

## The architects of East Kilbride's Development Corporation and the post-war New Town

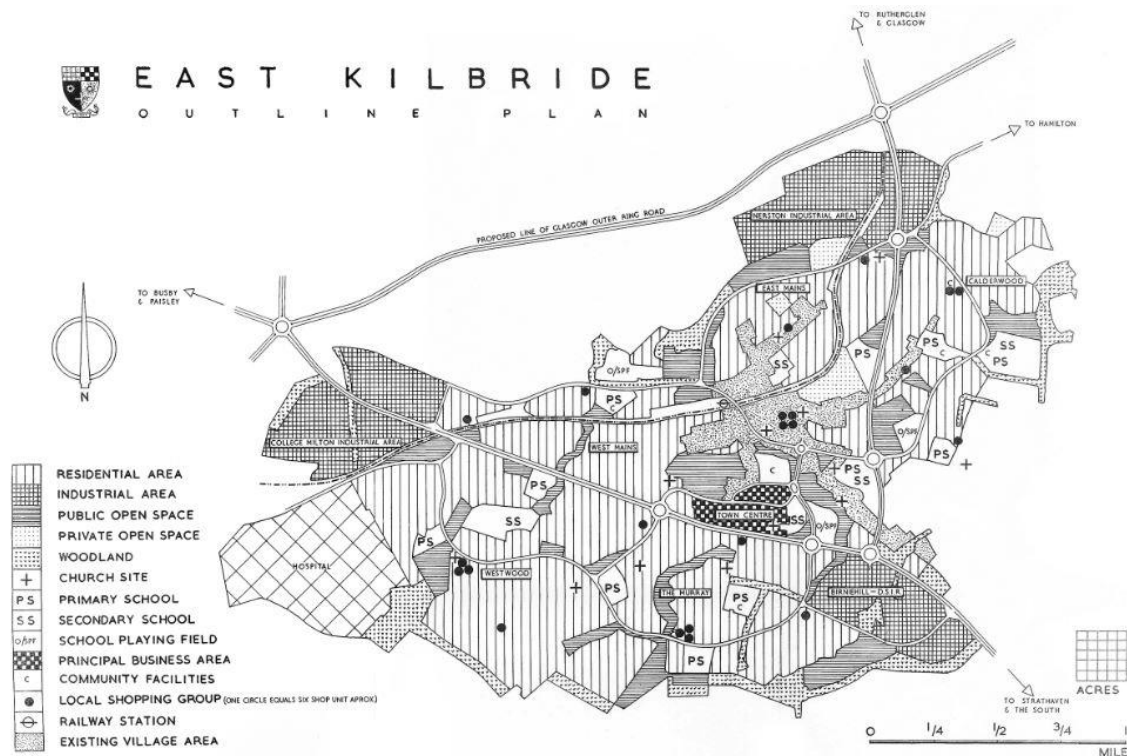


Figure 1. Outline plan of East Kilbride. Courtesy of South Lanarkshire Council Archives

In the 1830s the village of East Kilbride in Lanarkshire had a population of around 900 who largely depended on agriculture for employment. One hundred years later, though the type of employment was different, the size of the population had not risen significantly. In the late 1940s this changed completely, as did the appearance of the town which has continued to evolve until today when the population exceeds 70,000. The reason for this radical change was the designation of East Kilbride as Scotland's first New Town in 1947.

The New Town Movement was derived from the socially conscious Garden City Movement in England founded at the turn of the century by Ebenezer Howard as an alternative to overcrowded city slum housing. The Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (known as the Barlow Commission) of 1937–40 had already advocated the decentralisation of the population, and the Reith Committee of 1945 advocated the need for new towns, the problem of overcrowding in cities being particularly acute after the Second World War. The

New Towns Act was passed in 1946. Each New Town was managed by a Development Corporation, a new type of body endowed with statutory powers to enable it to acquire, plan and develop the land which would constitute the 'New Town'. It was to be apolitical, and directly funded by the Scottish Office. Its function was to relocate both people and industry from congested districts – in this case Glasgow and North Lanarkshire – while cultivating an identity of its own, kept physically distinct from the city by the preservation of the 'green belt'. It was also hoped to attract new firms to widen the economic and employment base of the region, the markets for whose heavy engineering products had declined with the Empire, and whose coal seams were nearing exhaustion.

