scottish Architecture* as one which 'almost brings us full circle to the ideas of Reich in the 40s' (see Figure C.2).³⁰



Figure C.1. Ian Begg's 1988-9 Scandic Crown Hotel on Edinburgh's Royal Mile was criticised for its historicist and pastiche addition to the city's Old Town.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 480.



Figure C.2. Doward Gardens Montrose, by Baxter, Clark & Paul was a finalist of the 1994 World Habitat Awards, demonstrating its internationally recognised significance as sheltered housing.

Irvine New Town

One of the most prominent works of Modern-Vernacular architecture to bridge the 1980s and 1990s, however, was seen in the continued expansion of Irvine. Started in 1966, the New Town had undergone most of its expansion by the late 1980s, but several development areas in the town's historic heart and harbourside area continued into the following decade. Described in *Home Builders* as "...one of the standard-bearers [...] of the continuing 'Scottish vernacular Modernist' tradition of public housing design, following in the footsteps of Anthony Wheeler, Robert Hurd and others" one of the principal designers for the Irvine New Town Development Corporation (IDC) was architect and planner, Roan Rutherford.³¹ Rutherford, who worked for the IDC from 1972 to 1996, was one of the dominant figures within the Saltire Awards in the 1980s and 1990s.³² He won ten Saltire awards and commendations, two Regeneration Awards

³¹ D. Watters, 'The Modern Company: Building Tradition, 1960 to the Present Day' in M. Glendinning and D. Watters (eds.), *Home Builders: Mactaggart & Mickel And the Scottish Housebuilding industry* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 185.

³² *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Henry Roan Rutherford (http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400999).

‘Supreme Awards’, three RIBA Regional Awards and three Civic Trust Awards and Commendations for his work in Irvine between 1984 and 1997.³³

These awards demonstrate the significant impact that Rutherford had on the town, ranging from new development areas to restoration work. His earliest work for the IDC involved the creation of Conservation Area Plans for the Dreghorn, Glasgow Vennel, Perceton and Seagate areas of the town centre in 1973, showcasing his interest in safeguarding the historic environment.³⁴ Rutherford’s most successful development, though, winning the 1992 RIBA Regional Awards, a Civic Trust Commendation, and a Saltire Society Award, was his Bryce Knox Court to the north-east of the town (see Figure C.3). The scheme contained a low complex of sheltered housing built in a familiar style of pale harled walls and mono-pitch pantiled roofs.³⁵



Figure C.3. The multi-award-winning Bryce Knox Court in Irvine by Roan Rutherford for the Irvine New Town Development Corporation follows many of the design concepts seen in architecture by the 1950s Modern-Vernacular architects, such as the use of pantiles and mono-pitch roofing.

³³ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

³⁴ *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, Henry Roan Rutherford.

³⁵ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

However, some of his most interesting modern-vernacular work and most obvious connection to the fishing village aesthetic of post-war Fife towns, was his work in the Harbourside area of the town. This area was completed in several phases, starting with the 'dramatic' 1992 Harbour Street social housing.³⁶ He then went on to develop a plan for the broader area in 1993, which contained the Peter Street/ Gottries Crescent development and the Cochrane Street area (see Figure C.4). Awarded the 1996 Saltire Award, The Peter Street/ Gottries Crescent scheme was a combined area of terraced houses and three and a half storey tenement blocks. These were harled in white, topped with slate roofs and donned a modern 'spikier' twist on traditional tenement features, such as cupolas and bay windows.³⁷ Cochrane Street followed this in a similar style between 1996 and 1997 by Rutherford's practice Wren Rutherford, after the 1996 closure of the IDC. The development has been praised in *The Buildings of Scotland* for its 'ambition and articulation' of its windows.³⁸ The impact Rutherford's work had on Scotland's last completed post-war New Town demonstrates the impact that modern-vernacular architecture had on nationally significant developments across the 90s and beyond.

³⁶ R. Close and A. Riches, *The Buildings of Scotland: Ayrshire & Arran* (London, 2012), p. 389.

³⁷ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*; Close and Riches, *Buildings of Scotland: Ayrshire & Arran*, pp. 336-7.

³⁸ Close and Riches, *Buildings of Scotland: Ayrshire & Arran*, p. 388.



Figure C.4. Roan Rutherford's Peter Street and Gottries Crescent developments blended traditional harling and slates with an unusual, jagged use of glazing.

The Decline of the Council House

However, by the mid-1990s the Conservative government's 1980 Right-to-Buy scheme had dramatically changed the ownership, and consequently the management, of over 1.3 million of what had originally been local authority council houses in England alone.³⁹ This was coupled with a dramatic decline in the number of council houses being built in this period.⁴⁰ To further confuse matters for housing architects, in 1989 the Scottish Special Housing Association and the Scottish arm of the UK funding body, the Housing Corporation, merged to form Scottish Homes. This new government quango was responsible for the funding of new social housing.⁴¹ This change of approach contributed to an ongoing shift in the ownership of rented housing,

³⁹ *United Kingdom Government*, Statistical Data Set: Live Tables on Social Housing Sales (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-social-housing-sales?fbclid=IwAR1JX2wa84UoDSgPiT8RM0jqnIoUahWUdJK_E1-jV6wQLMpX8i8AaflPkK4#:~:text=The%20Right%20to%20Buy%20scheme%20was%20introduced%20by%20the%201980,with%20effect%20from%20October%201980.&text=registered%20providers%20assured%20tenants%20who,a%20Preserved%20Right%20to%20Buy).

⁴⁰ *Scottish Government*, Housing Statistics 2019, Key Trends Summary (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-scotland-2019-key-trends-summary/pages/1/>).

⁴¹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

which passed in a growing number of cases from local authorities to housing associations.⁴² In parallel, owner-occupation was presented increasingly as the ideal, with council/social rented housing being seen as ‘residual’ (as John Boughton argues).⁴³ Whereas in the years around the Second World War, the majority of new homes in Scotland were built for rent, by the 1980s owner-occupation had achieved a significant share of the landscape.

A Period of Historicism

Increasingly, overtly modern approaches to design were associated with council housing. Stigmatization of this form of tenure and a wider critique of modernism that had developed since the 1970s and had led to housing designed in new historicist styles by the 1990s.⁴⁴ As Wheeler said himself in 1995, Scotland had ‘now reached the stage of a latter-day Victorianism.’⁴⁵ He criticised the ‘bits’ that had been added on to housing, a sharp contrast to the ‘simple, straight form’ that architecture had aspired to reach during Modernism.⁴⁶ Wheeler questioned, ‘why did we struggle for so many years in the 50s until the 70s’ when by the 1990s ‘speculative housing [had become] appalling.’⁴⁷ This view on speculative housing development was not an uncommon one for the time. In February 1994, a letter written to the *Scotsman* described a recently opened development of ‘Victorian-style’ houses in Edinburgh’s Buckstone area by Bryant Homes that had been inspired by the English suburbs as, ‘the case for Scottish independence built in red brick’ (see Figure C.5).⁴⁸ While homes in the inter-war and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ J. Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London, 2018), p. 84.

⁴⁴ Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p. 101; G. Ortolano, *Thatcher’s Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism Through an English New Town* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 125-142.

⁴⁵ Anthony Wheeler, interviewed by M. Glendinning.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Glendinning and Watters, *Home Builders*, p. 267.

immediate post-war period were often lacking in detail, new private housing of the 1990s tended to include 'add on' historical details, such as Tudor gables and plastic astragals across the double glazing.⁴⁹ Due to their clear lack of recognition for regional differences in design and sympathy for the surrounding environment, awards bodies were unimpressed and private schemes were rarely recognised as a result.⁵⁰



Figure C.5. These 1994 houses by Bryant Homes at Queen Margaret Close in the Buckstone Area of Edinburgh were criticised for their Victorian and English appearance.

By the 2000s this type of out-of-place historicist commercial estate had evolved into another form of speculative development. Across Scotland, New Urbanist 'new-towns' began to be built on farming land at sites such as Tornagrain and Knockroon in the early 2010s, after a decade of development. Work at Tornagrain, near Inverness, began in 2012 and was envisaged by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) for the Moray Estate, with the support of the Prince

⁴⁹ Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of Wales.⁵¹ The plan proposed a densely clustered development of two and three storey detached, terraced and tenement housing. The architecture of the buildings has, like its 90s counterparts, tended towards an arguably exaggerated 'historicism' (see Figure C.6). Whilst attempting to reproduce a traditional 19th century settlement, other than their brilliantly white harling and immaculate upkeep there are few modern features to set the developments within their own period. Their design has been criticised by architects across Scotland, something which few found surprising given the famous use of DPZ's were famous Seaside development in Florida as the set for *The Truman Show*.⁵² While density of the development arguably shares traits with the work of post-war modern-vernacular practices, the architectural design is something that would have been unlikely to have been approved of by the likes of Wheeler, Hurd or Reiach.



Figure C.6. Tornagrain, with its dense urban pattern, lacks the modern element of its 1950s and 1960s predecessors. (Stephen)

Recent Modern-Vernacular Work

However, other examples from rural Scotland have adopted a less overtly historicist approach to addressing this combination of the modern and vernacular. HebHomes, a division of the Skye-based Dualchas Architects, was launched in 2007 to design modern kit homes based on

⁵¹ P. Lewis, 'In 30 Years We Will Develop A New Vernacular,' *The Architect's Journal*, vol. 224, no. 13 (2006), pp. 101-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*

traditional Hebridean housing types.⁵³ The company has blended modern features such as large plate glass windows, sharp-edges and open-plan living spaces, with vernacular structure from the local area. They have described their work as an ‘extremely modern interpretation’ of longhouses, steadings, whitehouse and àirighean (see Figure C.7).⁵⁴ However, although this work is in the spirit of modern-vernacular architecture, its generally rural and isolated positioning prevents the architects from creating the form of dense urban layouts generally seen in post-war modern-vernacular work.



Figure C.7. A modern take on a traditional Hebridean Longhouse by HebHomes.

A more densely clustered example of this starkly modern interpretation of ‘traditional’ form has been seen in Scotland’s cities in recent decades, in a similar urban setting to that of most post-war modern-vernacular work. In Edinburgh, the sympathetic modern-vernacular approach adopted by practices like Wheeler & Sproson has been carried into the 21st century in the development of ‘modern Colony’ flats. As discussed in Chapter 1, Edinburgh’s Colonies

⁵³ K. Scott, ‘Kit homes expansion set to drive business at architects,’ *The Herald* (2017), (https://www.heraldscotland.com/business_hq/15270869.kit-homes-expansion-set-to-drive-business-at-architects/).

⁵⁴ *HebHomes*, New Airigh Range Launched (<https://www.hebhomes.com/news/new-airigh-range-launched>).

were a distinctive form of workers' houses designed to tackle the rising population and unsanitary conditions in the city during the second half of the 19th century (see Figure C.8).⁵⁵



Figure C.8. Edinburgh's Stockbridge Colonies circa 1988, demonstrating the external stair access to the upper flats.

This 'traditional' and distinctive form has been revived across the city in recent decades, starting with the redevelopment of Leith Fort, designed by Malcolm Fraser Architects, and completed by Collective Architecture from 2013 to 2018, winning Saltire and RIAS awards (see Figure C.9).⁵⁶ This trend has continued to the present day with developments currently under construction in 2020, such as the Waterfront Plaza Development in Leith by CALA Homes,⁵⁷ the Baileyfield area of Portobello by 7N Architects,⁵⁸ and the Urban Eden development in Lochend

⁵⁵ Edinburgh City Council, *Edinburgh Colonies Conservation Area Character Appraisal* (Edinburgh, 2014).

⁵⁶ *Urban Realm*, Edinburgh Colonies (2013)

(https://www.urbanrealm.com/features/404/Edinburgh_Colonies.html); *Fort of Leith Housing Association*, Leith Fort (<https://www.polha.co.uk/housing/development-archive/leith-fort/>).

⁵⁷ *Urban Realm*, Leith Comes to Life as Colony Living Reaches Victoria Dock (2020)

(https://www.urbanrealm.com/news/8784/Leith_comes_to_life_as_colony_living_reaches_Victoria_Dock.html).

⁵⁸ *Urban Realm*, Portobello Master Plan Submitted for Planning (2014)

(https://www.urbanrealm.com/news/5081urban%20realm%20lochend%20colonies/sendtofriend/Portobello_master_plan_submitted_for_planning.html).

by EMA.⁵⁹ Although each of these new developments have made use of brick as opposed to the original stone, they continue to adopt the traditional colony form, through the use of stacked flats with entrances on opposite sides, external access stairs and are built in long parallel rows.



Figure C.9. Leith Fort Colonies arranged in the traditional row pattern, with external access stairs leading to upper flats.

