

INVENTORISATION OF MODERN HERITAGE: URBANISM AND LANDSCAPE

Thursday 13 March 2014 - Session One - Paper Three

'The Inventorisation of New Town Landscapes: Principles for the identification and selection for listing Glenrothes' Town Art'

by Dawn McDowell (Deputy Head of Listing and Designed Landscapes, Historic Scotland)



David Harding, *Mushrooms*, Pitteuchar, 1976. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

This case study will explore the challenges of identifying and selecting diverse objects in the context of the post-war planned urban landscape of Glenrothes. More than 140 public art works, of various scale and type, are located in the townscape and all of these have been considered recently for statutory listing by Historic Scotland, an executive agency of the Scottish Government.¹

INTRODUCTION

Glenrothes was designated in 1948 under the New Towns (Scotland) Act 1946 as Scotland's second post-war New Town, after East Kilbride in 1947. Glenrothes is located in the east of Scotland in the county of Fife and approximately 35 miles north of Edinburgh. The original plan was to build a new settlement for a population of around 34,000 to house mining families following the recent opening of the Rothes Colliery. The early failure of the mine was mitigated by the Scottish Office's establishment of electronics and high tech companies in the town as part of Scotland's emerging technologies economic development programme, ensuring a continuation of access to local employment from around 1961 to

2000 and a certain level of stability in the local economy which gave flexibility for a more ambitious town plan.

From the beginning, careful consideration was given to the form and infrastructure of the town, focusing on individual precincts, which were self-contained residential areas that were kept separate from planned industrial estates. Engineers, planners, builders and architects worked together to not only create good quality mass housing but also green spaces, tree planting and hard and soft landscaping giving each precinct a distinctive identity. By its 20th anniversary, the Glenrothes Development Corporation took the pioneering step to ensure a lasting sense of place and identity for a town that had by then experienced the ebb and flow of its first generation of residents by appointing an artist to join the planning department in 1968. This was the first permanent post of a 'town artist' in the country, arousing widespread interest across the UK as it demonstrated most decisively an innovative collaborative approach by this development corporation.

¹ See www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/glenrothestownart for more information about the listing review and the project. To search listed buildings see Historic Scotland's data webpages <http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk>.

David Harding, *Dog Cemetery*, Pitteuchar, 1970. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

When Historic Scotland undertook a listing survey of



Left: Richard Doyle, the General Manager of the Glenrothes Development Corporation, with the Glenrothes Master Plan in 1976. © The Scotsman Publications Ltd. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

Right: Ariel view of Caskieberran and Tanshall precincts, 1989. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk

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the public art of Glenrothes in 2010, it was the first time that the agency looked at art related to a large scale, planned urban environment in one of Scotland's five New Towns.² Previously, tentative steps had been taken to identify the special interest of buildings for the purpose of listing in these post-war new town settlements, where no listing programme had yet been prioritised. More widely across Scotland, the statutory listing of mass or social housing has only taken place intermittently, and area designation – the responsibility of local authorities – is virtually non-existent in relation to post-war estates. Only one post-war conservation area has been designated by the City of Edinburgh Council at the Thistle Foundation, which recognises special housing types and their immediate infrastructure to support disabled war veterans and their families. While listing cannot account for the spaces in between buildings, conservation areas of post-war urban environments have not yet come forward to bridge the gap that listing cannot fill.

Nevertheless, the buildings and the fabric of post-war urban environment that can or should be recognised through listing, by way of existing statutory and non-statutory mechanisms is worthy of further consideration. Thus, the assessment of a significant body of work across an entire New Town can be seen as a convenient entry point into the post-war urban townscape at Glenrothes in particular. The need to identify and measure or rather 'inventorise' the work before statutory listing could take place was an accepted first step of the proposed listing review. It was also anticipated that the act of inventorising would foster a positive understanding of the town art to help decision-making for statutory listing, and to provide

further recognition of the artwork as individual assets and within their architectural context.