The overall scheme for East Kilbride was prepared by planners in the Scottish Office, based on the first New Towns in England, influenced also by American thinking and consisted of the town centre, encircled by separate neighbourhoods, and linked by different classes of roads. Industry was to be grouped into zones (Figure 1). Over the years the town's plan evolved with new neighbourhoods such as Greenhills and Stewartfield, and new industrial areas being added.

A number of East Kilbride's buildings were designed by the foremost architects of the period: Duncanrig School by Basil Spence; the housing at Stuart Street/Kirkton Place by Alan Reiach; St Bride's Church by Isi Metzstein and Andy MacMillan of Gillespie Kidd & Coia; and the Dollan Baths (now the Aqua Centre) by Alexander Buchanan Campbell (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Dollan Aqua Centre © Historic Environment Scotland

Alongside architects in private practice, the Development Corporation's own architectural department were breaking ground in mass housing design. The

Development Corporation was led by chief architects Donald Paterson Reay (1947–52), Francis Clunie Scott (1952–65), Joseph Duncan Beaumont (1965–70), Richard William Colwell (1971–7), Thomas Fraser (1977–83) and James Barrie (1983–94).

Much of the Department's time was taken up with housing design. The Department won, or was commended, 12 times by the Civic Trust and Saltire Society in the 1950s and 1960s. This was no mean achievement as the architects were forced to work within the restrictions of building licences (not relaxed until November 1954) and repeated post-war shortages of both skilled tradesmen and materials. The Scottish Office required the elimination of domestic porches, canopies, roughcasts and colour washes. However, the Corporation tried to vary their house designs, and welcomed rare opportunities to use stone in Calderwood and Westwood shops (Figures 3 and 4), as well as encouraging traditional Scottish craftsmanship. They also evolved various forms of system or industrialised building, to speed up their output.



Figure 3. Calderwood shopping centre © Historic Environment Scotland



Figure 4. Westwood shopping mall © Historic Environment Scotland

The Murray I scheme (206 houses and 98 flats, covering 23.1 acres) earned the

1952 Saltire Award for Robert C Stones and Robert Bryden (who spent his career with the Corporation) (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. Murray 1 housing © Historic Environment Scotland



Figure 6. Saltire plaque © Historic Environment Scotland

Two years later Donald Reay received an award for his white-harled Stuarton Park (Figure 7) and Dalrymple Drive (East Mains) detached houses, linked by screen walls, and turned gable-end to the street for greater privacy.



Figure 7. Stuarton Park © Historic Environment Scotland

Francis Clunie Scott and Gustav Mandl won the 1955 Saltire Award for two simple, balconied blocks of flats at Park Terrace (usually misidentified as Brouster Place) (Figure 8) with an open outlook over the future Cloverhill Park which was enhanced by the retention of the existing trees, its 'informal' layout linked in scale to the old village by a small terrace.



Figure 8. Park Terrace flats © Historic Environment Scotland

The Corporation also won an award for another set of three-storey flats that year. The angled bay windows of the blocks in Quebec Drive, Westwood were intended as an all-weather alternative to the usual open balconies (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Quebec Drive flats © Historic Environment Scotland

Housing was not the only concern of the Development Corporation and a number of schools were designed by the Architect's Department on behalf of the County Education authorities. Heathery Knowe (1953), designed as a 'temporary' school by Leslie Morley, the Corporation's schools senior architect, was prefabricated from aluminium by the Bristol Aeroplane Company in Weston-super-Mare. The school had generous windows and was grouped around two courtyards, containing sunken gardens and a pond (later filled in) for nature lessons, the exposed angular metal framing relieved by the gables clad in large, round Loch Long beach cobbles. Andrew Jackson and Thomas E J King designed Maxwellton Primary (1954) which consists of a long gabled block with classrooms raised above the circulation space. St Bride's RC School was opened in 1956. It was 'future proofed' by being split into two interlinked units, to enable either secondary or primary use as required, but ironically has now been superseded.

Opened the same year as St Bride's Church, Our Lady of Lourdes for the Roman

Catholic Church still retains its landmark detached campanile (Figures 10 and 11). This was designed by the Corporation's Robert Reid, who died only weeks before its completion in 1964.



Figure 10. Our Lady of Lourdes  
© Historic Environment Scotland



Figure 11. Our Lady of Lourdes interior  
© Historic Environment Scotland

A series of progressively darker spaces opens into the serene interior, with its side-lit sanctuary and vertically coursed brickwork pulpit. The side walls form a series of canted bays, filled with obscured glass, acting as sources of daylight concealed from the congregation, while focusing all attention on the raised chancel.