While few of these examples can be directly linked to the modern-vernacular architects of the 1950s and 60s, it is clear that a desire to create buildings that bridge the divide between the modern and the traditional has persisted throughout the past 70 years. Each decade since the completion of Burntisland and Dysart has seen the design of award-winning housing that is both sensitive and distinctly contemporary, from Baxter, Clark & Paul's housing of the 70s and 80s, to Roan Rutherford's Irvine developments in the 90s, and to Edinburgh's recent modern Colonies. In 2016 Clare Nash of Claire Nash Architecture, published her book *Contemporary Vernacular Design : How British Housing Can Rediscover Its Soul*, which discusses the need for

⁵⁹ *Urban Realm*, Urban Eden (2017) (https://www.urbanrealm.com/buildings/1195/Urban_Eden.html).

'high quality buildings that 'fit' in the same way that vernacular architecture does but reflecting a very different time.'⁶⁰ This vision of 'Contemporary Vernacular', according to Nash, heralds a 'new era of [...]vernacular place making.'⁶¹ Whether this is the case is yet to be seen, but it certainly seems to echo the ideals of a group of ambitious architects practicing half a century earlier.

The Contemporary Condition of Burntisland and Dysart

Despite the recent popular examples of sensitive and historically rooted modern architecture discussed above, early examples of this kind of work are now becoming increasingly prone to neglect. The impacts of this neglect can be mitigated through a range of measures, with listing and Conservation Areas providing the best protection. However, although post-war buildings are now increasingly gaining listed status, significant buildings are often lost before they can be safeguarded. As Alan Powers points out in his *The Modern Movement in Britain*, modern buildings are especially prone to alteration and demolition.⁶² This is no less relevant in Burntisland and Dysart, which have both become increasingly neglected over recent decades, now suffering from crumbling harling, broken doors on external stores, smashed windows in laundry rooms, stained surfaces, and demolitions in some areas.

⁶⁰ C. Nash, *Contemporary Vernacular Design: How British Housing Can Rediscover Its Soul* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016), p. 3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Powers, *Modern*, p. 234.

The Deterioration of Dysart

This deterioration of modern buildings can occur for several reasons. Often those who own or reside in such buildings do not appreciate or understand the architectural significance of their buildings.⁶³ However, issues can also be caused by problem areas in modern buildings, such as windows due to their regular lack of thermal breaks and difficulty in replacement, while concrete as it often faces water penetration and movement due to reinforcement bars placed too close to the surface.⁶⁴ As Orbaşlı argues, many buildings of the era Wheeler & Sproson were designing in were experimental in their use of materials or design, and structures may not have been successful technically or socially.⁶⁵ However, unlike many of their contemporaries, Wheeler & Sproson's buildings were not constructed using experimental methods and instead were built following traditional brick construction (see Figure C.10). Some of the most common culprits for the deterioration of local authority housing have, however, been the cuts councils have faced to their housing budgets since the 1980s, and the impact of Right to Buy and buy-to-let have had on maintenance levels. Furthermore, the residualization, whereby council housing is only provided to those who due to 'poverty, age or infirmity' cannot access accommodation in the private sector, furthering declining state investment in housing.⁶⁶ Dysart and Burntisland are no different, and have unfortunately also met the 'normal fate of modernist post-war local authority housing', with neglect evident in their appearances.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Orbaşlı, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ J. Pearce and J. Vine, 'Quantifying Residualisation: The Changing Nature of Social Housing in the UK,' *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2014), pp. 657-675.

⁶⁷ Watters, 'A Modern National Tradition.'



Figure C.10. The brick structure of Wheeler & Sproson’s small tower blocks in Dysart Phase 2 is clearly shown in this photograph from their construction. In some respects, they arguably share a similarity to the modern Colonies discussed above.

In his interview with McKean in 1997, Sir Anthony Wheeler discussed his views on the future of Dysart, stating that he was happy for residents to make small changes to their flats and hoped that his architecture was robust enough to support this.⁶⁸ In response to a refurbishment of the development of the same year, Wheeler argued that what he did not want to happen was for the scheme to be reconstructed, saying that ‘if it were re-roofed – that would kill it dead!’⁶⁹ Unfortunately, exactly that happened, with large areas of the development’s flat roofed blocks drastically altered later that year. Most significantly, Block 5 of Phase 2 has been, according to Watters, ‘transformed beyond recognition.’⁷⁰ The block has received crow-stepped, rusticated stair towers and brightly pantiled roofs have replaced

⁶⁸ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ pp. 110-114.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

surfaces which were once flat (See Figure C.11). The concrete access ramp has also been removed, decks have been replaced with private balconies with felt roofs and doorways have been topped with pitched canopies.



Figure C.11. Dysart's Phase 2, Block 5 received a dramatic redevelopment in 1997, with a pitched roof added, the access ramp removed, and crow stepped stair towers and canopies attached.

Since their completion in 1977, much has happened to the burghs, with a drop in population to match the deindustrialisation in the area. In particular, the closure of Dysart's Frances Colliery in 1988 had a dramatic impact on the settlement, with increased unemployment and the gradual closure of small businesses. Despite these 1997 attempts at regeneration, by the early 2000s, Wheeler & Sproson's redevelopment area was experiencing 'high unemployment, poor quality environment in some places, lack of play facilities, high dependency on benefits, poor health, low educational attainment and limited access to shops and services' according to Fife Council.⁷¹ They noted that the area was proving to be expensive to maintain and was

⁷¹ Fife Council, *Supporting Statement for Conservation Area Consent to Demolish – Dysart* (Glenrothes, 2007).

attracting too few new residents. As a result, the Council deemed that ‘further investment was not justifiable.’⁷²

In attempts to remedy this, in 2005 a questionnaire was conducted by Fife Council to determine the views of those living in the area. The results of the survey showed that 60% of residents supported ‘outright demolition or the consideration of demolition’ of several of Wheeler & Sproson’s modern blocks.⁷³ In response, the management of the ‘Dysart Regeneration Area’ proposed the demolition of 87 ‘run down houses’, with the majority of them being vacated by 2007.⁷⁴ That year, Fife Council released a *Supporting Statement for Conservation Area Consent to Demolish* in Dysart, which argued that the blocks had become a target for antisocial behaviour, including fire raising and graffiti.⁷⁵ Within the year, several blocks had been demolished, the most prominent examples of which include the large block of four connected sections in the first phase area, four of the six small towers in Fitzroy Square, and the unique pyramid-roofed tower on Dysart’s High Street, as can be seen in Figure C.12.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

⁷⁵ Fife Council, *Consent to Demolish – Dysart*.

⁷⁶ Ibid.



Figure C.12. Wheeler & Sproson buildings demolished by Fife Council at Dysart are highlighted in red, with the remaining development shown in black.

Dysart Conservation Area was established in May 1978 and covers much of the central area of the burgh.⁷⁷ Its creation came at an interesting point in Dysart's history, just a year after the completion of Wheeler & Sproson's regeneration scheme. Whether its creation resulted from

⁷⁷ Fife Council, *Dysart Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan* (Glenrothes, 2009), p. 4.

Wheeler's work to protect its historic buildings or in retaliation against the clearances that did happen is unknown. However, by 2007 the protections that Conservation Areas are intended to offer the existing environment fell short of protecting Wheeler & Sproson's work. Although most of the scheme was included in the Conservation Area, it is apparent that it is merely intended to protect the town's oldest buildings as opposed to its newer contributions. This can be seen by the way the Conservation Area boundary steps in and out, careful to avoid any areas deemed unworthy of protection, in particular the Phase 1 and Phase 3 - Part 2 areas (see Figure C.13).



Figure C.13. Dysart’s Conservation Area covers much of the central area of the town, but steps around the Phase 1 and Phase 3 – Part 2 developments.

Even within the bounds of the Conservation Areas, there are limited powers available to protect modern architecture, with councils facing ‘strong internal opposition.’⁷⁸ As Watters

⁷⁸ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

argues, local authorities were clearly not aware of ‘sleepless nights’ Wheeler & Sproson faced in the 1950s in their battle to protect the historic environment and enhance the character of the burgh ‘in the face of strong opposition.’⁷⁹ Instead, in 2005 a local councillor claimed ‘I would like to see Dysart look like a wee town again that we can all be proud of it’s a royal burgh after all’, an ironic contrast to his predecessors, who were determined to flatten the settlement.⁸⁰ It is clear that this is not an outlier view, as Wheeler & Sproson’s modern contributions to the settlement have also been singled out by Fife Council’s Planning Department as having a negative impact on the character of the area.⁸¹

Ironically, Fife Council’s *Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan* for the site criticises Wheeler & Sproson’s scheme, stating that ‘the combination of listed buildings and bland social housing does not combine well with Dysart’s history.’⁸² The document goes as far as implying that the historic buildings were fortunate to have avoided redevelopment, despite the efforts its architects put into their preservation.⁸³ It also condemns the ‘stark architectural contrast’ between the old and new, and what they perceived as an ‘inappropriate layout’, without any consideration for how and why this was done.⁸⁴ Rather oddly, the document also complains that the scale, massing and materials used were inappropriate for the area.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ McKean, ‘The Dysart Redevelopment: Rebuilding in ‘Context’,’ pp. 110-114; Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

⁸⁰ Watters, ‘A Modern National Tradition.’

⁸¹ Fife Council, *Dysart Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*, p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-30.

This is rather strange, as included in the *Conservation Area Appraisal* are plans for the buildings that were to replace the demolished buildings.⁸⁶ What was proposed, and built between 2010 and 2019, were a collection of ‘affordable housing’, which primarily takes the form of houses. Although technically in a generic ‘sensitive’ aesthetic of harling, slate roofs and pitched gables, they unfortunately neglect to represent the surrounding historic buildings as was intended. Their use of colouration, materials and scale is arguably less sensitive to their surroundings than what they replaced. Little was also done to regain the loss of original street pattern the Council were keen to revive. Instead, they have formed a cul-de-sac of housing with ‘defensible’ front and back gardens that privatise and cordon off most of the public space that Wheeler & Sproson fought to include in Fitzroy Square, removing it from ‘public realm’ (see Figure C.14 and Figure C.15).



Figure C.14. The cul-de-sac which replaced large areas of the Fitzroy Square area of Wheeler & Sproson’s Dysart Redevelopment, with the much-altered Phase 2, Block 5 acting as a backdrop.

⁸⁶ibid, p. 36.



Figure C.15. Designed by Wheeler & Sproson to be an open square with pedestrian access from all directions, the new cul-de-sac has disconnected and privatised much of the area.

The Intact State of Burntisland

Burntisland, on the other hand, has, remarkably, remained entirely intact. This is likely as a result of the higher occupation rates in the area due to the rail connection to Edinburgh and other nearby towns. Every original block and service structure remains standing and occupied at present. As a result, Burntisland is significant as one of the best examples of a complete post-war modern-vernacular scheme in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, over time the blocks have become run-down, with sections in need of re-harling or painting. Despite this, it is arguably the best-preserved historic burgh redevelopment project taken on by Wheeler & Sproson and demonstrates well their unique blend of architectural and planning approaches.

