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THE SALTIRE SOCIETY

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Saltire Society
Test of Time Research
80 Years of Housing Design

Revised and Enlarged Edition
Second Impression

BUILDING SCOTLAND



PAST AND FUTURE

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*Celebrating the
Scottish imagination*

Welcome to a celebration of 80 years of the Saltire Society and its work. Those who started the Saltire Society in 1936 feared that Scotland's cultural gas was at a peep, that the achievements of the past were unrecognised, great traditions were being lost and contemporary arts lacked vitality. They did something about it.

They formed a movement that for 80 years has promoted, presented, published, agitated and debated and in doing so helped create the conditions for today's thriving and confident creative Scotland.

In the context of the 2016 Festival of Architecture, Innovation and Design the Saltire Society commissioned a 'Test of Time' research project, reflecting on 80 years of the Saltire Society Housing Awards and allowing the Society, the industry and the general public to better understand the longevity and significance of Scottish housing projects.

This essay is the culmination of Lizzie Smith's research.

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In this the year of Architecture, Design and Innovation we have had the latest opportunity to take stock of Scotland's world of architecture at one point in time. But in addition to the opportunity to look at the present, there is also a need to reflect on where we have come from. The Saltire Awards, running since 1937, helps us reflect on the qualities, requirements and progress of past practice and think as much about how we view, as what we view.

The Saltire Awards are now in their eightieth year, having been established in 1936 with the first award issued in 1937; as old as the Society itself currently celebrating its 80th anniversary. The Test of Time project (with similar reflections commissioned in the other aspects of the Saltire Society's activity in literature, arts and crafts and civil engineering) is an attempt to look at how these awards capture changing practice and shifting context in Scottish life over these years. The Saltire Awards for housing are a unique lens through which to behold everyday life across the country, illustrating living standards and social attitudes.

In the 1930s the instigators of the awards were themselves involved in crafting early Scottish housing and planning policy. This continues to be reflected in the approach today where a panel of experts, of key influencers and contributors in architectural and place making policy, work to ensure ongoing the relevance of the awards. Recalling the early drive behind these awards – a focus on improved practice in the design of social housing, the social parameters of housing design continues to be highlighted as a key factor in the resilience of neighbourhoods and communities.

Saltire founding members Robert Hurd and Alan Reiach wrote in their 1944 Building Scotland publication ‘Bad housing creates bad citizens, it breeds ill health and warped minds’.¹ Thomas Johnston’s forward to the same publication speaks of ‘the social conditions and habits of mind’ that gave what he deemed as the worst housing conditions, but proclaimed that these now lay firmly in the past.² And so, the intrinsic link between housing and social conditions was

established within the dialogue of the Saltire's annual deliberations. House and home is not merely a domestic interior, it is a face to a street, the life between, the make or break between death and life of a community, an expression of city or suburb or rurality, and an overarching outlook of a nation in identity flux. The means by which housing is produced and received, or perhaps now consumed, reflects priorities and prerogatives of the givers and the receivers, producers and consumers; well considered or ill thought out attitudes to housing can reflect respectively as things to be cherished, people to be welcomed or put in their place. Over eighty interesting years we have seen house building for a vastly changing society, increasingly defined as a market; the proletariat, the suburban gardener or the neoliberal copycat.

Scotland, perhaps more so than many other places due to inherent climatic conditions, has an intense reliance and requirement for its housing to work, quite literally in many instances, providing the backbone of working community

life, and providing the place of sanctity against often inclement weather. It is too often the only place of refuge (and, hand in hand, isolation) when equally tempestuous societal or economic conditions prove difficult. If we consider that the public sphere of common space and meeting places are all too often under-resourced socially sympathetic housing becomes the means to support, and in some cases provide, a social coherence to lives and communities through a sense of place.

With this social housing theme to the fore, how might the Saltire Society reflect on its unique role? Is it guardian, protagonist, back slapper, eulogiser, educator or something else entirely? And how has the Saltire's presence, in whichever form, been synchronous with Scotland's changing attitudes to home?

The Saltire awards provide a fascinating record of well considered and innovative design, many of which have stood the test of time. An examination of a selection of

diverse projects from a variety of time periods between 1937-2015 begins to illustrate the objective of the awards, excited by new ideas, some envisioned as magic bullets. It reflects the reality that with newness, ambition and the good intentions of the time comes unavoidable uncertainty. The fact that Basil Spence's 'Hutchie C' received an award despite its catastrophic failure in social coherence and all other manner of technical appropriateness, does not belittle the decision to award at the time. These situations make the Saltire even more valuable as a historical resource and as a reflection — undoubtedly the attitudes of the evolving panel have developed as has the housing, they are not autonomous agents unaffected by the ambition and steer of the time. The awards, as an extensive resource, serve to highlight game changers and pivotal moments in ideas and enlightenment, a selection of which are outlined here.