To consider the principles of identification and selection and the recognition of value or special interest, it will be useful to discuss how the listing of Glenrothes town art was initiated, what criteria was applied to assess the work, and some of the lessons which can be learned from it.

GLENROTHES'S ARTISTS AND ART WORK

The planning, development, management and promotion of Glenrothes was conceived as a totality, and certainly the public art – especially the earliest work associated with first phases of town planning – can be seen to define the progressiveness of the socialist-utopian vision of the period. The town produced a distinctive and diverse collection of art works set within a carefully planned urban landscape which included site specific art works ranging in date from 1965 to the present.

In 1968, twenty years after the town's inauguration, the artist David Harding, was employed by the Glenrothes Development Corporation to work collaboratively and in consultation with planners, architects on art projects that became inextricably linked to the town's built environment. While the appointment of a permanent post for a town artist was new, Glenrothes was not the first new town in the UK to commission public art as part of considered policy by local authorities for their housing developments and planned public spaces. By the late 1950s for example, Peterlee in County Durham, employed the well-known contemporary artist, Victor Passmore, whose striking architectural and sculptural arrangements in the town were well-considered for their context, however, the extent of his work in the town was limited. By contrast, Harlow, in Essex, which had appointed the architect Frederick Gibberd as its master planner, held a distinct policy to commission and purchase sculpture by well-known artists (such as Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth), although these works were not necessarily integrated into the planning and architecture of the town and eventually formed a civic art collection, giving the town its present council-endorsed title of 'Sculpture Town'.³

² East Kilbride (1947); Glenrothes (1948); Cumbernauld (1956); Livingston (1962); and Irvine (1966).

³ See http://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=37 and http://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=13

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Indeed, the Glenrothes Development Corporation had commissioned one of Scotland's leading sculptors, Benno Schotz, in 1964/5 to create a setpiece sculpture to represent the growing ambition of the town. Three years later, the development corporation had shifted its rationale, perhaps unconsciously following a wider change in thinking from early modernist formalism in art and architecture, to the later modern period. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, uniform structured planning systems had been broken down making way for humanising, collaborative cross-discipline dialogue between artists and architects. The artist, David Harding was involved directly in taking decisions with the architects and town planners and the post of 'town artist' (a moniker adopted by Harding after it was suggested by an acquaintance) became the actualisation of utopian idealism to which the New Town movement aspired and to which Glenrothes Development Corporation was ready to take forward.

From 1972, post-graduate students were engaged on year-long contracts to assist the town artist. These artists-apprentices helped Harding to create distinct works in the town, including the infamous Glenrothes hippos, and went on to work in other modern urban environments, such as Stanley Bonner, who contributed to environmental art schemes in Newcastle and East Kilbride. Harding also considered it important to involve local residents, adults and children alike, in the creation of the work. Harding left his post in 1978 but the role continued on and he was followed by Malcolm Robertson who worked with Glenrothes Development Corporation until the corporation dissolved in 1995.



David Harding and Stanley Bonnar, *Feeding Hippos*, Caskieberran, 1973. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

The result of over 30 years collaborative working between planners, architects and artists produced around 140 individual sculptural objects, sculptural groups, architectural reliefs, or 'environmental works of art' (as David Harding has preferred to refer to the work) located in Glenrothes. The works of art are of varying scale, purpose and contribute to multiple layers of meaning in the context of the post-war planned urban landscape. During Harding's tenure, which coincided with the most intense period of urban development for the town, the artist had the opportunity to work closely with different teams in the development corporation, ranging from the commercial, industrial, landscape and civil engineering departments. The resultant works were extremely varied and included architectural panels in the housing types, others relate to urban-planning and infrastructure such as under- or overpass design, urban fabric on a domestic scale such as street furniture, or



Left: *Ex Terra*, unveiling ceremony, 1965. © Newsquest (Herald & Times). Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

Right: David Harding supervises as children place their tiles in Huntly Drive, Caskieberran, 1971. © David Harding

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more deliberately artistic sculptural hard landscaping, and sculptural groups which are playful and cheerful for the sake of it. Patterns of use emerged early on, and many sculptural groups and their locations were soon adopted as local meeting places, and in some cases, games developed around them.