Like in Dysart, the Burntisland Redevelopment is also almost entirely contained within the settlement's Conservation Area. Even more prominently than Dysart, however, Burntisland's Conservation Area takes pains to step around some of the most interesting and significant and well-considered elements of Wheeler & Sproson's redevelopment area. The West Leven Street area has been carefully encircled on the plan so avoid any protective status for the flats there (see Figure C.16). Despite their hilltop location, chamfered corners and response to Rossend Castle on the neighbouring hill, the West Leven Street blocks have been excluded from any protective benefits the Conservation Area could provide. Protection, however, is unlikely at present, as although the *Burntisland Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan* acknowledges that the modern infill respects the historic street pattern, the document views Wheeler & Sproson's work as 'detrimental to the overall quality of the area.'⁸⁷ Further clarifying the Council's views, the *Appraisal* argues that the redevelopment is 'not in keeping with the traditional character of the area' and views it as 'bland' compared to the surrounding historic buildings.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Fife Council, *Burntisland Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan* (Fife, Unknown), p. 14.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

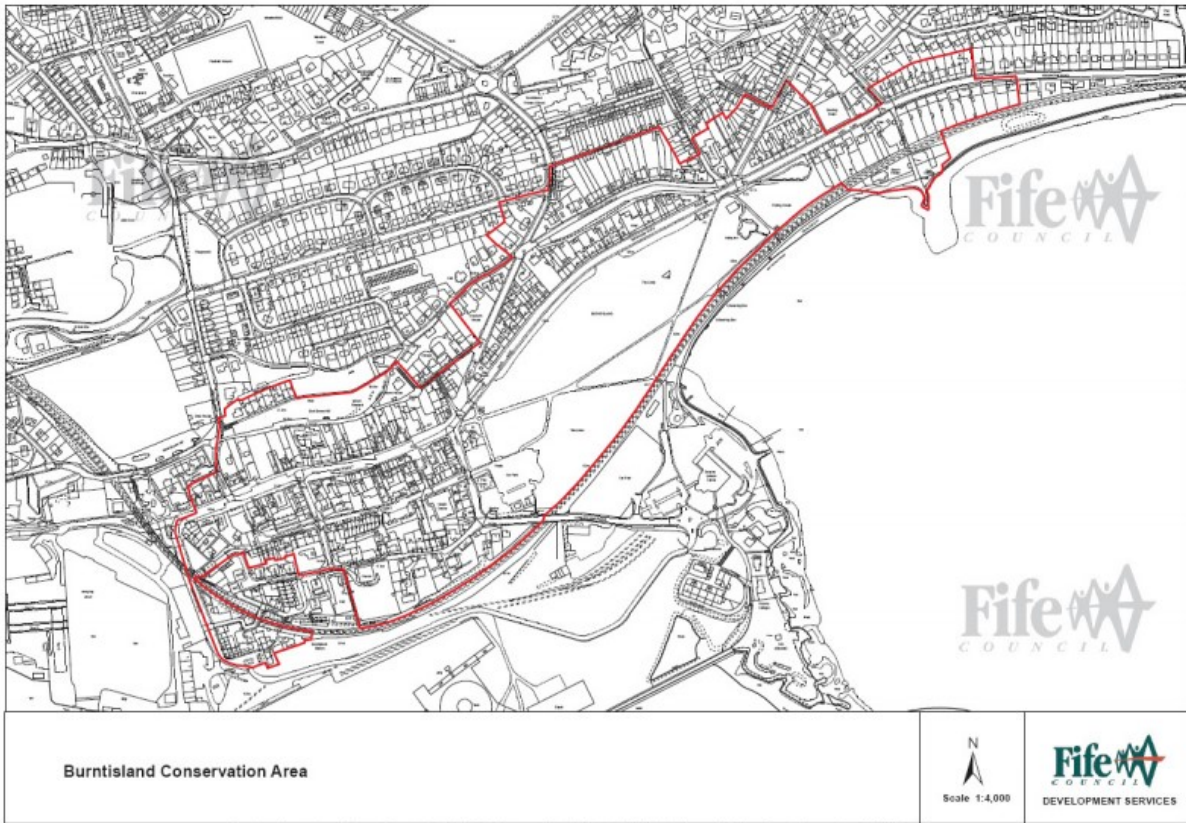


Figure C.16. As with Dysart, Fife Council have been careful to step the boundary of the Conservation Area around the 20th Century additions to Burntisland. The West Leven Street area has most obviously been avoided.

These views expressed by Fife Council is not uncommon, with modern architecture widely described in negative language in *Conservation Area Appraisals*. In stark contrast, Historic Environment Scotland has increasingly regarded Wheeler & Sproson’s work in a favourable light in recent years. Many of the restoration projects the practice were involved in have since been listed, including a collection of listings in 1971-72 of Sailor’s Walk and Pathhead Medical Centre in Kirkcaldy, the Stables at Kinmount house in Dumfries and Galloway, 6 The Rumford in Crail and The Gyles in Pittenweem. However, it is Wheeler & Sproson’s two listed modern buildings that are the most interesting.

The Protection of Post-War Heritage in Scotland

In 2004, Wheeler & Sproson's St Columba's Parish Church in Glenrothes finally achieved category 'A' listed status.⁸⁹ There had been after several previous failed attempts by DOCOMOMO-Scotland and Anthony Wheeler himself to protect it, but a review of unlisted important churches by Aonghus MacKechnie in 2000 for the then Historic Scotland helped to contribute to its final listing.⁹⁰ The church was, according to theologian Professor James Whyte, 'the first where the architect gave independent thought to the requirements of Reformed worship and the contemporary [twentieth-century] church.'⁹¹ The church was ultimately listed due to its 'contribution to ecclesiological change', having persuaded the Church of Scotland to become more open to new ideas and concepts in future buildings.⁹² More recently, Wheeler & Sproson's Hunter Building at Edinburgh College of Art, discussed in Chapter 7, received category 'B' listed status on the 18th of November 2020, partially using information on the practice discovered when researching this thesis.⁹³ The building has been listed for several reasons, including its sensitivity to the surrounding environment through its massing, scale, materials, and respect of earlier building pattern in the area. Unfortunately, these two buildings are currently the only buildings by the practice to be listed, despite several attempts to highlight their importance over the past three decades.

⁸⁹ Historic Environment Scotland, *Glenrothes: Church Street, St Columba's Parish Church Including Hall and Bell Tower* (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB49999>).

⁹⁰ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' p. 67; A. MacKechnie, *Maison Dieu: List of Churches Worthy of Consideration for State Care* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 5.

⁹¹ Watters, 'St Columba's Glenrothes,' pp. 72-73.

⁹² Historic Environment Scotland, *Glenrothes, Church Street, St Columba's Parish Church*.

⁹³ Historic Environment Scotland, *Hunter Building*.

In 1993, DOCOMOMO-Scotland created a list of 60 notable post-war buildings built between 1945 and 1970.⁹⁴ This included Wheeler & Sproson's Dysart Redevelopment. The aim was to identify important examples of architectural style, location and building materials from the period. DOCOMOMO intended that this list be used as a guide to inform the then Historic Scotland of buildings worthy of listing. Sadly, with Dysart irredeemably altered, the pressure is now on Burntisland as the most significant example of Wheeler & Sproson's modern-vernacular burgh intervention work that is still intact.

The listing of modern buildings is something which has caused much conflict and debate over recent decades. As Orbaşlı explains, buildings once considered a 'utopian ideal for living', may then be viewed as a 'blighted tower block', before eventually becoming an 'architectural icon' within the space of thirty or forty years.⁹⁵ These rapidly changing opinions on modern buildings and the subsequent interest in their listing sets them apart from older buildings. With older buildings, there was a higher chance that those of them that were of poor quality of particularly disliked would not have survived to the point where listing began to take effect in the 1930s and 40s.⁹⁶ In comparison, post-war buildings were created in a time where listing already existed, so interest in their protection often occurs earlier on in their lifespans. Despite this, there remains a risk that buildings of this era may be neglected or lost before they can reach listed status.

⁹⁴ M. Glendinning (ed.), *Rebuilding Scotland*, pp. 153-182.

⁹⁵ Orbaşlı, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 31.

⁹⁶ J. Gillon and D. McDowell, *Edinburgh's Post-War Listed Buildings* (Edinburgh, 2016), p. 8.

By 2009 there were only around 200 buildings constructed after 1945 listed in Scotland.⁹⁷ Age is a significant factor in the listing of buildings. In both Scotland and England there is a rough '30-year-rule' applied, meaning anything younger than that requires detailed attention, as they have not had as long as historical perspective and are usually only considered for listing if they present a particular national importance or are under imminent threat.⁹⁸ As a result, buildings built in the 60s and 70s have only really been considered seriously for listing since the 1990s, setting them in steep competition for attention in comparison to other examples by their contemporaries. In Scotland, focus has primarily been placed on 'starchitects' such as Basil Spence. The work of Gillespie, Kidd and Coia has received a particularly disproportionate level of listing, with 26 buildings listed that were built after 1945.⁹⁹ What was especially unusual was the listing of the 14 churches by those architects in 1994, something with few, if any, other practices have been honoured by.

This concentration on the listing of high-status buildings such as churches and Educational buildings by prominent 'artistic' modern architects highlights the comparable lack of focus received by more 'ordinary' forms of architecture. Out of the 38 listed buildings discussed in Historic Environment Scotland's *Glasgow's Post-war Listed Buildings*, for example, 18 are for churches and 11 for educational buildings.¹⁰⁰ Medium-to-high density housing developments, such as those by Wheeler & Sproson or local authority and New Town Development Corporations have by comparison, received substantially less focus despite their importance within the built environment and the lives of millions of people. In recent years there has been

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Orbasil, *Architectural Conservation*, p. 31.

⁹⁹ Historic Environment Scotland, *Listed Buildings Search* (<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/search>).

¹⁰⁰ D. McDowell, *Glasgow's Post-War Listed Buildings* (Edinburgh, 2016).

a marked move towards the listing of prominent examples of high-density modernist housing such as the listing of Alison & Hutchison & Partners' Cables Wynd House and Linksvie House in 2017, and the current consultation on the listing of a collection of high-rise flats in Aberdeen.

However, modern-vernacular architecture has received comparably limited focus. Out of the 60 buildings listed in the 2016 *Edinburgh's Post-War Listed Buildings*, 17 examples of medium-to-high density housing are itemised within the city.¹⁰¹ However, out of these of listed housing projects, only 5 are for buildings that could be considered modern-vernacular, and three of these are for jobs by the celebrated Basil Spence. Although this is still an achievement, it highlights the limited number of projects of this kind to be recognised for their importance. While this is not good news for the protection of modern-vernacular architecture in Scotland more broadly, it does underline the necessity for early sites like Burntisland to be protected before they are altered beyond recognition, as was the case in Dysart, or lost altogether.

Further Research

The thesis has provided the first substantial in-depth study of Wheeler & Sproson and their housing developments at Burntisland and Dysart. Unfortunately, there are several areas of research that were not studied within the scope of the project. Although we have begun to explore the conservation issues related to the sites, further work could be done to better understand the significance they hold within the context of heritage and the threats that they face. In particular, a study into the reasons why Burntisland has fared better than Dysart over

¹⁰¹ Gillon and McDowell, *Edinburgh's Post-War Listed Buildings*, p. 6.

the past 65 years could shed light onto any differences in their approach, the views of local leaders and the differing economic conditions within the settlements. Further, a Statement of Significance could be produced for Burntisland, highlighting its importance and need for investment.

Other examples of their work which adapted some of the distinct forms used in Burntisland and Dysart, such as their Langlee development in Galashiels, also require further attention. This could perhaps be done in a form comparable to the recent survey of Wheeler & Sproson's Grangemouth by Historic Environment Scotland that was done as part of this project. In the case of Langlee, this is particularly important as despite demolitions in some areas of the development, much of it has recently undergone a relatively sympathetic regeneration project by Camerons Strachan Yuill Architects.¹⁰² Small towers, similar to those in Dysart, have received an external layer of insulation and been reclad in harling of a very similar colour to the original.

Furthermore, the thesis has primarily focused on Wheeler & Sproson's work in a period between 1955 and 1977, with limited exploration of the careers of Antony Wheeler and Frank Sproson before they commenced Burntisland and Dysart, and of how the practice evolved beyond the completion of these sites. There is opportunity for a study to be done examining their work in Glenrothes Development Corporation prior to the formation of the practice, and the impact on those Wheeler taught when instructing at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. Equally, as post-1975 Architectural History becomes an increasingly popular field of study, with a studentship on this topic already under-way at the University of Edinburgh and

¹⁰² *Urban Realm*, Galashiels estate renewal to ensure homes remain fit for purpose (2020) (https://www.urbanrealm.com/news/8821/Galashiels_estate_renewal_to_ensure_homes_remain_fit_for_purpose.html).

a recent article by Watters highlighting the significance of this period in Scottish architecture, there is scope for a study of Wheeler & Sproson's work in this period.¹⁰³ The post-1975 period was one of transition for the practice, with increasing work in Edinburgh, Wheeler retiring in 1986 and a final decade markedly consumed by healthcare contracts. The practice's adaptation of their modern-vernacular approach to areas such as Edinburgh's classical New Town is an area which could be of particular interest.

However, research into their housing projects of the 1950s to 1970s is by no means complete. While this thesis has focused primarily on the schemes at an urban level, more focus could be placed on the design of the interior of Wheeler & Sproson's buildings. Questions on the layout and functionality of the new homes in comparison to the historic conservation projects could be addressed, and could provide an opportunity for oral history research to be done on the sites. Beyond Fife, there are several interesting examples of how the practice modified their primarily historic burgh-based redevelopment approach to the conditions of other areas, such as Grangemouth. Whilst I was involved in a short survey of the practice's 1970s work at Grangemouth, a mostly *tabula rasa* clearance site, it became clear that further investigation must be done to fully understand the approach the practice took across its seven phases.¹⁰⁴ This is particularly important, as Grangemouth is one of the few examples of Wheeler & Sproson's work that combined housing with retail facilities, and even a proposed civic centre. Similarly, other forms of Wheeler & Sproson's work, such as their educational and health care projects, require detailed research. Although the Hunter Building has now received recognition for its significance, other key examples of their work such as their halls of residence at Heriot

¹⁰³ Watters, 'Scotland's Postmodern Architecture.'