One of the earliest neighbourhoods awarded by the Saltire was that of Westquarter Mining Village, Stirlingshire in 1938. It serves as a demonstration of neighbourhood

imbued through layout, and anticipated amenity. What's interesting about the scheme, entirely of its time, are the links between industry and community at its conception — in stark contrast to the glaring omission of connections between industry and neighbourhood seen in workless post-industrial and often peripheral and marginalised communities of the later twentieth century. Saltire had given prominence to the community lifestyle of the worker within pleasant and connected housing, common spaces and resources.

Seventy years after the first flicker of the new towns idea (through the inception of the Clyde Valley Regional plan in 1946), a 2016 report by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health links the phenomenon of the ever perplexing 'Glasgow Effect' of disproportionate health inequalities, to the 'socially selective' new town displacement of the 1950s and 60s. Glasgow was left with an imbalance of work poor and health poor residual population burdened with the dregs of inner city slums. This was an era of quickly changing and

often divergent attitudes towards housing solutions, which were far from remedied by the new towns. Within an approximate decade (1968 -1978) the Saltire had awarded an antithetic collection including new town housing, inner city high rise and tenement rehabilitation, reflecting a case by case appraisal of housing ideas and relevance to the differing circumstances and contexts.

When complete designed communities came into full fruition with this rise of the new towns, the Saltire was interested in awarding innovative neighbourhoods of diverse housing types.

East Kilbride featured coherent neighbourhoods of flats and two storey family homes such as Freeland Lane, an award winner in 1953. The new towns established themselves as mixed income communities through the likes of developments such as Stuarton Park, East Kilbride, awarded in 1954, where large detached family homes were built to high standards. The success of these neighbourhoods was perhaps reliant on amenities that were provided hand in

hand — not merely building the doctor’s house, but the doctor’s surgery too.

Cumbernauld, in all of its radical appropriation of layout and car free spaces, was familiar to the Saltire Awards throughout the 1960s, with developments such as Seafar 1 (1961) and 2 (1963) responding directly to topography and pedestrian routes through well developed landscaping. Neighbourhood was created by a new form of community planning featuring high density and car free areas with omission of private front gardens and boundaries promoting reduced division and more chance of public encounter. The housing here was experimental for the Scottish context, perhaps drawing on interpretations of Scandinavian best practice highlighted within the Building Scotland book a decade or so previously. The housing was embedded into the landscape with interesting courtyards and connections to recreation and community space throughout. Through this the Saltire had supported a connection between the quality of spaces between homes, connectivity between private and

public realm and creating a form of community cohesion which has become strongly evident in later award winning schemes. Contrast this to gated developments and the plot by plot privacy of highly fenced gardens and car oriented barricades of much developer led modern non-places, far from the Saltire's radar.

It is evident that origins of placemaking policies such as 'Designing Streets' could be traced back to these forms of experimentation with communal courtyards and gathering spaces playing key roles in providing socially cohesive masterplans through chance of encounter and common interest in shared spaces. Success of recent Saltire awardees such as the privately built, but Scottish Government led, Polnoon in Easglesham (2015) is testament to the shared page of Saltire and planning policy. Recent awardees partake in policy drives for advancing design quality for the creation of streetscapes which encourage neighbourliness in terms of mixed income communities, passive surveillance, on street play and gathering/social space in close proximity

to amenities and public transport. It seems that design guidance and statutory requirements have begun to catch-up with the Saltire's attentiveness to the multitude of contributing factors making successful social neighbourhoods throughout the years.

The Saltire has continued to view both overall masterplans and the detail of housing typologies as critical to the success of housing including housing typologies for social living. The Saltire awards demonstrate varieties of house and apartment types and suitabilities to contexts of time and place. Early post war schemes saw the rise of 'community planning' rather than simply 'utilitarian units of accommodation'³ of which Rosemount Square in Aberdeen is of note. Awarded in 1948 as one of the last bastions of tenement housing, Rosemount is unique in its hybridity. It embraces the old communal forms of the tenement in density and mass, yet it employs newness and radical ideas with a stateliness — offering a pronouncement for the proletariat. Its form hints at palatial proportions with grand

arches and courts and frontages which had an almost regal scale, omitting any entranceways to the street frontage which might otherwise give away the subdivisions of domesticity inside. The block form is commonly compared to Red Vienna's Karl Marx Hof⁴ some fifteen years previous, with miniature versions of arched entranceways and communal courts, albeit lacking the socially innovative programme and functions of the Marx Hof's interior landscapes. It seems the Saltire award managed to encase and preserve an attitude to sociability as successful density, close to working practices and celebrating the working class and the inner city, an attitude to housing types which was soon to be obliterated by new typologies commensurate with an exodus to suburbia and the peripheral estates.

