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# THE PUBLIC WASHHOUSES OF EDINBURGH

STEVEN ROBB

THE AUTHOR'S INTEREST in public washhouses began whilst researching Ebenezer MacRae's twentyone-year spell as Edinburgh's City Architect, and his great-uncle George Clark Robb (1903-1980), who worked under MacRae for a decade and was assistant architect for the Union Street public washhouse. Consideration of the construction drawings for the washhouse, which the author's family had retained, spurred him to investigate the building type further. It is useful to consider the place of the public washhouse in Edinburgh's history. This is especially true as, at the time of writing, only four of the thirteen former washhouse buildings survive: two are likely to be lost imminently, and the long-term use of one of the remaining examples is coming to an end.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

The washing of clothing and bedding was an important sanitary and public health issue within the industrialised and overcrowded urban centres of Scotland. Large swathes of the population often had limited or no access to clean continuous water supplies or adequate washing facilities, and in overcrowded properties the sharing of both bedding and clothing was commonplace.

This unhappy collision of poverty, substandard and overcrowded housing and inadequate or contaminated water supplies led to conditions particularly susceptible to disease. Although cholera, the first epidemic in Scotland being in 1831, was primarily contracted by the consumption of affected drinking water or food, it was often then spread by the shared contaminated bedding and clothing of sufferers. Smallpox and typhoid fever were transmitted in a similar manner. Tuberculosis,

influenza, typhus, respiratory diseases and vermin (bugs, lice, rats and mice) were also part of the wider sanitary conditions experienced by the poor in overcrowded urban areas. Conditions for the spread of disease were exacerbated by inadequate drainage and sewerage, and a woeful attempt to collect refuse.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent accumulation of filth (excrement, both human and animal), was exacerbated by urban slaughterhouses and the habit of keeping animals in close proximity to dwellings and shops. Besides this the poor often had a bad diet and a heavy reliance on alcohol, the latter perhaps understandable in their circumstances.

These living conditions led to high levels of infant mortality, alongside the death rate, a standard favoured measure of the health of a community. Those that lived adjacent to the open sewers or those families in one or two roomed houses were especially vulnerable.<sup>2</sup> In the Old Town of Edinburgh a large migrant population lived in one or two room houses with up to 15 people sharing a single room. The population of Edinburgh had doubled between 1811 and 1881 and overcrowding in the Blackfriars Wynd area alone was said to be four times greater than prison accommodation of the period. Often these rooms were in badly converted and overcrowded buildings with poor ventilation, limited natural lighting and little sanitary provision.<sup>3</sup> The result was one of the highest death rates in the country.

When access to water meant purchasing it from caddies or an inconvenient journey to the local pump (which was often contaminated by leakage from sewers or cesspools), washing clothing and bedding was not a priority, and if they were washed it was often in dirty reused water. If a household managed to obtain, store and heat the water to wash their clothing and bedding they struggled to dry it, often making a poor choice between drying damp clothes in the house, or from a pole outside in the polluted

air. In 1847 James Simpson described the wretched conditions of the Edinburgh poor, as they lived:<sup>4</sup>

many of them, in floors of very high altitude, they labour, particularly when sickness is in their families, under privation so great that they content themselves with a dribble of water that would surprise you – probably their little tea-kettle full. Anything like personal cleanliness in such a condition is rare, while domestic cleanliness is quite out of the question. Their recourse to public wells is not only a very great hardship on themselves, but is a source of public nuisance, moral as well as physical. I should be sorry to see any attempt to increase the number of these wells; and hope to live to see the time when they will be a matter of history alone.

In any case many families only had one set of clothing and bedding, often shared amongst family members, and therefore cleaning and drying them in one day, in a one-room house, was clearly impracticable.