SENSE OF PLACE

Today, there is a deliberate cultural layering that is still evident in the town which boasts a thriving arts programme, including a theatre as well as music, photography, fine art exhibitions, and a community arts ethos completely imbedded into the creative psyche of the town.

It is not surprising that the recent listing review was suggested by this engaged community who were

conversant with the language of public art by their familiarity with the work that had pervaded their buildings and public spaces for more than forty years. While the character of the artwork remained strong, by the first decade of the 21st century, wear and tear had become an issue and many of the works either required maintenance or were proposed for re-siting within other areas of the town. The sense of impending loss of Glenrothes's personal landmarks was widely felt by the town's residents leading to an approach by the local Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) to raise interest in securing a future for the art through political channels.

Notwithstanding the expectation of the requirement for care and maintenance which fell to the local authority, Fife Council had already recognised the unique contribution the art made to the town and from 2009 had already initiated a recording project of the art.



Left: John Gray and Malcolm Robertson, *Four Seasons*, panel relief, Tarvis Place, Collydean, 1980. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Right: John Gray and Malcolm Robertson, *Geometric Panels*, Kemnay Drive, Collydean, 1980. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk



Left: *Playing in the Pipe Tunnels*, Newcastle precinct, early 1970s. © Hulton Getty. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

Right: Malcolm Robertson, *Dinosaur*, Waverley Drive, Caskieberran, 1980. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

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Left: David Harding and Hugh Graham, *Nature Culture*, Queensway Underpass, 1976. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Right: David Harding, *Cluny Place Mushrooms*, Pitteuchar, 1976. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk



Left: Hugh Graham with David Harding, *Victorian Picture Frame*, 1976, Balgonie Avenue, Woodside. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Right: *Picture Frame*, re-sited to Riverside Park, Glenrothes. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Supported by interested volunteers, a comprehensive list of art works was compiled locally. Although it is difficult to qualify how town residents regarded the value of the public art works relative to their built environment specifically, it was noteworthy that when art works began to disappear, with some to eventually be re-erected with some become decontextualized completely, by moving to new locations, or perhaps to be moved into storage, decisions were being questioned. It was at this point that Historic Scotland was asked to engage formally with a review of the work for the purpose of statutory listing.

THE LISTING REVIEW

The onset of change or rather more pointedly, the threat of loss, is not an uncommon point of entry into the listing process; however the perception that listing can stop change can be misplaced. Rather, listing

ensures that a building's, or in this case a sculpture's, special interest may be considered before change occurs and as part of the planning process. It can be assumed that the community did not expect all 140 sculptures would become listed; but what would listing a selection of the artworks in Glenrothes achieve? How could these structures, in the context of their environment, be protected? Should they be protected? What would their protection through listing ultimately mean?

In the last ten years, as themes related to post-war architecture and post-war environments have emerged, Historic Scotland has actively engaged with the question of the special interest of Scotland's post-war heritage. Some of the projects the agency has been involved in include surveys of the work of leading architectural practices of the period, reviews of university estates which contain a significant number of post-war buildings, and other targeted thematic

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reviews, including for example, post-war churches. The agency has also committed to publishing, where possible, on post-war themes. A greater understanding of this period is growing, and it becomes easier to assess the significance in listing terms as academic interest develops. There is also a general sense of appreciation by the public who now recognise the vulnerability of the buildings of this period and have increasingly been responsible for proposing ad hoc listing proposals for post-war buildings. Nevertheless, the number of listed post-war buildings is very small against the total number of listed buildings in Scotland, and is less than 0.5% of the overall figure of 47,500.

SELECTION PRINCIPLES FOR GLENROTHES TOWN ART

At Glenrothes, the task was to identify and select the public art by considering their 'special architectural or historic interest' under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and to assess the work against set published criteria, whose broad headings are: age and rarity; architectural or historic interest; and close historical association.⁴ A building is defined broadly, and can include structures such as sculptures, public monuments, grave stones, war memorials, garden ornaments, market crosses, fountains, wells, bridges, milestones, finger posts, phone boxes, post boxes, and any objects which are fixed or are fixed by their own weight.

