

Ack by letter 18/01/05

43 Fenwickland Avenue,
AYR KA 7 3 QB.
23rd November '04.

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The Cultural Commission,
Broughton High School,
Carrington Road,
Edinburgh EH4 1EG.

Dear Sirs,

Some time ago I read your letter in the "Ayrshire Post" requesting views on CULTURE in Scotland.

Though I voted enthusiastically for a Scottish Parliament, it would appear that unless you live within twenty miles of Glasgow or Edinburgh, you are on the "periphery". We have twice missed out on City Status, Stirling seems to us to be a much favoured town much money being poured into it via Historic Scotland and also Falkirk via the inland Waterway Board. We hear of Railways to Edinburgh and Glasgow Airport, Alloa & Stirling, and even reopening to the Borders. Here our link to Stranraer, is threatened with terminating at Girvan because the Ferry Terminals are moving to Cairnryan, no mention of reopening the old military Railway to that Port at a modest cost comparatively. Also too I read several years ago that it was proposed to have direct Rail Services from Ayr to Edinburgh via Carstairs over already electrified lines, nothing has happened, and I still have to wearily trudge between stations in Glasgow on my frequent visits to the Capital. I was really surprised to see last time I was in Central Station that the small East Coast Resort of North Berwick has a DIRECT Rail service to Central! No such luck for Ayr & Paisley to Edinburgh!

However to CULTURE I doubt if our local South Ayrshire Council could SPELL the word let alone know what it means. DAS KULTUR they would think was a new soap powder.!!! Culture is a dirty word in these parts, any economies to be made a generally culture based, and in consequence the standard of living here in AYR is getting poorer each year. AYR used to be among the Top Ten Towns in Scotland, I believe we are now ranked 16th!

The Councillors from AYR are outnumbered almost two to one by those from other towns and villages. Even some of AYRS ward representatives come from outside the town, my ward (Belmont) is represented by a man from the village of Coylton 6 Miles away! The one for Central AYR stays in Prestwick! Our Provost comes from Troon, and the Leader of the Council from Maybole!

Most Missed is our CENTRAL Art Gallery and Auld Ayr Museum in the Carnegie Library, true we have the McLaurin Gallery in Rozelle Park two miles from the Town Centre, with poor public transport connections, but the one in ~~the town~~ ~~was~~ was true peoples gallery, I know, as we used to staff it during our Club (Ayr Art Circle) Exhibitions there. The artefacts in the Museum must be rapidly deteriorating in storage, so we have no display of our towns long history, AYR will celebrate 800 years as a ROYAL BURGH in 2005. The celebrations are being lead by the GUILDRY OF AYR, as they probably would be ignored by the South Ayrshire Council. THEY The Council sponsor a History Fair each year in Troon, a fairly Modern Town, but use a picture of 18th Century Ayr on the Programme, so if you go to Troon looking for a New Bridge and Tolbooth Tower, you could probably sue under the trade descriptions act, as they were in AYR.

Also VERYMUCH MISSED is our little CIVIC THEATRE, much used at modest rent by many Amateur Groups, they discovered Asbestos in it and say it would take an enormous sum £200000 to eradicate it, no one believes them they just want rid of it.

This year also they closed one of AYR's TOP Attractions in the Loveley Craigie Estate, which is connected by Walkways on either side of the River Ayr from the very heart of town. Namely the Craigie Horticultural Centre, which had Tropical and Temperate Greenhouses, Pond, Garden Centre, and Scandinavian Type Wooden Restaraunt, Lecture rooms and workshops used by many groups. It was the Ambition of the late lamented AYR CORPORATION to make this AYR's Botanic Gardens. Our new Masters have no such foresight, they say it cost £90,000 a year to run, but never look at the money such attraction bring in making Ayr worth visiting.

I conduct tours for interested parties round the Town and its Historical Sites. Ayr has connections with Wallace, the council did not capitalise on the "Braveheart" Film here we have more monuments to Wallace than any other town. There is the Wallace Tower, which dominates the High Street and contains a Statue of him, further down the High Street, and another Statue to him on the site of the Old Tolbooth at the corner of Newmarket St. A few Miles from Town on Barnweil Hill is another Tower owned by AYR Common Good Fund, and again in Newmarket Street is a bust of him, Robert the Bruce and John Knox above a doorway.

Bruce came to Ayr in 1315 after the Battle of Bannockburn and convened the Scottish Parliament in the Church of St John. Our Present Parliament went to Aberdeen!