Robert Hurd's Canongate was another of the Saltire's insightful choices at this time characterised by city departure. Awards went to numerous Canongate developments in the late 1950s and early 60s and Hurd's comprehensive refurbishment of Canongate tenements was a

radical outpost in attitudes towards conservation of street frontages and dense urban living. Hurd's redevelopment included shopping arcades at street level — activating the street for a unique sense of neighbourhood within such an historic setting. The juxtaposition of ordinary dwellings, local shops, heritage, tourism, monarchic palaces and, for the past fifteen or so years, proximity to the seat of governance, comments boldly on Scotland's democratic melange of the ordinary working classes and the representatives of the nation, cheek by jowl on the most interesting of streets and linear neighbourhoods. Hurd's Chessel's Court redevelopment won an award in 1965. It included '82 houses, 1 school and schoolhouse, 4 shops, 1 public house and further office space' and used a 'wide range of restoration philosophies (within the scope of a limited housing fund budget) to achieve a unified scheme'.⁵ This was parts of Hurd's portfolio of restorations on the Canongate which provided 'a test case model for further systematic restoration of the area'.⁶ This was an interesting case in its entirety — providing experimentation and

confidence in the sustenance of the inner city neighbourhood at a time of flight. The Canongate's pends and warrens of mixed use continues to serve proof that neighbourhood in the inner city can sustain despite the touristic focus of the main streets and the lure of suburban space.

Glasgow's tenement revitalisation through the 1970s was a further awakening of retaining what remained of old working class neighbourhoods. The Saltire's response to the North Kelvin Treatment Area was to highlight the potential of substantial and highly functional blocks of tenements already well integrated into the city's fabric. As noted by Penny Lewis in her 2007 Saltire reflection, this came at the time of the Saltire supporting the 1961 Harris and Kelsall publication 'A Future for the Past' which stated: 'A child brought up in a Burgh or Village where there is ample witness to the past in stone and lime is likely to have a much deeper sense of social continuity — of being part of a mature yet still developing community — than a child

brought up in a typical housing scheme, raw, rootless and lacking any individuality'.⁷

The tenement revival began in Glasgow's Govan, successfully proposing tenement life as desirable neighbourhoods, tipping the balance away from the short lived success of the high rise.

Whilst the tenements were brought up to liveable standards, they lost something of their neighbourliness. Backcourts subdivisions were reinstated, perhaps in unwitting preparation for the subdivision of maintenance through ownership changes which were to come. With gentrification came displacement of some communities from tenement areas which were in desirable locations and thus private rentals and student housing in many areas that had been close knit tenement communities lost their identity, demonstrating that Harris and Kelsall's argument might not merely be substantiated by materiality and historical

relevance but by the composition or displacement of the neighbourhood.

However, in the 1990s Page/Park's Duke Street (1994) confirmed the favourability of the new tenement in Glasgow particularly, proving that its form and contextual composition with socially conducive scale could continue to be favoured with further re-establishment, notably through sustained housing association provision, of the street friendly typology in recent years (by means of award winners such as Annandale Street (Govanhill) 1995, Melville Street (Pollokshields) 1997, Queen's Gate (Clydebank) 2010, and Argyle Street / Shaftesbury Street (Anderston) 2014).

Whilst the cities explored the re-emergence of the tenement, the nineties saw interesting conglomerations creating new communities in places like Irvine Harbour. Here new private and housing association stock mixed with existing commerce, industry and new cultural and visitor facilities, creat-

ing a revived form of neighbourhood. 1980's policy on provision of specialist needs housing also saw a rise in communal living types such as sheltered housing and dwellings for young people including two units in Ayrshire at Caley House (1984) and at Bryce Knox Court (1992) which utilised requirements for large open communal spaces to provide inspiring formats and variety among residential streetscapes.

The past twenty years have seen the re-emergence of preference for living close to work places and the re-appropriation of inner city brownfield sites; Glasgow's Homes for the Future (2000) and 2015 winner Lauriston Phase 1A of private and housing association stock, utilise land that has seen many a reincarnation in the last fifty years. The arrangement and public space of Homes for the Future evokes a sense of place akin to the most successful of village life from centuries past. Each sees landscaping and communal green space, shared by residents, and in places providing pleasant public thoroughfares. The variety in form, enclosure and subtle dis-

inction between private and public provide a distinctive neighbourhood identity in these recent schemes, and integrate appropriately into their highly public inner city settings.