What then was the starting point for the listing assessment in Glenrothes? Inventorising for this project meant assessing each and every sculpture according to the listing criteria. Although this process is necessarily prescriptive, it is also an active process that provides a system for classifying the subject. Inventorising therefore allowed for the understanding of the art in its physical context and as a complete body of work which would be crucial before taking decisions related to statutory designation.

The first job was to consider the context of the work: a post-war urban landscape developed for a mass housing environment where no comprehensive listing

survey had previously taken place, and where there were three existing listed buildings and no designated conservation areas.

The lack of statutory designations in Glenrothes, as discussed above, is typical of all five new towns in Scotland, which were designed on mass scale with common and repetitive building types. It is also typical in this context that the few listed buildings which exist are community defining landmarks such as churches or schools and this is true of any context, from all periods, where common building types are found, such as a tenemented areas in large cities or traditional terraced housing in smaller towns and settlements. Indeed the three existing listed buildings in Glenrothes are churches.⁵



Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, St Paul's Church, Glenrothes, 1956, listed category A. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

In reference to age and rarity of the building type, in this case public sculpture, it is a typology that is eligible for listing and hundreds of public monuments of all periods are listed across Scotland, including two post-war sculptures which are not war memorials (in Glasgow and in the Western Isles). Although the sculptures in Glenrothes are not old or rare in themselves, it is rare to find such a concentrated collection of artwork and a concerted integrated programme that made this association with the work special in Scottish and UK context. It was established that they were of a sufficient interest

⁵ St Paul's Glenrothes Roman Catholic Church (HB10012); St Columba's Parish Church (HB49999); St Margaret's Parish Church (HB42983). For their listed building records see <http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk>. 1 in 5 post-war listed buildings in Scotland are places of worship.

⁴ See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents>. The criteria for listing are published in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) 2011, see <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/policy/shep>.

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for the contribution to a post-war urban settlement but also that a number of works were representative of a significant shift in public sculptural practice characteristic of the late 1960s and 1970s conceptual art movement. Most of the sculpture was conceived to be integrated with the architecture and the spatial planning of the town and not set apart as self-referential works of art on plinths to be admired in and of themselves.

After setting the work into a temporal and spatial context, the assessment then considered the individual works of art within their type and how the approximately 140 works of public art could then be compared within the entire body of work. For example, it was also important to consider if the artwork conceived in the earliest phase of the arts programme could be more closely aligned with the early town plan and therefore possibly of considerably more interest in listing terms, and generally this was found to be the case.

Individually the works had to be considered for their architectural or historic interest, which was also critical in selecting specific works for possible listing. Therefore sculptures were also considered for the design quality and artistic value. They were considered within the period they were created and whether they were stylistically important or representative of a period style. They were also assessed for the artist's contribution to the development of the architecture

or artwork and whether it was significant within that artist's own output.

Within this heading and an important consideration for the selection process for listing public art, the work's setting was considered extremely significant. How the sculpture as an environmental work of art, related to its surroundings was a crucial question to pose as it recognises the importance of the site specific nature of a public monument or sculpture. It would be therefore consistent to question the special interest of the artwork if it was no longer in its original location and had lost its original context.

Close historical association is another broad heading for the listing criteria and becomes more relevant when there is less intrinsic architectural or artistic and design value associated with the building or structure and where a close association related to a nationally significant event or person is known. The programme for producing public art at Glenrothes on such a large scale was thought to be nationally significant however it was not a determining factor for listing the works individually.