The problems experienced by the poor began to be addressed by social reformers and benevolent authorities in the nineteenth century. This came about with a real desire to improve the lot of the poor, both for altruistic reasons as well as to assuage fears about the fracturing of the social order following Chartist and anti-Poor Law demonstrations. The latter fears were also fanned with the publication of Friedrich Engel's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The economic and national cost of continued poverty and ill health was also an issue, brought to prominence in times of conflict when many volunteer recruits were judged unfit to fight. Bad housing began to be seriously addressed by municipal authorities only after legislation in the late nineteenth century, but little happened before the Housing Act of 1919, when central Government offered financial assistance alongside the requirement to provide housing.<sup>5</sup>

However, by the second half of the nineteenth century addressing the lack of access to public washing facilities for both clothing and personal ablutions would become a public priority. Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report for the Poor Law Commissioners* had promoted cleanliness in the population and suggested clean water supplies, along with drainage and refuse collection, as the most practical measures an authority could provide.<sup>6</sup> In 1847 the Edinburgh Sanitary Association agreed, considering the supply of constant high pressure water to dwellings as an essential prerequisite for their plan to erect housing for the working classes,

as well as for the 'improvement of the health of the town'.<sup>7</sup> Before too long both Edinburgh and Glasgow were sourcing reliable and clean water supplies from the surrounding countryside and by 1862 legislation in Edinburgh insisted proprietors provide a water supply to housing. However, supplies were hugely exceeded by demand and often faltered.

Despite those who argued against municipal spending and those who thought the poor too feckless to embrace cleanliness (the coal in the bath argument), there was eventually a realisation that improvements to public health and personal hygiene could be an effective measure of disease prevention, and that prevention rather than cure could, in the long run, make financial sense. Diseases such as cholera also spread from the poorest members of society up the social ladder, and this was no doubt another consideration.

This is not to say that the mechanism of disease transmission was properly understood. Although it was recognised that disease was most virulent in bad urban housing and filthy unsanitary conditions, it would be the later nineteenth century before the miasma or 'bad air' theory of disease transmission was finally discredited in favour of the germ or pathogenic theory, which argued micro-organisms, often water-borne, were responsible for many diseases. This discovery provided an added impetus to the provision of pure water supplies, washhouses and public baths.

The phrase 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness', popularised in a sermon by John Wesley, was used liberally in press reports on the commissioning and opening of washhouses. This 'crusade' of cleanliness reflected the belief that educating the poor about personal hygiene, as well as making them more resistant to disease, would improve their moral, and even their religious standing.<sup>8</sup> In Edinburgh religion certainly played its part in the wider campaign for better housing with Rev. Dr James Begg and Rev. Dr Thomas Chalmers, two ministers of the Free Church of Scotland, prominent in pressing for improvements. Consequent improvements in morality and cleanliness would, it was believed, also help the poor to shun alcohol, which often accounted for up to half of a working family's expenditure. In Edinburgh an early campaigner for baths and washhouses was Councillor Robert Cranston (1815-1892), a teetotaler, and the founder of several successful temperance hotels, including the Old Waverley on Princes Street.

## PUBLIC WASHHOUSES

Public washhouses, buildings funded entirely and operated by the local authority for the use of the general public, differ from the small unmanaged washhouses found to the rear of many Scottish dwellings, one of which, in Kirriemuir, gave J. M. Barrie his first stage. Such washhouses, where they existed, were often poorly maintained and their communal unmanaged use inevitably led to quarrels. Although the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland (1917) reported washhouses serving tenements in Paisley, Motherwell, Kirkcaldy, Arbroath, Port Glasgow, Bo'ness, Selkirk and Clydebank, in Edinburgh there were only a few washhouses in the newer tenement blocks and none at all in Leith.<sup>9</sup>

The public washhouse should not be confused with privately-run laundries or those operated by the Co-operative Society, where laundry was collected, washed, dried and returned to customers, naturally a more expensive option than self-service.

The first public washhouse in Britain opened in Frederick Street, Liverpool, on 28 May 1842. It was designed as a combined baths and washhouse by the City Surveyor, Joseph Franklin, in a city that was already home to the country's first publicly-funded baths, which had opened as early as 1829.<sup>10</sup> The impetus for a washhouse in Liverpool had arisen from a devastating cholera outbreak in 1832 which was centred on the densely populated docks area. A local woman Catherine 'Kitty' Wilkinson (1786–1860) and her husband had taken in the laundry of neighbours, and on a surgeon's advice, washed and disinfected it with chloride of lime.<sup>11</sup>

There was similar progression nationally with the founding in 1844 of the Association for Promoting Cleanliness amongst the Poor and the Committee for Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Washhouses for the Labouring Classes. The latter was led by William Cotton (1786–1866), Governor of the Bank of England, and its President was Charles James Blomfield (1786–1857), Bishop of London. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert headed the list of many benefactors. In 1846 a Royal Commission had also reported on the sanitary condition of large towns, and the following years would witness Public Health Acts that covered England, Wales and Ireland.