¹⁰⁴ N. Crimmins, 'Shaped by Industry,' *Historic Environment Scotland Blog* (2020) (<https://blog.historicenvironment.scot/2020/01/barr-grangemouth/>).

Watt University's Riccarton Campus and their student's union at the University of St Andrews could be explored.

Beyond Wheeler & Sproson's own work, there is opportunity to resolve the current under-researched state of modern-vernacular architecture in Scotland more broadly. Although several short publications and articles have been published centred on the Saltire Society, this requires a more detailed approach, with investigation into the mechanics and key figures of the Society and their impact on Scottish national forms of architecture. Likewise, related practices and organisations, such as Baxter, Clark & Paul, Moira & Moira, Hurd-Rolland, Sinclair MacDonald and Son have received little attention by historians and require further attention. In doing so, we can begin to develop a better understanding of this little studied, yet significant form of Scottish post-war architecture.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that modern-vernacular work is an important component in the history of housing in post-war Scotland. While large and attention-grabbing Modernist schemes dominated the cities and the headlines, a quieter pattern of housing development was spreading in towns and cities across the country, from its capital to its most isolated regions. This architecture was distinctly modern; yet steeped in local history. In 1974, Colin McWilliam praised the 'simple vernacular' as 'the most deeply relevant tradition' in Scottish architecture.¹⁰⁵ That this vernacular-inspired approach manifested itself most prominently in

¹⁰⁵ Glendinning, et al, *A History of Scottish Architecture*, p. 480.

the form of housing, speaks volumes about its significance to large proportions of the population and its rooted position within Scottish culture. Wheeler & Sproson were one of the most significant and awarded practices producing modern-vernacular work in Scotland during across the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

In her 2019 obituary for Frank Sproson, Diane Watters wrote of an interview she conducted with the architect. Sproson spoke of his time working with Anthony Wheeler with fondness, explaining how they 'shared a view' on architecture, and that partnerships were 'just like marriages!'¹⁰⁶ Clients also remembered how they complimented one another, with Sproson being 'solid', 'approachable' and 'responsible for the stability of the office', while Wheeler provided a 'flamboyant' and 'arty' touch to their work. This partnership proved a successful one, with a lasting impact on the towns and cities of south-east Scotland. Burntisland and Dysart are two of the most interesting examples of this, being developed at a time when Wheeler & Sproson's work and the modern-vernacular ideas themselves were in their formative stages. Now that their work is up to 65 years old, it is high time that this work receives some much-deserved recognition. If Wheeler & Sproson's task was to bring 'new life to an old town', the challenge for planners now is to find a way to bring 'new life' back into Wheeler & Sproson's interventions in Fife.

¹⁰⁶ Watters, 'Frank Sproson', pp. 96-97.

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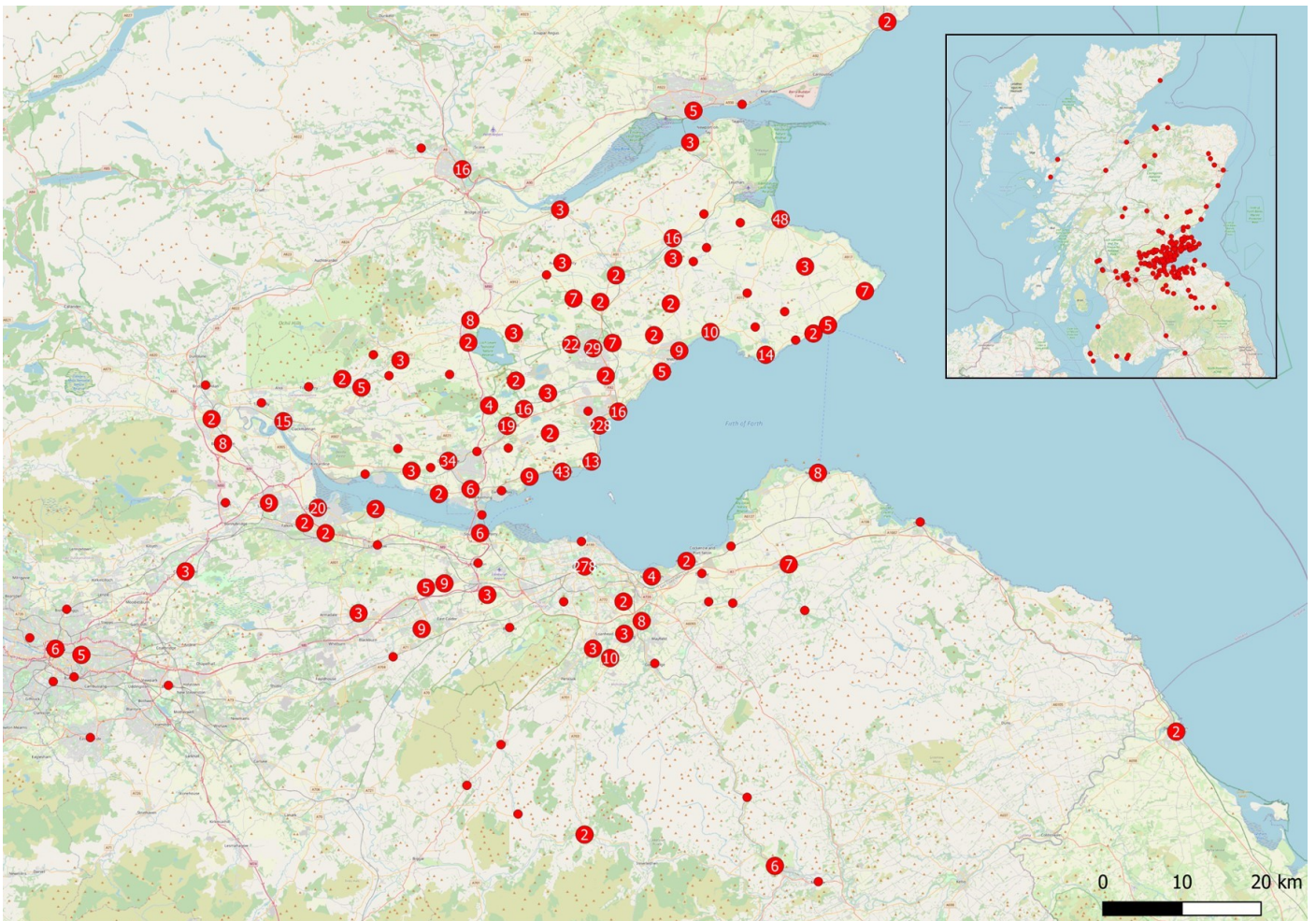
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Map of All Wheeler & Sproson Jobs



*All Wheeler & Sproson Jobs from 1952 to 2005, with the exception of a very small number of jobs in England and Saudi Arabia. Cluster points show all jobs within a 3mm distance.

Appendix 2: 'New Life in an Old Town: The Post-War Redevelopment of Burntisland and Dysart' Exhibition Panels

New Life in an Old Town

The Post-War Redevelopment of Burntisland and Dysart

Introduction

'New Life in an Old Town' is an exhibition focused on the innovative post-war regional redevelopment work of architects Wheeler and Sproson. The focus of this exhibition, Burntisland and Dysart, demonstrates Wheeler and Sproson's intimate and sensitive approach to Fife's historic burghs. These projects blended the modern and the vernacular, combining restoration, reconstruction and new development into a unique recipe that revitalised Scotland's historic burgh architectural tradition – but which is now, in its turn, threatened by a fresh wave of under-appreciation and neglect.

This exhibition is part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded PhD research project supported by the University of Edinburgh and Historic Environment Scotland. The thesis examines Wheeler and Sproson's approach to architecture and planning using Burntisland and Dysart as case studies. Much of the research has been conducted using the Wheeler and Sproson collection of drawings, photographs and manuscripts, held at Historic Environment Scotland, which has acted as the primary source for the images used in the exhibition, unless otherwise stated.

When most people think about postwar housing in the United Kingdom, they tend to picture council housing in the form of high rise flats, peripheral schemes and New Towns. Although each of these approaches to coping with the ever-growing population and housing demand of the time is fascinating in its own right; bringing about its own set of stories, this project has focused on a little studied form of regional council housing built in the small towns and villages of Fife.

The purpose of this exhibition is to both refine the work already done on Scottish housing history and help to direct attention towards the vernacular in modern architecture. It will draw focus on how

Wheeler and Sproson understood and envisaged 'modern-vernacular' architecture and discover how the practice was potentially one of the biggest influences on Scottish architecture

Wheeler and Sproson

Based at Sailor's Walk in Kirkcaldy, the practice opened as 'H Anthony Wheeler' in 1952, soon changing to 'Wheeler and Sproson in 1954 when Frank Sproson was made a partner. They were well known for both their historic buildings preservation work and their modern designs. Their work was mostly designed in a 'modern-vernacular' style and included council housing, hospitals, academic institutions, retail, industry and some private housing.

The practice was mostly known for its work for local authorities, housing associations, health boards, universities and religious bodies. Of all the projects they worked on, it was these public sector commissions which were generally the largest in scale, the longest running and the most notable jobs. The impact the practice had on South Fife in particular, is astonishing, with almost every burgh being noticeably altered in some way or other, primarily through housing schemes and health service infrastructure.

Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopments

Two of Wheeler and Sproson's most prominent and long-term projects took place across a span of twenty years in coastal communities in South Fife. The Burntisland Redevelopment Project was built between 1952 and 1975, with the Dysart Redevelopment Project taking place at approximately the same time, between 1957 and 1975. The projects were necessary to cater for the growth in the population of Fife, especially to cater for the expanding mining industry. Across the two towns, Wheeler and Sproson built twenty-five separate phases of development, with some including up to ten individual blocks.

A 1950s perspective sketch of the Somerville Street/High Street Redevelopment Burntisland.

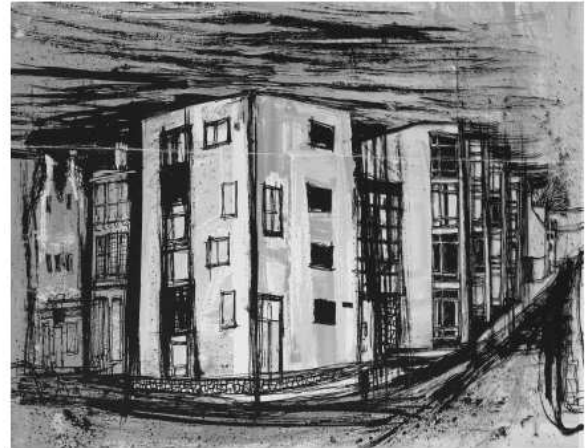


Photograph of Sir Anthony Wheeler and Frank Sproson. © Scottish Field.

Background



Image of the High Street in Dysart circa 1950, prior to redevelopment works.



Sketch of proposed High Street/Lothian Street Redevelopment, Burntisland.

The Towns Before Redevelopment

Burntisland and Dysart were both once bustling and wealthy settlements. Burntisland was the main link to Edinburgh by the world's first roll on roll off rail ferry up until 1890 when the Forth Rail Bridge opened. Dysart acted as a significant port, exporting salt and coal to the Baltic countries in return for wine, fine cloths and exotic foods. By the inter-war years, however, the settlements were both experiencing decline, with a series of economic disasters connected to the primary industries. By this point, Burntisland and Dysart were under the control of two different local authorities, with Burntisland managed by its own small burgh council and Dysart contained as a ward of the increasingly busy Kirkcaldy Corporation. Both towns were suffering from overcrowding and sub-standard housing. The local authorities acted to improve housing conditions by condemning large areas of primarily 19th century housing. The clearance areas included mainly tenements which were lacking bathrooms, larders, sculleries and hot water systems.

The Need for New Homes

By the start of the Second World War, 67% of homes built in Scotland since 1919 were in the public sector, compared to 29% in England. Despite these efforts, the inter-war housing drive did little to lessen the perceived housing shortage post-

1945. Although Scotland survived the war virtually unscathed, there was an urgent political and public demand for increased reconstruction through centralised planning.

Whilst on Clydeside and in other industrial areas high-rise estates and New Towns were being built, a third approach was also increasingly being adopted in the smaller urban centres of Scotland. A new generation of architects saw the urgent demand for new housing as a design opportunity to harmonise old and new in traditional burgh schemes. Their work was largely based on the turn-of-the-century 'conservative surgery' concepts of 'father of town planning,' Patrick Geddes. The aim was to weed out the worst of the slum tenements to allow for increased sunlight and airflow, whilst the 'best' of the buildings were kept and restored. One of the leading advocates of Geddes' techniques was his son-in-law, the architect and planner Sir Frank Mears.

