



■ On the up and up... Mr Iain Sutherland (left), chairman of the Wick Society, and Mr Tony Sinclair (centre) with the cheque presented by Shell spokesman Mr Julian Barnes (right) at the restored steps at Whaligoe. Looking on are members of the society, from left, Maisie Sutherland, William Sutherland, Helen Falconer and Mhairi Sutherland.

Wick group steps up for new award

A NORTH heritage group has claimed the distinction of winning national awards for its preservation work, both inside and outdoors.

Wick Society has won several competitions, including Scottish Museum of the Year, for the displays in its heritage centre in Bank Row.

Yesterday, it received national recognition for its efforts in restoring the 200-year-old set of stone steps at Whaligoe, near Ulbster.

The project has led to the society being chosen as one of the 12 organisations short-listed for this year's Shell Better Britain environmental campaign.

Society chairman Mr Iain Sutherland was presented with its award and a £250 cheque by two of the campaign orga-

nisers, who braved torrential rain to visit the steps.

Society members gave up their free time over 11 months to work on the dramatic cliff-face feature, where the wives of herring fishers used to haul their baskets from the small harbour below.

The handful of volunteers used a rope-drawn sled to haul 16 tons of Calthness flagstone down the zig-zag 320-stone path — thought to be the longest in Scotland.

Apart from replacing 63 of the steps, which had broken up through the effects of weather and vandalism, they also reinforced the stone-retaining wall on the seaward side.

The project was masterminded by Mr Sutherland who himself designed the bogie, propelled by oak rollers, used to lug the slabs of stone, supplied by Spittal quarry.

Mr Sutherland has a family interest in Whaligoe as his great grandmother was one of the hardy band of herring fisherwomen whose daily chores included carting the herring up the five flights of steps.

Whaligoe is now deserted. It was last used in the mid-1950s by creel fisherman Mr Willie Sinclair, a 92-year-old now living in Wick.

The society has guardianship of the steps and is to continue to maintain them. Mr Sutherland believes they have great potential as a tourist attraction.

Sadly, most of the society's cash prize will be spent repairing damage caused to the newly-restored steps by vandals.

Said Mr Sutherland: "It will take us four or five visits to put right the damage caused by one mindless action."

The renovation project was described as a magnificent achievement by Shell spokesman Mr Julian Barnes.

The winner of the Shell award will be known later this month at a ceremony in London.

Meanwhile, society members are turning their attention to their next outdoor project — renovation of what is believed to be the longest mill lade in Scotland. The three-mile lade runs from the loch at Hempriggs to a former water mill at Wick.

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NADAIR
na h-ALBA**



SGIRE CEANN A TUATH NA
GÀIDHEALTACHD

Prìomh Shràid
Goillspìbh
Cataibh
KW10 6TG
Fòn: 01408 633602
Fax: 01408 633071

**SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE**



NORTH HIGHLAND
AREA

Main Street
Golspie
Sutherland
KW10 6TG
Telephone: 01408 633602
Fax: 01408 633071

Iain Sutherland
Chairman
The Wick Society
Wick Heritage Centre
18, 20 Bank Row
Wick
Caithness KW14 5EY

20 July 2001

Dear Mr Sutherland,

Whaligoe Steps, Ulbster, Near Wick, Caithness

Thank you for your letter of July 14 enquiring about the possibility of having the above site taken into public ownership. It is an outstanding place and one that should be maintained.

SNH is the agency responsible for countryside issues and not therefore able to consider the ownership or care of historic buildings or sites, no matter how entwined with the landscape they are.

Consequently, I have forwarded your letter to the below persons who may be able to consider your proposition.

Sarah Govan
Historic Scotland
Longmoor House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH
Tel: 0131 668 8600.

John Wood
Regional Archaeologist
The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX
Tel: 01463 702 000

I hope that this is of use to you, and wish you well in your efforts to preserve a remarkable construction.

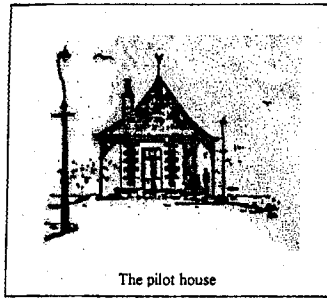
Yours sincerely

Andy Rockall
Area Officer
(East Caithness)
Email: Andy.Rockall@SNH.gov.uk

H.C. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE		
20 JUL 2001		
PAS	DATE	DATE
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THE WICK SOCIETY

Affiliated to the Scottish Civic Trust
WICK HERITAGE CENTRE

18, 20 Bank Row, Wick, Caithness. kWh 5EY
Telephone and fax :- 01955 605393

Scottish Natural Heritage
Fraser Darling House
9 Culduthel Road
Inverness

14 July 2001

"RECEIVED"

18 JUL 2001

REGISTRY N/W REGION RHQ

Dear Sirs

Whaligoe Steps, Ulbster, Near Wick, Caithness

I write to enquire into the possibility of having the above taken into public care and to find out what is necessary to do this.

The steps are 200 years old and are unique in Scotland both as a feat of engineering and as a tourist attraction, which is visited by hundreds of people every year. In fact they are among the handful of memorable attractions in Caithness. For the last 20 years I, and a few friends have voluntarily maintained and repaired them, and indeed in 1992 we won a Shell Best of Better Britain Award for the work we did then. That involved taking 20 tons of stone manually down the steps and repairing them.

This winter a substantial section of the retaining wall at the bottom platform fell away, and we have repaired that by taking the necessary stone down the steps. But things are coming to the stage where a regular maintenance check will have to be carried out if further erosion and damage is to be prevented so I write to seek your guidance on how the steps may be listed as of national importance, and secondly on how they may be taken into national care.

Yours faithfully

Iain Sutherland
Chairman

RECEIVED
19 JUL 2001