Cromwell Built his largest Scottish Fort here in 1654, much of the walls are still standing, the AYR Auld Kirk was partly funded by him as compensation for taking over St John's.

John Loudoun Macadam was born in Lady Cathcart's House Sandgate. Ayr

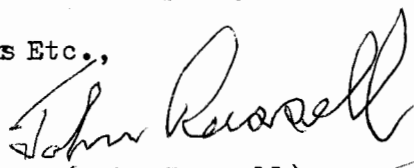
John Knox's Daughter is buried in the grounds of St John's

Robert Burns was baptised by the Minister of the Auld Kirk of which his father was an elder, he was educated in French and English By Dr Murdoch whose house is marked with a plaque, the Twa Brigs are here so also are Simpsons Inn and the Tam O'Shanter.

None of this is of any interest to South Ayrshire Council, they do not see any benefit in projecting AYR as one of Scotlands 800 old Royal Burghs, they have no tourism or Cultural Strategy unless they are in receipt directly of Money. Recently they had a competition for Sea Front Improvements, one of the best suggestion was for a Pier/Breakwater out to sea so that Cruise Liners, and their high spending passengers could call. Too costly, though they could recover a huge area between the new and old piers which would pay for it.

So those are my views on CULTURE in AYR at least or should I say the lack of it. As a 78 year old who used to work for Ayr Corporation, the abolition in 1975 by politicians of Scotlands Ancient Burghs was the blackest day in Modern Scottish History, and it has been down hill all the way since then. Also as stated I am VERY disappointed in our new Parliament, it is far too inward looking, look at Norway, their credo is to DE centralise to keep the rural areas alive and not to have a "Periphery".

Yours Etc.,



(John Russell)

PROPERTIES CLOSED OR SOLD OFF IN AYR - BY DISTRICT COUNCIL .

Art Gallery Carnegie Library	now a Research Room.	Magnificent Room completely wasted!
Auld Ayr Museum	do	now a Store!
Civic Theatre	do	do
Electric Map at Town Hall	Closed Permanently.	Greatly missed by Amateur Players.
Carrick Street Halls	Removed.	much consulted by visitors, no maps now at all.
Lady Jane Hamilton's School	Old Peoples Day Centre sold to developer,	demolished.
St Leonards School	Sold now Housing developement called Buckingham Court!	
	Sold do do	should have been site of new Grammar School.
Craigie Garden Centre in Graigie Estate.	Closed.	Contained Tropical/Temperate Greenhouses, Scandinavian Tearoom lecture/workshops rooms.
Dam Park Hall	Demolished for Music College	which has never been built.
Wellington Leisure Centre	Sold now a non council fitness centre.	
Pavilion Theatre/Ballroom	Sold now Childrens Play Place.	
Land at Old Barracks.	Sold was to be for Leisure Area/Marina,	Now Housing.
Yacht Clubhouse & Marina	Sold Now Housing.	
Boating Pond with play area & Minature Railway seafront	Up for sale.	
Pitch & Putt Craigie	Closed.	
Playing Field do	Proposed Offices.	
Unionist Hall, New Road	Sold. former offices.	
Lismore, Miller Road	Sold. do do	
Robertsons Field Alloway	now Housing.	
Alloway Football Field	to be sold for Housing.	
Greenan House.	Sold.	
Golf Course Greenan.	Never laid out.	
High Greenan Farmhouse	Destroyed by fire sold.	
Wallace Stone High Street.	Site of Kyle Port covered over.	by roadworks.
Historic Ayr Trail.	Never Laid Out.	Though we have association with Bruce/Pie in the Sky!
Arts Centre, Town Hall.	Wallace/Cromwell/Macadam/Burns.	
Ayr Flower Show.	Withdrew Support, now run by voluntary Body.	
Tam O'Shanter Ride.	Withdrew Support, this commemorated Tam's Ride to Alloway from the Inn in High St, by Riders mostly Children on Horseback.	
BurnsHouse, Statue Square.	Proposal to sell large Office BLock containing Planning dept Etc relocate to industrial Estate, thus damaging Ayr Town Centre economy and access to departments.	

NON COUNCIL PROPERTIES.ETC.

Afton Grange Hotel.	Now Housing Development.
Gartferry Hotel.	do do
Large SYHA Hostel.	Sold, now part of Wellington School.
High Court.	Now Meets in Kilmarnock.
Police H.Q.	Now situated do
Children's Hospital	Now do Site in Ayr is for sale.
Maternity Hospital	Now do Now Housing.
Fish Market Ayr Harbour	Now Troon site now housing.