The sterling efforts of Liverpool and London, together with the work of the various committees, were both instrumental and influential in the drafting of the Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1846.<sup>12</sup> The Act, introduced by Sir George Gray, empowered parish vestries and borough councils to borrow money or raise it on their rates in order to build public washhouses and baths for the working classes. The Act also allowed for reduced prices for water supplies to such facilities, and it promoted three areas of activity: the provision of washhouses for the laundering of clothes and linen; individual 'slipper' baths for personal ablutions; and open bathing places, e.g. communal baths. Washhouse prices for both washing and drying were set at 1d per hour, or a maximum of 3d for two hours. The legislation was primarily to promote cleanliness amongst the urban poor, and the provision of swimming baths for pleasure and health was a later development.<sup>13</sup>

The 1846 Act did not apply to Scotland, which had to wait until the Burgh Police Act of 1892 for similar legislation for urban authorities.<sup>14</sup> However, before this date a number of councils had begun to introduce local legislation to provide washhouses, the first being Glasgow with its Police Act of 1866. Although the 1846 legislation, amended the following year, allowed councils to provide washhouses many were not keen to burden themselves financially, with what were often loss-making facilities. England and Wales only began to embrace baths and wash houses in earnest in the 1860s and 1870s respectively, but several large towns and cities only delivered such facilities when their civic pride was dented by their provision elsewhere, especially in cities seen as rivals. Even when public baths began to be provided in great numbers the provision of washhouses lagged behind. The Carnegie Trust Report of 1918 on Public Baths and Washhouses, suggested this was due to the intensely conservative nature of housewives who would be too busy organising their husband and children to 'agitate for innovations'.<sup>15</sup> Lest one think this a typically male chauvinistic viewpoint of the time, one should note that the report was written by a woman, Miss Agnes Campbell. Her report found the washhouses' greatest asset was convenience, a ready supply of hot water combined with labour saving devices to wash, wring and dry washing at a reasonable cost outside the home. Even when a family possessed only one set of bedding, it

could now be cleaned, dried and back in the home within the same day. However, Campbell also found that time could be wasted carrying clothing to the washhouse and waiting for tubs to become available. There were also the moral difficulties in users mixing with undesirable company and leaving their children at home or worse, running free. Such objections, it was argued, could largely be addressed by competent administration, suitable locations for washhouses, and running crèches within them.

Initially, Scotland was also slow to provide washhouses, the first opening in the late 1870s, but by 1918 the Carnegie Trust was able to report that both their provision and use in Scotland compared favourably to England, although Scotland still lagged behind England in public baths. The report recorded around 38 washhouses largely run by municipal authorities in Glasgow (20 washhouses), Edinburgh (6), Dundee (6) and one each in Perth, Leith, Hamilton, Port Glasgow, Dumfries and, perhaps surprisingly, the small Hillfoots mill town Alva. At this stage Glasgow stood tall above all other Scottish cities with almost 1000 washing stalls on offer. The report also recorded interesting differences between Scotland and England including the use of washhouses in Scotland by 'respectable women' who valued their economy and convenience. It also noted that there were no penalties for multiple use by individuals in Scotland, thus allowing women to wash for those who could not manage, or chose to pay someone to do it for them. In England women were actively prevented from making a living at the public expense. However, the Scottish Act of 1892 made no allowance for discounted water supplies which often meant washhouse prices in Scotland were slightly higher than England.