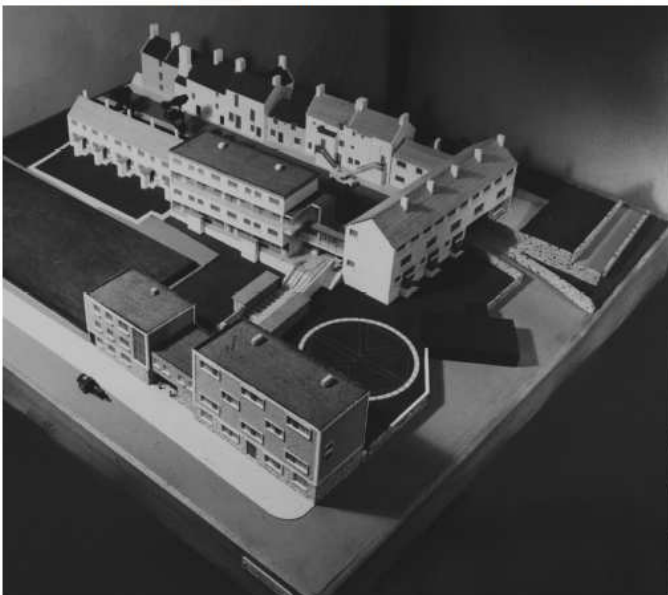
With an estimated additional 45,000 people expected to move from the Clyde Basin to Fife by the 1970s owing to expected growth in the mining industry, plans such as the Regional Plan for Central and South East Scotland by Mears were created to manage the influx. Mears proposed that rather than just building new towns, existing burghs be expanded to create a cohesive network. Dysart and Burntisland played a vi-

tal role in this "constellation" of settlements, and 200 acres of land in and around the towns was allocated for new housing. By December 1955 there were 2,433 people on Kirkcaldy Corporation's housing waiting list alone, with others arriving in the area on a regular basis. Whilst in Burntisland, the Council were only handling two or three small development schemes at a time, Kirkcaldy Corporation had plans for housing which would more than double the size of the existing town.

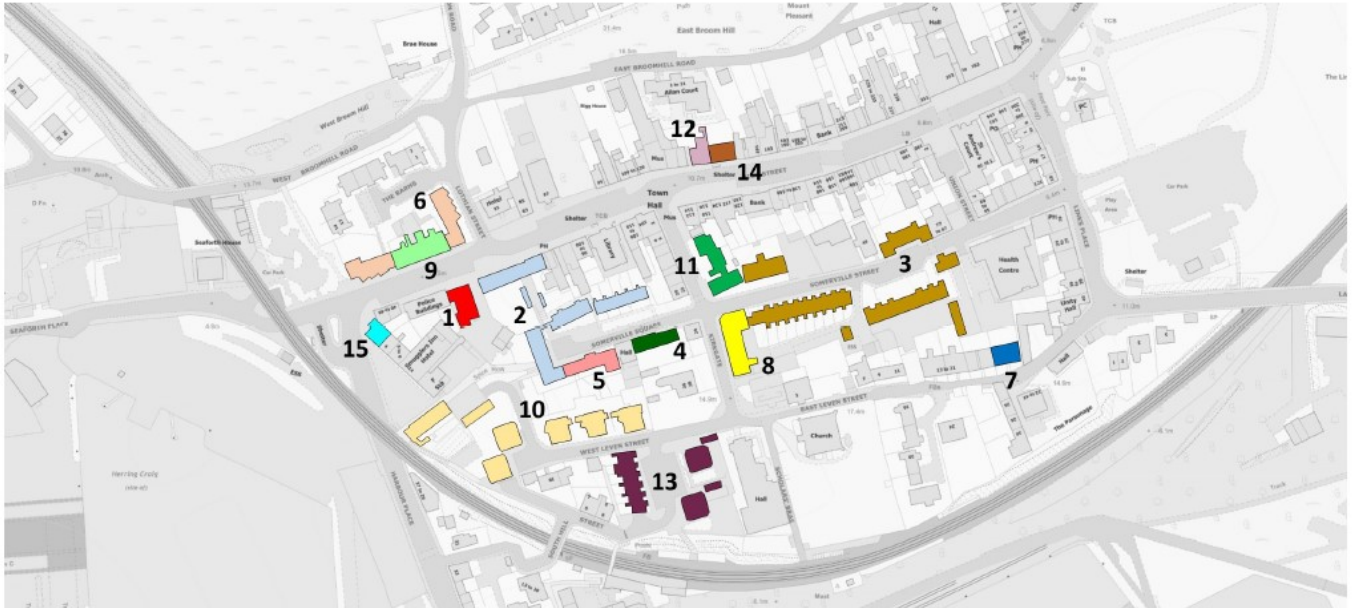
The Right Team for the Job

In 1952, Wheeler and Sproson convinced Burntisland Burgh Council that they were the ideal candidates to take on the first phase of the town's redevelopment. Their model of the Somerville Street/High Street development can be seen below. The practice used tools such as this model and the sketch of the High Street/Lothian Street development above to help the local authorities visualise the plan they had for what was a complex site closely surrounded by existing buildings. Wheeler and Sproson specialised in developments in difficult sites, where steep slopes, mine underworkings, dangerous historic buildings and limited site access were common. One of their first and most distinctive sites, the Somerville Street/High Street Redevelopment Project set in motion a fifty-year long relationship between the practice and the local authorities in Fife.

Images of the presentation model of Burntisland's Somerville Street Development, circa 1952.



Burntisland Redevelopment Project



1) Alterations to Police Buildings
Dates: 1952



2) Redevelopment at Somerville Street/High Street
Dates: 1955—1957



3) Somerville Street Development, Phase 2
Dates: 1956—1958



4) Alterations to Somerville Street
Dates: 1956



5) Alterations to 14-28 Somerville Street,
Dates: 1955—1956



6) High Street/Lothian Street Redevelopment
Dates: 1959—1961



7) Alterations to Leven Street East
Dates: 1961—1962



8) Redevelopment at Somerville Street/Kirkgate
Dates: 1962—1965



9) Alterations to 41 High Street
Dates: 1965—1966



10) Leven Street Redevelopment
Dates: 1967—1970



11) Housing Redevelopment at Kirkgate
Dates: 1968—1970



12) Alterations to 139/147 High Street
Dates: 1970—1972



13) West Leven Street Redevelopment Phase 2
Dates: 1972—1973



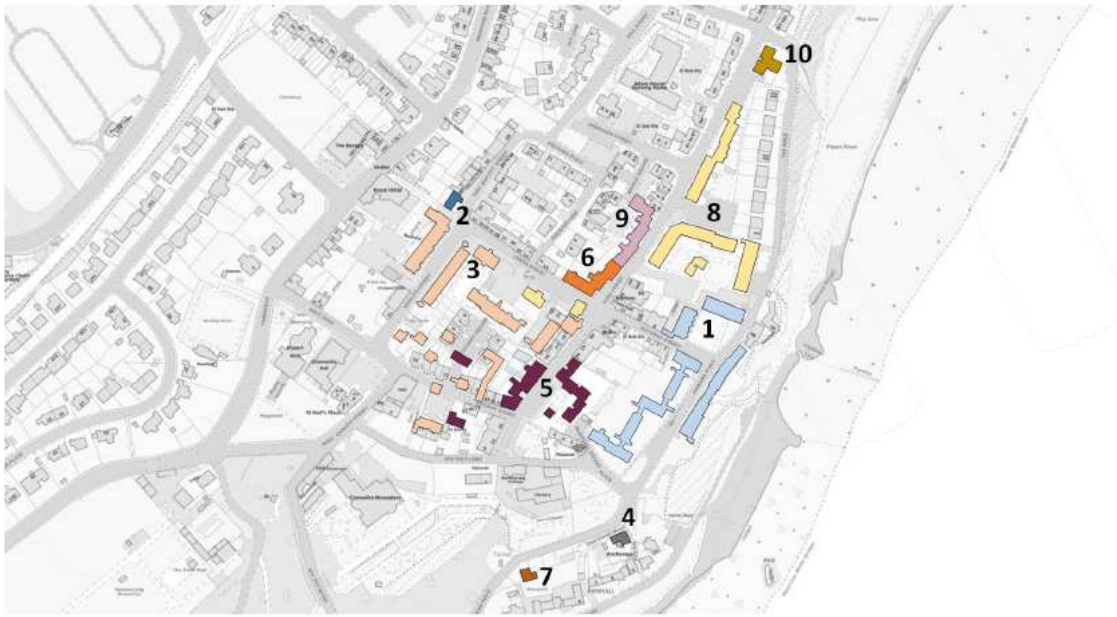
14) Alterations to 163-173 High Street
Dates: 1971—1972



15) Housing Redevelopment at 1-2 Harbour Place
Dates: 1974—1975



Dysart Redevelopment Project



1) Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 1
Dates: 1957—1963



2) Restoration of 'The Towers'
Dates: 1963—1965



3) Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 2
Dates: 1961—1970



4) Restoration of 'The Anchorage'
Dates: 1963—1967



5) Dysart Redevelopment : Phase 3—Part 1
Dates: 1967—1973



6) Restoration of 43-67 High Street
Dates: 1971—1972



7) Renovations of Church Tower
Dates: 1970—1971



8) Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3 - Part 2
Dates: 1971—1976



9) Restoration of 69-71 High Street
Dates: 1974—1975



10) Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 3 -Part 2, Block 10
Dates: 1974—1975



New Development

In June 1952, Burntisland Town Council decided to redevelop the Somerville Street area and part of the High Street. A plan for this site was compiled and approved by the Secretary for Scotland and the work was programmed over a 20 year period. The plans for the first five years were drawn up at this stage and aside from the retention of some of the 16th and 17th century houses on Somerville Street, most of the existing 19th century tenements in the centre of the town were to be demolished.

The Somerville Street job became Wheeler and Sproson's first redevelopment project in a historic burgh. Their initial work in Burntisland began in 1955 and set in motion a series of 15 jobs that they worked on within the central area of Burntisland from the 1950s to the 1970s. Their

work had an enormous impact on the burgh and takes up large areas of the town centre.

In Dysart Wheeler and Sproson's redevelopment work also covered the majority of the settlement. The practice were attracted to the 'essentially urban' character of the town and saw it as an opportunity to carry out work similar in character to their recent experience in just 8 miles away in Burntisland.

Between 1957 and 1975, Wheeler and Sproson designed a multi-part local-authority housing development in Dysart that resulted in the construction of 280 homes. The project consisted of over thirty individual blocks of housing, the majority of which were newly built. These ranged

from one bed flats up to substantial family homes.

Wheeler and Sproson opposed the kind of low-density form of development common in smaller towns in the inter-war period, with its spread out bungalows and wide streets. Instead, the practice favoured a higher-density approach, with housing ranging from two to five storeys in height. They felt this was particularly justified in Dysart and Burntisland due to the difficult nature of the sites. The varied topography, presence of significant historic properties, mine underworking and prior industrial usage in the towns allowed them to create something original and exciting in the limited space available for development.

Case Study: Phase 2, Dysart

Described as an 'an inward-looking district of convoluted alleys and broken-down walls', the area between the High Street and Quality Street was transformed into the second phase of the Dysart Redevelopment Project. The development was designed and built between 1961-70 and consisted of 8 zones, containing 14 individual blocks.

The blocks ranged from two to five storeys, mostly in long terraces. The most prominent and recognisable part of the development was the six 4-storey towers. These towers each contained a set of two stacked duplex flats. The area between them was purposefully left unbuilt, with landscaped squares used instead to allow for increased sunlight and space for children to play safely.



Five-storey deck access slab block at Dysart Phase 2



Four of the six small towers of Dysart Phase 2

Case Study: Somerville Street/High Street, Burntisland

The Somerville Street/High Street area was described in 1954 by officials as 'the most pressing area' of the settlement, as it was seen as 'unfit for human habitation.' Many of these houses had been subject to demolition orders in the 1930s with the remainder of the buildings designated for clearance in 1953.

Designed and built between 1955 and 1957, the scheme consisted of 5 separate blocks, containing 139 homes. The square was bounded on the south by restored properties and on the west and north by new blocks. The road was also widened to allow light penetration from the north, and by doing so formed Somerville Square as a focal point of the development.



Somerville Square



The High Street facing blocks

Restoration

Much of the work done on the Dysart Redevelopment Project and its related schemes was through the restoration of existing buildings. Restoration work on these buildings aimed to prolong their lifespan whilst preserving their architectural character. Historic properties such as these were disliked by the local authorities of the time, who were keen to wipe them clear for the creation of an entirely new environment. In interviews, Wheeler spoke of the struggles he had with the councillors of Dysart in particular, who grew up in the area and were determined to 'get on with the Brave New World' and demolish the townscape they had become tired of.

