

A SENSE OF PLACE



Remember the classic sketch where Ronnie Corbet says, 'I know my place'. He was, of course, referring to his place in the social order. We're here tonight to discuss our 'place' in the physical environment, in particular, the built environment in which we choose to live.

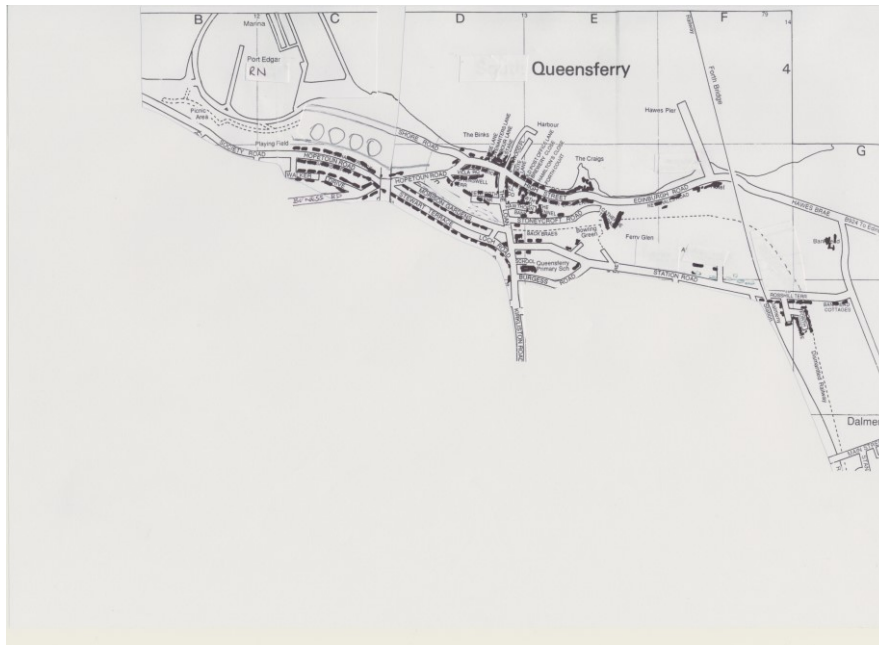
The philosophy of 'place-making' as we will hear later, is about trying to ensure that the places we create provide a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, and a sense of community.

Queensferry has been a place where people chose to live for different reasons over the centuries. The original town, along the High Street and around the harbour lies on a raised beach physically contained and constrained by rock outcrops to west and east – the Binks and the Sealscraig, as well as the steep slope to the south.



The population of 3-400 remained static for generations, sustained by the Town's role as a trading port, which in 1636 brought (bought) it the status of a Royal Burgh. When the shipping trade declined, soap manufacture, brewing and a small coastal trade, took its place. The population began to rise at the beginning of the 19th cent with the development of the fishing industry and shale oil mining. Provost Wyld's Glenforth distillery at the harbour passed to the Stewart brothers, founder members of the Distillers Company Ltd. It became a malting barn for Mr McEwan's Fountainbridge works, with grain still arriving at the harbour, which remained a key element in the town's economy.

By the end of the 19th century the population had grown to about 2,000. Last century saw an increase in employment opportunity with VAT 69 bottling plant, Hewlett-Packard and Agilent, but before that, the Burgh Council house-building programme addressed the need for those employed at Port Edgar. All these developments – Morison Gardens, Stewart Terrace, Farquhar Terrace and Walker Drive, and those that went before, all paid some 'respect' if you like, to the contours of the land as well as building outward along existing routes into the town.

