

J.E. Russell
Drumwalls
Gatehouse of Fleet
DG7 2DE
Phone/fax: 01 557 814 297
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James Boyle Esq,
 Chair, The Cultural Commission
 Broughton High School
 Carrington Road
 Edinburgh EH4 1EG.

Dear Mr Boyle,

I read your letter in one of our local papers, the Galloway Gazette.

The disaster which struck the people of Scotland and their cultural activities a generation ago was the replacement of local democratic councils by regional bureaucracies. The Gatehouse town hall, which was the centre of our cultural life here, was built by the Town Council, who in the usual manner raised a thirty year loan from the Government guaranteed by the rates, supported by much local fund raising. Once the regional bureaucracy was established, they demolished our town hall – it was the seat of democratic government ! Since the rates, now called Council Tax, are now paid to the regional government, Gatehouse cannot raise the funds to build a new town hall. The centre of our cultural life has gone. An old school building which serves as a community centre is no substitute. No-one could generate civic pride for such a building. The Gatehouse taxes which in the past were used for the social and cultural life of the people of Gatehouse, are now used to support an army of bureaucrats !

We have a small library, donated to the burgh by the feudal superior in the late 1800s. It is far too small to cover the present need of space for study and for computer terminals. But feudalism is out of fashion and we will not get a new bigger library from that source : nor from the bureaucracy who only favour the major towns in the Stewartry. In England, the government preaches the need for 'sustainable communities' : communities which should have full cultural services as well as shops and businesses. Here in Scotland our bureaucrats will not support new facilities in the smaller burghs and only favoured the larger towns – Dumfries has several libraries !. No wonder cultural activities are failing in the smaller burghs.

We do our best. An old mill in Gatehouse was rebuilt, surprisingly by the regional council as a tourist attraction. As such, it has been a failure, but the people of Gatehouse have converted part of it into an art gallery, with regular exhibitions. Our local music society organised concerts in the parish church – they have been priced out of the school hall by the regional government. Our choral society organised concerts in the church. Gatehouse was of course the place where the famous family of Faed artists was born : not much of a cultural draw as their home mill is being converted into a house !

The major change which is needed to bring cultural life back to the burghs is a change in the constitution of community councils, enabling them to raise funds for local matters, and allocating a percentage of the local Community Tax for them to spend. It presages a change from paid regional bureaucrats back to local unpaid volunteers. A return towards local democracy !

Let's see what you can do !

Yours sincerely,

Tom J. J. J.
Ancient Penmanship