In Burntisland the Council tended to be more prone to appreciating the value in their most significant historic houses. In Dysart, by contrast, Wheeler and Sproson felt forced to fight for the retention of the many of its historic build-

ings, often against the wishes of the local council. In a 1997 interview, Wheeler discussed how he had to persuade the local council in Dysart to save 'The Towers' from demolition as they were unhappy with its rundown appearance and location.

The practice were keen to safeguard buildings of both architectural and historical interest that they thought added to the cultural significance of the settlements. One interesting example of a building saved for its historical connection was a house in Dysart owned by the first man to walk from one end of Australia to the other!

By the time they began working on the historic properties of Burntisland and Dysart, the practice had become experienced in the restoration of 16th and 17th century build-

ings. One of their most prominent roles was as job architects for seven of the National Trust for Scotland's Little Houses Improvement Scheme (LHIS) sites. The purpose of these projects was to restore significant historic properties which had been neglected.

Like with the LHIS scheme, Wheeler and Sproson attempted to bring the restored buildings in Burntisland and Dysart back to their former glory. They did this by making repairs such as the replacement of damaged walls and roofing with original materials. They also brought the properties up to modern-day standards, with the introduction of kitchens and bathrooms. Examples of buildings Wheeler and Sproson restored in Burntisland and Dysart includes the 16th century 'The Towers' and the 17th century houses on Somerville Street, discussed below.

Case Study: The Towers, Dysart

The 16th century 'The Towers' is a category A listed L-plan tenement located at the junction of East Quality Street and Cross Street in Dysart. Work on 'The Towers' took place between 1963 and 1965, the second job of the Dysart Redevelopment Project. Three flats were created within the building in the space which was originally a single house.

Renovation work on the building took place in tandem with the first block of Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 2. By working on both buildings at the same time, Wheeler and Sproson were able to connect them through the use of a distinctly modern timber clad joining section at first floor level. This connection visually tied 'The Towers' to the rest of the development, whilst retaining pedestrian access through a pend below.



Image of Dysart's The Towers before restoration.

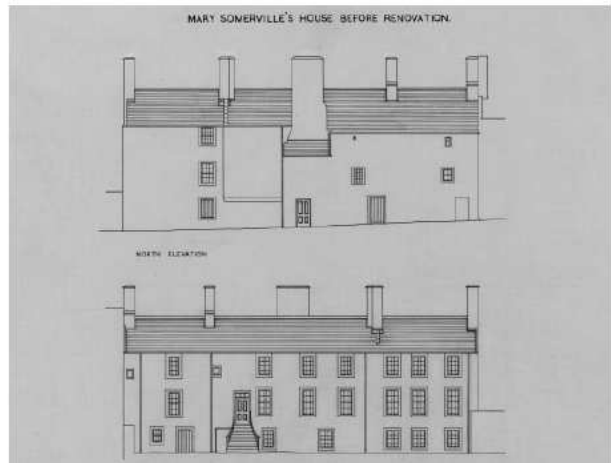


Image of Dysart's The Towers after restoration.

Case Study: Somerville Street, Burntisland

The row of category B listed 17th century historic houses on Somerville Street were restored as part of two separate jobs between 1955 and 1956 for Burntisland Burgh Council and the James Harrow Trust. Like at 'The Towers' Wheeler and Sproson retained as much of the original buildings as possible, whilst adjusting the interior to accommodate flats.

One of the houses which was saved was once the home to Mary Somerville, the famous scholar, mathematician, and astronomer who was wife to Admiral Fairfax, and who became the namesake of both the street and of Somerville College at the University of Oxford.



Ministry of Works 1959 drawings prior to restoration of Somerville St.



Image of Burntisland's Somerville Street after restoration.

Reconstruction

The third type of development Wheeler and Sproson designed in Burntisland and Dysart was that of facsimile reconstruction. These schemes involved the rebuilding, or at least substantial rebuilding, of historic houses or commercial buildings. Most of these had suffered from structural damage caused by mining in the area, or had been derelict for long periods of time. They were often considered too costly and difficult to restore. Reconstruction was occasionally chosen as the only alternative to the complete loss of the building.

They were built as close to the original as possible, but not as complete replicas. Often they would look similar to the originals on the outside, with only slight modifications made. Usually the newly built replicas of the buildings

were kept close to the original footprint, including any additional features such as stairs, pends or projecting entranceways.

The most noticeable change was usually in terms of the overall shape of the building. It was often necessary to raise rooflines to make them more functional as flats. Similarly, the addition of extra windows was often vital in their transformation into living spaces. The configuration of their interiors would also regularly altered to suit modern living, with the interior either completely reorganised, or larger rooms were partitioned.

Very little research has been done on this kind of 'urban facsimile' architecture in Scotland, as it is generally associ-

ated, internationally speaking, with reconstruction after wartime bomb damage to historic towns – something that Scotland was entirely spared in the 20th century: the pioneering examples are instead in continental cities such as Ypres in Belgium or Arras in France.

The relative lack of facsimile architecture in Britain as a whole was also influenced by the preference of many conservationists for a clear separation between 'old' buildings and 'modern' additions or reconstructions. Therefore examples such as those seen in Burntisland and Dysart were exceptions. Examples of buildings Wheeler and Sproson reconstructed in Burntisland and Dysart includes 43-67 High Street in Dysart and 1-2 Harbour Place in Burntisland.

Case Study: 43-67 High Street, Dysart

Between 1971 and 1972, Wheeler and Sproson rebuilt a series of houses between 43 and 67 High Street, Dysart. The buildings were suffering from severe subsidence due to mining works in the area and as a result had to be taken down. Instead of losing what Wheeler and Sproson considered to be significant historical buildings, they instead chose to rebuild them as close to the original as was practically possible.

The development contained eleven flats, two shops and a library. The replacement buildings replicated the originals as closely as they could, following the original line of the facades and form of the buildings. The only dramatic change was the addition of several windows and the use of colour.



Image of Dysart High Street Before



Image of Dysart High Street After

Case Study: 1-2 Harbour Place, Burntisland

Originally a merchants house, then a shop with flats above, by the 1970s 1-2 Harbour Place had been drastically altered and had become derelict. It was demolished and rebuilt between 1974 and 1975 and transformed into three flatted properties.

Wheeler and Sproson opted to raise the level of the roofline in order to add an extra flat in the attic space. This was necessary, as without the additional property, the local authorities would not have considered it a worthwhile investment. The building contains three flats with the first and second floor flats accessed by an exterior fore-stair.



Image of Burntisland Harbour Place Before



Image of Burntisland Harbour Place After

Planning



This square in Dysart's Phase 3: Part 1 is a good example of how Wheeler and Sproson set back the original street line to create improved lighting conditions.



The connecting section between Dysart's Phase 2 and The Towers allowed locals access to the main road above through the use of a traditional pend structure.

The 'Conservative Surgery' Planning Approach

In the 1950s, disagreements over the best planning approaches to the growing population and rapidly decaying housing stock were at their peak. While elsewhere ideas of *tabula rasa* clearances of inner-city areas or the construction of New Towns dominated, the coastal communities of South Fife followed a different concept. Patrick Geddes' 'Conservative Surgery' approach, developed half a century before, proved to be an effective way to tackle Fife's growing settlements.

Wheeler and Sproson embraced the densely built nature of these large sites and adopted Geddes' concept of twisting and winding housing in and around the original burgh architecture, conforming to particular historic plot lines in some areas and opening up green spaces in others. They did this by restoring or rebuilding significant historic buildings in key locations and using the sites left over from the demolition of crumbling 19th century housing for new construction. The practice saw Burntisland and Dysart as being "essentially urban in character" and hoped to group together historic and modern buildings to create a "unified" environment.

'Spheres of Influence'

The strong influence of Burntisland and Dysart's historic architecture and layout was reflected vividly in Wheeler and Sproson creation of 'spheres of influence' around historic buildings in the burghs. They concentrated the layout of their new developments around particular views of significant buildings which they fought to save. Examples of this include Dysart's The Towers, St. David's and the Anchorage, but also other key landmarks such as the Tolbooth and St Serf's Tower.

With this relatively sensitive approach to the historic environment, the practice aimed to design buildings which avoided disrupting the architectural scale of the area. In a 1967 interview, Sir Anthony Wheeler explained this method, arguing that 'it's a gift to have some fine old buildings as a focus and something to key the whole scheme to'. This method can best be seen in Phase 2 of Dysart, which was surrounded by The Towers to the north, St. David's to the west and the Tollbooth to the south/east. Throughout the scheme, they arranged each block to allow for glimpses of the historic landmarks through gaps between buildings.

Similarly, in Burntisland, the practice chose to use 'spheres of influence' to shape the redevelopment primarily around the row of 16th and 17th century houses on Somerville Street. This became the main focal point of the area, with its location at the centre of the redevelopment, creating a new square in front of them to enhance their significance.

Public Spaces

Wheeler and Sproson believed that they needed to fit their designs in and around the existing environment. They did this in both Dysart and Burntisland by ensuring that pathways and rights of way were retained by integrating pends and squares into the design. This can be seen best in Somerville Street Phase 1 in Burntisland which benefited from one of the first pedestrian ways in the country, and Fitzroy Square in Dysart's Phase 2. Whilst much of the focus of the era was on improving housing standard, Wheeler and Sproson were determined that urban environments also required improvement. The practice believed that layout and landscaping had to go hand in hand with housing construction in order to create functional and lively streets.

Dysart's Phase 1 not long after completion. Wheeler and Sproson designed these two blocks to straddle the site where a gas tower once stood, creating an intimate square that children could safely play in while overlooked by their parents in the duplex flats above.



Architecture



A modern concrete external stair was used in contrast with the traditional stone and harl behind at Somerville Street, Burntisland.



One of Wheeler and Sproson's most iconic building forms was the 'zig-zag' flats, which can be seen here in Phase 1 of Dysart, but are also present in Burntisland.

Modern-Vernacular Architecture

Influenced by Patrick Geddes and Frank Mears, the Saltire Society was founded in 1936 to promote the utopian 'golden age' of Scottish culture and heritage. The Society attacked modern buildings for their supposed lack of charm and solidity. They proposed remedying this by compromising between modern and traditional through blending the ideas of the time with the solid design of the past. The aim was to create a 'deeper' or 'sane' modernism inspired by 16th and 17th century Scots architecture in the hope of dissolving class division and helping to restore the 'organic unity of the nation'.

However far-fetched the social and cultural idealism, the architectural results of this fusion of modernity and tradition were often truly memorable and unique. The Society proposed a mixture of in-character housing infill in the modern-vernacular style and monument reconstructions to counter the clean slate destruction of the time. The outcome was a series of schemes which varied from primarily preservation-based projects to more openly 'contemporary' new or infill developments.

The practice were regularly involved with the Saltire Society

and The Royal Scottish Academy, and were subsequently exposed to the works of its leading figures, such as Patrick Geddes, Frank Mears, Alan Reiach and Robert Hurd. Wheeler and Sproson's work in Burntisland and Dysart represents this unique period within architectural history in Scotland and demonstrates well the ways in which the architects interacted with the environment around them.

Architectural Form and use of Materials

The architecture of Fife had for centuries been characterised by pantile roofs, crow-stepped gables and a thick render ('harling'). By blending traditional forms and materials such as these with more modern alternatives, Wheeler and Sproson created a visual representation of how they wanted Scotland to be – a nation rooted in the past, but forward looking and unafraid to adopt modern ideas.

They used local materials such as stone, pantiles and harling to link their modern buildings to their surroundings. The lower sections of many of the blocks were constructed by reusing stone from demolished 19th century housing in the area. They even attempted to make use of detailed stonework such as date stones in the fabric of the new buildings to

comemorate the buildings that has been demolished. Elsewhere Wheeler and Sproson opted to use traditional harling in a variety of colours to bring life to their buildings and create a cohesive environment in the settlements.

Alongside these, Wheeler and Sproson used modern materials such as concrete steel and glass to both harmonise with the historic fabric in some areas and create a stark contrast in others. The natural, raw texture of the concrete worked well alongside the more traditional materials and its rough appearance helped link the structures to the thick-walled, blocky vernacular houses of Fife.

The most unique way in which Wheeler and Sproson expressed their artistic vision was through the use of a variety of building types across both towns. While their more traditional tenement inspired blocks were a vital part of the schemes, one of the most unique building types were the small towers seen in Dysart Phases 2 and 3, as well as Burntisland's West Level Street Development. The practice combined a variety of traditional irregularly spaced windows, chamfered corners and closely clipped gables with more modern projecting balcony spaces and entrance canopies.