In her 2007 reflection, Lewis also notes the polemical tone of the society, offering an example where Alan Reiach and Robert Hurd condemn the ‘shortsightedness’ of the Victorians by proclaiming that ‘No one troubled about Scotland as a whole — it was a time of each man for himself’.⁸ The Saltire as a long standing and quietly prominent test of design quality is a celebration of the outstanding for the everyday, where the material conditions of the ordinary worker are the subject of recognition, not the housing of the elite or the procurement powers of international property investment. Post 1990s saw this change with, on occasion, Saltire award winning multi-million pound single house extensions eclipsing the budget of 27 apartment developments. In recent years the awards have moved to a much more detailed system of award categorisation

incorporating separation into ‘Large or small scale housing’, ‘single dwelling’, ‘alterations, renovations and extensions’, and ‘innovation in housing’, enabling the awards to appreciate intricacies of certain conditions and circumstances which might be otherwise overlooked, and therefore to some extent compartmentalise these types of dichotomies.

In the 2000s the new dawn of the millennium heralded an exciting decade of publicly documented architectural ambition. Scottish architecture enjoyed a successful public awareness, spurred by Glasgow’s year of Architecture in 1999 and a subsequent period of key note exhibitions at the Lighthouse and related national programmes. After the demise of these boom years of architectural pondering and engaging with distinctively Scottish conditions and relationships to international factors, it is even more significant and crucial that the Saltire continues to give face and exposition to quality housing in Scotland. It stands as a test of time to diligent and attentive consideration for the built environment, through all parameters, aesthetics,

economics and social deliberations — a model of analysis for Scotland's built environment.

Returning lastly to the Building Scotland publication, Reich and Hurd suggest that the purpose of the book is to introduce the reader to 'the pleasures and pains of ancient and modern forms of Scottish architecture: and in doing so to indicate that, to be a good citizen in an age of reconstruction, every man, woman and child should learn to use their eyes and be competent to know a good (or bad) building when they see it'.⁹ Perhaps therefore the Saltire's next era might task itself to a greater level of public outreach with the quality of Scotland's housing, where plaques (which seem to serve to connect with those already familiar with the building, either through design, inhabitation or proximity) might be augmented with a broader public image. Could the Saltire be more outwardly aspirational, raising desire from the lay person rather than predominance amongst built environment professionals? The Saltire's understanding of social importance within housing is a wealth of information, perhaps unparalleled by any other

nationwide study over the years. It could really contribute a coherent picture of learning from doing and capturing that understanding, not only thorough contribution to policy but also through a grassroots engagements with what it means to have better housing. There is appetite for knowledge and learning. People can welcome the outcomes, but they need to know how and why, and see that it can be done and has been done. Saltire sustains a unique opportunity to raise this aspiration, make it visible, and long may it prevail.

Lizzie Smith

Appendix

1. Hurd and Reiach, *Building Scotland*, 1944, Author's Preface.
2. Then Rt. Hon. Thomas Johnston, M.P and Secretary of State for Scotland.
3. Lewis, P., *Saltire 1937 - 2007 Seventy Years of the Saltire Housing Design Awards*, Carnyx Group, 2007
4. As noted by Mark Chalmers in *Rosemount Square, Aberdeen: Modernism in Granite* 2011, www.urbanrealm.com/blogs/index.php/2011/07/06/rosemount-square-aberdeen-modernism-in-granite?blog=16
5. Description from Historic Environment Scotland
CANONGATE, 3, 4, 5, 6 AND 6B CHESSEL'S COURT (S BLOCK) INCLUDING ST SAVIOUR'S CHILD GARDEN
<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB28454>
6. Ibid
7. Lewis, P., *Saltire 1937 - 2007 Seventy Years of the Saltire Housing Design Awards*, Carnyx Group, 2007 Quoting: Harris and Kelsall, *A Future for the Past*, 1961.
8. Lewis, P., *Saltire 1937 - 2007 Seventy Years of the Saltire Housing Design Awards*, Carnyx Group, 2007 Quoting: Hurd and Reiach, *Building Scotland*, 1944.

9. Hurd and Reiach, *Building Scotland*, 1944, Author's Preface.

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We are;

- An apolitical membership organisation open to all
- An international supporter and patron of the arts and cultural heritage of Scotland
- A champion of free speech on the issues that matter to the cultural life of every Scot
- A promoter of the best of what we are culturally, now and in the future
- A catalyst to ensure new ideas are considered and the best of them are made real

We believe we have an important and unique role to play, as an independent advocate and celebrant of all that is good and important about our cultural lives and achievements. The Society has played a crucial role over the last seventy five years, in recognising our cultural achievements. And while times have changed the need for that independent voice remains.

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