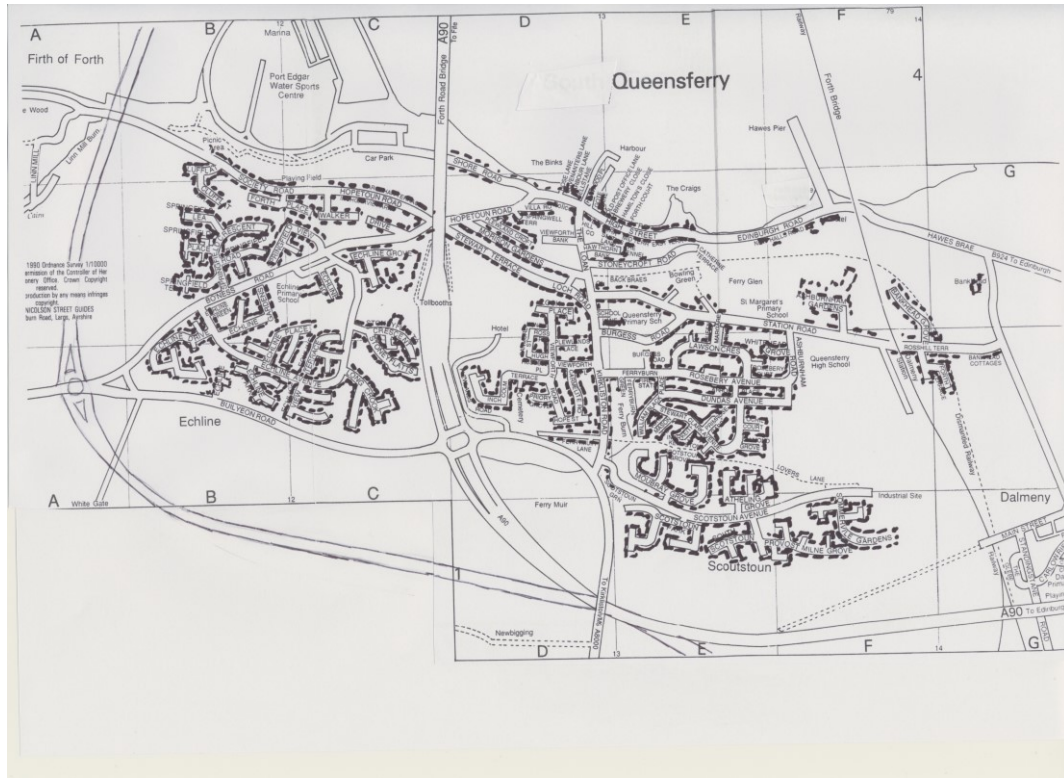


The first development to deviate from that pattern was the Council housing started at Lawson Crescent and finishing in Station Road, Queen Margaret Drive, Rosebery Avenue, Dundas Avenue, and Burgess Road. This was a huge undertaking.



Since then we have had the Varney, Scotstoun and Scotstoun Park, Springfield, Echline, Ashburnham and others, with contributions of varying quality from Housing Associations and numerous house-building Developers.

We've lost the Navy, the Distillery, Hewlett-Packard and Agilent. We've even lost the Bank. A fine way to repay the years of monopoly it's enjoyed in this town. Indeed, for the local population, the High Street is no longer the commercial hub of the town, that it once was.



The theme running through this presentation is three-fold – that until a few decades ago, the economy of the town sustained the population; until major expansion in the 20th century, physical development respected the landscape and relationship with the old town 'core', and that the town in all these years, was a self-governing entity. Through their own elected Council, the population had a say in what it chose to do.

I'm putting forward the view that these factors, which are now lost, are arguably the strongest reasons for a bond to exist between an individual and a place; for the creation of 'a sense of belonging, a sense of identity and a sense of community.

Now things are reversed. We are striving to sustain the economy of the town, to maintain a sense of place with a population, forecast to expand by another 40%, that increasingly has less sense of 'belonging' and little control or influence over important issues.

There are however many other factors involved. We all have a 'sense of place' for lots of different reasons. Queensferry is not alone in experiencing this economic and social change. Many towns and villages, and indeed parts of Edinburgh, have seen the same sort of changes in their High Street. So what else generates a sense of place? And what does it all mean to you and me?

MMcD. 26.04.18.