Dysart's Phase 2 redevelopment was dominated by its six 4-storey towers, which each contained 2 duplex flats each. Whilst clearly modern in appearance, the towers encompassed a range of traditional forms and materials, such as their clipped gables, irregular window spacing and harled walls.



Conclusion



The 1965 Saltire Society Award for Good Design found on Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 2.



Image of the demolition of part of Dysart Redevelopment: Phase 2 in 2008.

The Significance of the Practice

Throughout its existence, Wheeler and Sproson was a hugely successful practice, strikingly popular amongst cultural organisations, winning 19 Saltire Society Awards and Commendations and 12 Civic Trust Awards and Commendations. This helped them to develop the reputation of one of the most renowned 'modern-vernacular' practices in Scotland.

Through the Burntisland and Dysart Redevelopment Projects, the practice also developed a reputation of providing a balance between quality and economy which later proved attractive to local authorities and organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland. Across the 50 years they operated, the practice completed over 1,300 jobs, ranging from individual private homes up to significant institutional buildings.

Notable jobs the practice worked on include Edinburgh College of Art's Hunter Building, much of Forth Park Hospital in Kirkcaldy, a large housing development at Buckhaven, a students' union at the University of St. Andrews and the vast Grangemouth Central Area Redevelopment.

Burntisland and Dysart in Recent Decades

In his 1997 interview, Wheeler speculated about the potential future of the Dysart scheme, arguing that while no damage to the ensemble would result if residents made small changes to their flats - as he hoped that his architecture was robust enough to support this - the effect of more thorough reconstruction would be fatal: 'if it were re-roofed - that would kill it dead!' As fate would have it, however, that was exactly what happened, with much of the Dysart scheme not just reroofed in the late 2000s, but radically reconstructed.

Since the completion of the projects in 1977, a lot has happened to the two burghs, with a drop in population to match the deindustrialisation in the area. In particular, the closure of Dysart's Frances Colliery in 1988 had a drastic impact on the settlement, with increased unemployment and the gradual closure of small businesses. These changes impacted the redevelopment project, with vacant properties and antisocial behaviour reported in and around the flats.

In 2005 Fife Council announced plans for the demolition of several of Wheeler and Sproson's blocks in Dysart, citing this antisocial behaviour as the primary reason for their removal.

By 2008 one of the larger blocks of Phase 1, much of Phase 2 and part of Phase 3 had been demolished. Unfortunately this included four of the six small towers in Phase 2 and the unique pyramid-roofed tower in Phase 3.

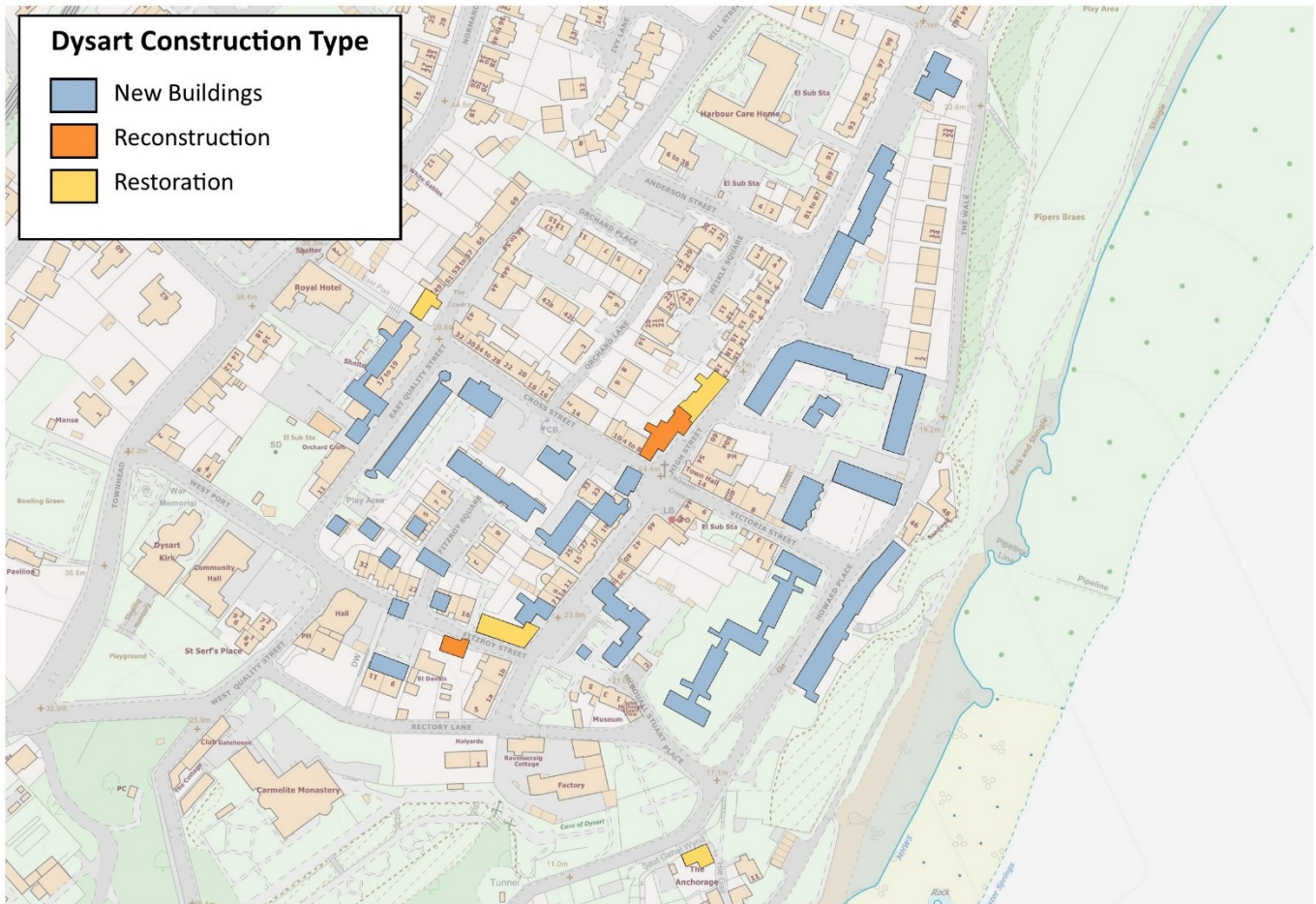
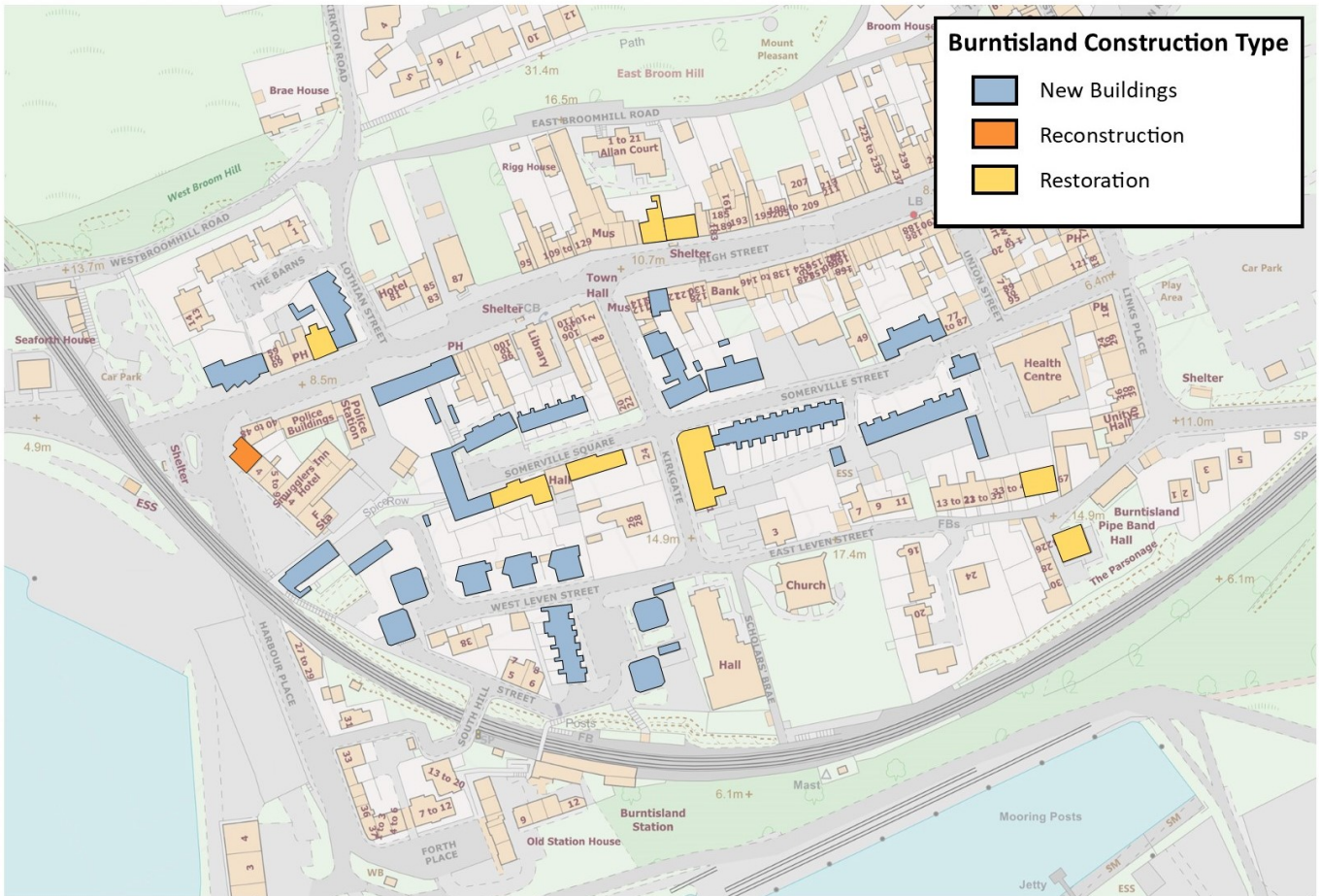
Burntisland, on the other hand, has remarkably remained entirely intact, with all of the original buildings and service structures still standing and occupied. As a result, Burntisland town-centre reconstruction enjoys a unique national status as one of the most richly creative and best-preserved 'modern-vernacular' ensembles in Britain, as well as the foremost survivor of the Geddes 'conservative surgery' tradition. Not just that: it also now increasingly stands out at an international level in comparison with equivalent setpieces elsewhere of postwar conservation-sensitive modernist architecture.

It is unclear at present what the future holds for the Burntisland Redevelopment Project, but it is hoped that the research done as part of this project will draw light on the important role it has played in the history of architecture in the United Kingdom.