Following the assessment against the criteria for listing, it was not surprising that only a small number of sculptures were selected for statutory listing – there were only four put forward. *Ex Terra* (1965) by Benno Schotz, was the first major work of public sculpture in Glenrothes. Welded in bronze it depicts a maternal



Our Lady of the Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean (Western Isles). © Comhairle nan Eilean



David Harding, *Heritage of 1976*, are 14 white concrete columns representing architectural styles of earlier cultures including Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Inca and Aztec. This sculptural group was originally located in front of the County Buildings which have recently been demolished. The group has been re-sited in Riverside Park in Glenrothes. (Left: © David Harding. Right: © Fife Council)



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figure emerging tree-like from the ground, symbolising the growth of the town. Its title is a take on the motto of the development corporation 'Ex Terra Vis' which means 'from the earth comes life' and is a reference to the town's inception as a mining community. *Industry Past and Present*, or *Western Avenue Underpass* (1970), conceived by David Harding, is a significant feature in the landscape and is designed on a large scale. It is intricately detailed and is representative of how artwork was developed as part of the town's infrastructure. The work draws heavily on the Glenrothes mining, paper and electronics industries

and used modern concrete casting techniques in its execution. *Henge* (1970) by Harding exemplifies the type of personal and distinctive narrative that epitomises the ethos of the public art in Glenrothes. The work, an homage to a local Neolithic stone circle, is interactive and encourages the viewer to move into the sculpture where there are symbols and quotations from contemporary popular culture on the inward face of the cement monoliths. *The Birds* (1980), by Malcolm Robertson, is prominently sited in front of the County Offices and is significant in its context of the commercial town centre.



Left: Benno Schotz, *Ex Terra*, 1965. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Centre: David Harding, *Industry Past and Present*, © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

Right: David Harding, *Henge*, 1970, Pitteuchar. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk



Malcolm Robertson, *The Birds*, 1980. © Crown Copyright: www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

UNDESIGNATED HERITAGE

It became clear, early on, that a vast majority of the art work at Glenrothes would not be considered to meet the listing criteria and would likely not become listed buildings at the present time under the terms of the 1997 Act. What did the listing review achieve if not many sculptures were listed? The survey itself brought

the art into recognition, with the statutory listing acting as a signpost to the wider historic interest of the area, in the same way that the three listed churches had pointed to this interest previously. Place-making, so critical to current heritage and political debate, had already been conceived and created in the 1960s, '70s and '80s as part of urban socialist agenda, which was successful in uniting Glenrothes in a shared local

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identity that is clearly associated with the architectural and artistic collaboration so important to this point in our history.

These four listed sculptures, in a collection of 140, are then the mnemonic signifiers of a greater whole and are part of a tangible architectural and artistic legacy for the town. The listing survey succeeded by expanding the understanding of the significance of the work as a group, with future designation still remaining a possibility at Glenrothes and possibly in other new towns and similar environments in Scotland. The survey effectively produced valuable and wide ranging resources related to the project with the publication of a free booklet and the gathering of detailed documentation of each sculpture including their artist, date and location. Historic Scotland also for the first time created a webpage dedicated to a single project which includes virtual town walks in five different parts of Glenrothes providing key stopping off points for all the town art in these routes. The agency also sponsored a popular photography competition and related exhibition.⁶

However, this can best be achieved by engaging with local communities by asking them about their priorities while seeking meaningful partnerships to enable them to take the lead in matters that are most important to them. Listing is only one part of this story.

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CONCLUSION

So what lies ahead for post-war urban and suburban townscape? Glenrothes town art may well act as a template for future reviews and could be seen as a useful approach to assess other art collections in modern planned towns. East Kilbride, Cumbernauld, Irvine and Livingston, all had town art programmes with artists employed in various guises around the same period as Glenrothes, but the approach could definitely reach beyond these five New Town settlements. The value placed on buildings or sculptures that are not immediately viewed as 'historic' has usefully been expanded. In the very least, the Glenrothes Town Art listing review has ensured that public art can no longer be understood exclusively in terms of 'worthies on a plinth'.

New conservation areas may yet recognise town art as integral to the historic built environment and may be the next step in identifying the interest of modern urbanism and landscape more widely. It remains for national agencies to continue to be aware of the interest of these totally designed environments and to recognise key elements of our ever evolving heritage.

⁶ See www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/glenrothestownart.