The Corporation treated all denominations alike in their allocation of sites, and designed several so-called 'hall churches' for the National Church Extension Committee of the Church of Scotland. These were strictly utilitarian, dual-purpose spaces, erected quickly in growing communities.

The Garden City ideal of the new town began to change from the mid-1950s and by the 1960s higher density and integration of services were new think in town planning. One of the main changes of the 1960s and 1970s was the progressive development of the town centre. The first part, opened in 1959, was designed by the London firm of Lionel Fewster, working in conjunction with the Corporation's development partners, Ravenseft Properties. The Corporation designed Princes Square in association with Norwich Union (Figure 12) (hence Norfolk House, begun 1962, which housed Corporation offices).





Figure 12. Part of Princes Square shopping mall © Historic Environment Scotland

The Plaza development, begun in 1971, was designed by Ian Burke Associates of Edinburgh, for City Wall Properties. These were laid out following the pattern set in Cumbernauld which was then at the stage of development and by English New Towns with open pedestrian streets and squares bounded by shops, transport being kept on the edges. Now comprising four main malls, the original concept has changed beyond recognition, pedestrianisation and complete roofing over of the original traffic routes making the centre now entirely undercover.

The Civic Centre is a large, brutalist concrete municipal 'block,' of council chambers and courts (Figure 14). Some of its intended features were never built. While it was on the drawing board nine architects, fearing redundancy as the town was nearing its target population, left in December 1966. However Francis Scott, former Chief Architect, was retained by the Corporation as 'Design Consultant' and continued to work on the Civic Centre and Whitemoss Sports Centre.



Figure 13. Francis Clunie Scott  
© All rights reserved. Courtesy of Alastair Scott, August 2015



Figure 14. Civic Centre © Historic Environment Scotland

Another large office block by the Corporation architects was Abercrombie House (1978–81) for the Overseas Development Agency, the first Scottish relocation of civil servants from London under the Government's policy of dispersing staff around the provinces (Figure 15). The Corporation saw this as a great coup, and a source of white-collar jobs for educated school leavers, reflecting their

continuing preoccupation with a 'balanced' community with a mix of employment and social classes. The large complex was disposed to conceal the bulk of the building, comprising three splayed wings and a central service core. Each section, finished in facing brick, gave a nod to Scottish tradition with a drum stair tower at the end. Being concrete framed, there were open-plan offices with day-lit exterior walls. These were refurbished, and a 'green' turf roof added, in 2004.



Figure 15. Abercrombie House © Historic Environment Scotland

As an example of the range of work undertaken by the Corporation, their Chief Engineer, John D Lowe, won a Civic Trust Award not for architecture, but the town's first for civil engineering.



Figure 16. Cornwall Street Bridge © Historic Environment Scotland



Figure 17. Cornwall Street Bridge detail © Historic Environment Scotland

His asymmetrical white footbridge over Cornwall Street (1967), on Y-shaped supports, marked a 'desire line' to the Dollan Baths with their distinctive concrete

dome (Figures 16 and 17). One end of the bridge winds down in a spiral, presenting interesting shapes as it curls around itself. The citation said: 'If the successors to this footbridge are equally lively and inventive, the new town may congratulate itself.' One successor was, indeed, similarly unusual. The gently arched footbridge across Whitehills Road at Hawkwood (1986) was the first in Scotland to be made of an African hardwood known as 'ironwood' because of its density.

On the whole, industrial buildings were designed by specialist architects in private practice – such as the aero-engine factory for Rolls-Royce (1953) by Edward G Wylie. However the Corporation pioneered a variety of pre-built standard factories, 'advance' factories, which set the standards to which others aspired. Much later Peel Park industrial estate (1981) was designed as an open, landscaped campus, with purpose-built and speculative units suitable for both high-tech manufacturing and office-based companies.

The last major design project overseen before the Corporation's orderly winding up in 1995 was the re-creation of the drained loch at the James Hamilton Heritage Park, which formed a manicured setting for Mains Castle, and a new watersports centre (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Heritage Park with Mains Castle in the distance © Historic Environment Scotland

The Corporation had used the epithet 'Scotland's most successful new town',

being the only one to make a profit and pay for itself. While its architecture reflected the ideals of its time, it is surely worth recording as an example of a completely planned environment. Some of its legacy, like Basil Spence's Duncanrig High School, has already been replaced. However interest not only lies in the major commissions but it is worth considering that the planned town was an integrated whole.

This essay was compiled by Yvonne Hillyard in March 2017.

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