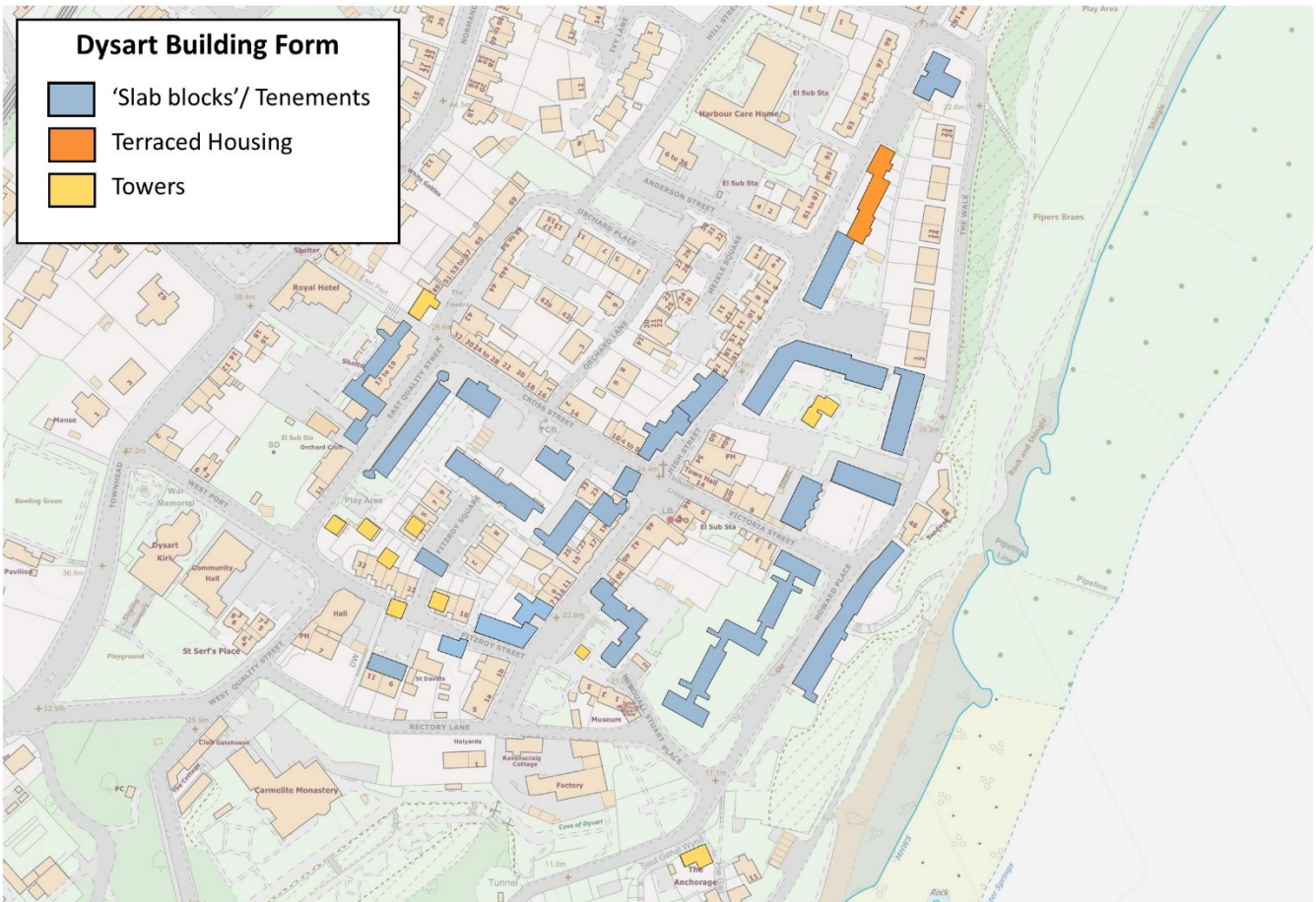
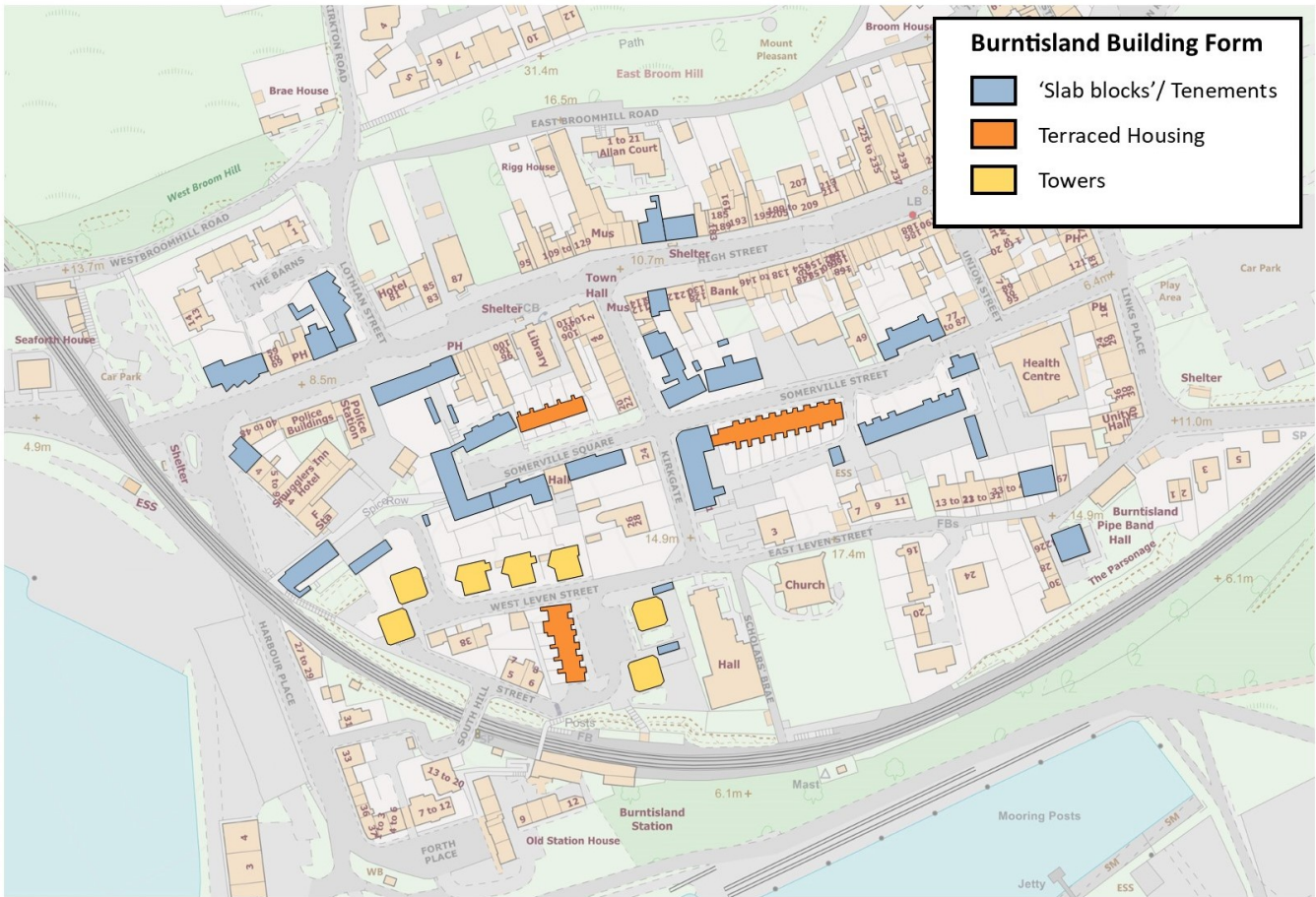
Aerial Photograph of Dysart Redevelopment Project Circa 1975



Appendix 3. Burntisland and Dysart Construction Types




Appendix 4. Burntisland and Dysart Building Forms




Appendix 5. Key Scottish Modern-Vernacular Housing Developments (1948-1979)


Baxter Clark & Paul
Churchill Court Housing,
Aberfeldy (1964)




Sinclair Macdonald & Son
Central Area, Thurso
(1969-75)



Sinclair Macdonald & Son
Palace Road, Kirkwall
(1967)




Moira & Moira
Heddel's Park, Lerwick
(1959)



James Parr & Partners
Commercial Street, Perth
(1978)




Baxter, Clark & Paul
Harbourlea, Anstruther
(1977)




**Anderson Roland
Wedgwood Associates**
Lynedoch House (1979)



Baxter, Clark & Paul
East Street, St Monans
(1968)



Robert Hurd & Partners
Chessel's Court, Edinburgh
(1958-66)



Basil Spence & Partners
Victoria Street, Dunbar
(1948)




Basil Spence & Partners
Canongate Development,
Edinburgh (1959-69)



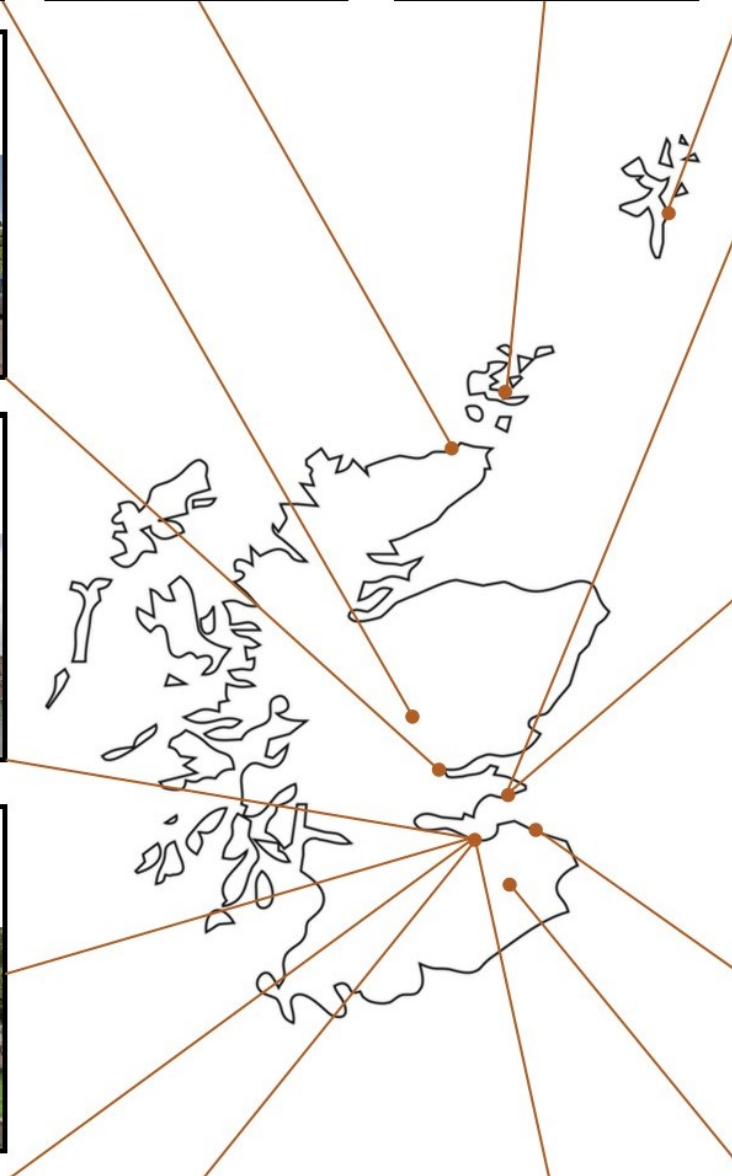
Ian G Lindsay & Partners
Newhaven Development,
Edinburgh (1960-72)



Basil Spence & Partners
Newhaven Development,
Edinburgh (1956)



Charles Peter Womersley
Central Redevelopment,
Galashiels (1963)

Appendix 6. All Wheeler & Sproson Awards and Commendations



1956	Saltire Society	Award	The Bowery	Leslie
1957	Saltire Society	Award	Flats, Cartmore Road	Lochgelly
1960	Saltire Society	Award	Phase 1	Dysart
1960	Civic Trust	Award	Sailors' Walk	Kirkcaldy
1962	Saltire Society	Award	High Street/Lothian Street	Burntisland
1962	Civic Trust	Award	Central Development - Contract 3	Lochgelly
1963	Saltire Society	Award	Broad Street	Cowdenbeath
1963	Saltire Society	Commendation	School Place	Uphall
1963	Civic Trust	Commendation	Office Extension at Sailors Walk	Kirkcaldy
1964	Saltire Society	Commendation	Redevelopment of Old Buckhaven	Buckhaven
1964	Saltire Society	Extension Award	1st Central Area (Extension)	Lochgelly
1964	Saltire Society	Extension Award	2nd Central Area (Extension)	Lochgelly
1965	Saltire Society	Award	Phase 2	Dysart
1965	Civic Trust	Award	Phase 1	Buckhaven
1965	Civic Trust	Award	The Gyles	Pittenweem
1967	Civic Trust	Commendation	The Towers	Dysart
1967	Saltire Society	Commendation	The Towers	Dysart
1967	Saltire Society	Commendation	The Anchorage	Dysart
1967	Civic Trust	Commendation	The Anchorage	Dysart
1967	Saltire Society	Award	Stirling Road	Milnathort
1967	Saltire Society	Award	The Gyles	Pittenweem
1968	Civic Trust	Commendation	Redevelopment of Somerville Street East	Burntisland
1969	Civic Trust	Award	Old Buckhaven Redevelopment	Buckhaven
1969	Saltire Society	Commendation	Old Buckhaven Redevelopment	Buckhaven
1970	Saltire Society	Award	Backcauseway	Culross
1971	Saltire Society	Extension Award	Phase 3, Part 1	Dysart
1971	Saltire Society	Award	Ladyburn Street	Kinghorn
1971	Saltire Society	Commendation	Abronhill 4	Cumbernauld
1972	Civic Trust	Commendation	Phase 3	Dysart
1973	Saltire Society	Award	Redevelopment at Old Buckhaven, Phase 3	Buckhaven
1975	Saltire Society	Commendation	John Wood's Hospital	Upper Largo
1976	Saltire Society	Commendation	East of Lumley Street	Grangemouth
1977	Saltire Society	Commendation	1/2 Harbour Place	Burntisland
1977	Civic Trust	Commendation	1/2 Harbour Place	Burntisland
1979	Saltire Society	Commendation	Path House	Kirkcaldy
1980	Civic Trust	Commendation	Path House	Kirkcaldy
1984	Saltire Society	Commendation	Glamis House Cheshire Home	Glenrothes
1985	Saltire Society	Award	Bedford Court	Alloa
2003	Civic Trust	Award	West Wemyss Townscape Heritage Initiative	West Wemyss

(Source: Rutherford, *Saltire Awards for Housing Design*.)