#### WASHING IN EDINBURGH

Residents of Portobello had the beach, but the Nor' or North Loch was the first open air washhouse for the Old Town, with early records forbidding its use in times of pestilence. However, a less hygienic location would have been hard to find as the Nor' Loch accommodated the drainage and sewage for the north side of the City and was also used as a receptacle for the effluent of the slaughterhouses of Edinburgh's

fleshers in the valley.<sup>16</sup>

Parts of the Cowgate and Canongate had a good supply from sunk wells, as the brewing industry on Holyrood Road would later attest, but those on the ridge and northern side of the city had an infrequent supply. Although improvements were made in the seventeenth century, with individual spurs to wealthy residents, the majority had to rely on the public fountains or water caddies.<sup>17</sup>

The construction of middle class housing in the New Town in the late eighteenth century often included provision for laundries within the properties, or in the various offshoots to the rear. However, this left the Old Town and other tenemented areas with limited access to washing facilities. Inhabitants of the Old Town struggled to do their washing at home and drying was either done inside the house or on wooden drying poles that formally adorned the facades of many city tenements. Drying was also done in back greens and parks, including Calton Hill.<sup>18</sup>

The provision of public washhouses went hand in hand with the campaign to provide public baths. As early as 1686 James Rae, barber to Charles II, was given permission to build a public baths in Edinburgh and by the nineteenth century several baths and subscription baths existed in the city.<sup>19</sup> The popularity of a third class baths, operated privately since 1848 on the south side of Nicolson Square, had indicated demand for a public facility for the working classes.

The public provision of baths and washhouses in Edinburgh only became possible in 1880 after Parliament passed the Edinburgh Municipal and Police Act of 1879. The Act allowed for the 'purchase, feu, lease or other acquisition of lands' for baths, washhouses, gymnasiums, bleaching and drying greens, and also allowed for their regulation and for the levying of suitable charges for their use. The Act was also responsible for various other municipal and sanitary improvements championed by Sir Henry Duncan Littlejohn, Edinburgh's first Medical Officer of Health.<sup>20</sup>

However, it was not until 1887 that the first publicly funded and operated baths were opened at Infirmary Street, off South Bridge. Designed by the City Superintendent of Works, Robert Morham, at a cost of £8000, it had two pools and a small laundry with washing tubs served by the same boilers as the baths. People often chose to wash their clothing at the same time as themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Scotland's first public washhouse, with baths, was opened on 19 August 1878 in Glasgow on a site by Glasgow Green, Greenhead. It was designed by the City Architect John Carrick (1819–1890) at a cost of £20,000. It had 48 washing stalls alongside swimming pools and private baths. The washhouse, demolished in 1960, was built on the site of an earlier washhouse which may have been in existence from the early eighteenth century. This earlier washhouse had 200 stalls and seems to have been run by private tenants who paid an annual rent to the Council.<sup>22</sup> From the start Glasgow designed combined baths and washhouses, with several impressive buildings provided in the decades either side of 1900 by the City Surveyor Alexander Beith McDonald (1847–1915) and his architectural team.

Alive to the long spirit of healthy competition between the two cities, Edinburgh Town Council's Plans and Works Committee had discussed setting up a public washhouse in the late 1870s and a tentative site had been identified in the old Fishmarket building in Market Street. However, despite drawings being prepared to convert the building in March 1880, it was not to proceed.<sup>23</sup> A site was finally purchased in South Gray's Close in 1884, and designs for a washhouse were produced in December that year. In 1890 the washhouse designs had been estimated to cost just over £3100, but it was not until late in 1892 that the poorer residents of the Old Town finally had the facility.

However, Edinburgh went down a different path from Glasgow, and indeed most other cities, by separating its washhouses from its slipper baths and swimming pools. There is no clear reason why this was done, but it was likely a conscious decision to separate those who used the baths and swimming facilities, from those using the washhouse. The latter group were often from the poorest sections of the community and were considered troublesome. Although the separate buildings may have been an initial cost-saving method, in the long term separation of these facilities was economically imprudent. Two sets of boilers, buildings and site costs were required and the washhouses rarely made a profit, but baths, especially as swimming for pleasure became increasingly more popular, often did. In retrospect, shared facilities may have offered Edinburgh's washhouses a subsidy from the baths and thus an additional protection from the political enemies of municipal largesse.

The architectural design of many of Edinburgh's washhouses conforms well to the description of McLeod Street, Gorgie, in the *Building News* of 1917: 'Externally the buildings are carried out on simple and unpretentious lines, and depend on these qualities for any architectural merit they possess.'<sup>24</sup> This is a kinder description than that for the early washhouse at Goulston Square, London (1846–51), which was described by the *Builder* as 'not simply plain and unpretentious, but downright ugly'.<sup>25</sup>

The utilitarian and specific purpose of the washhouses had no immediate precedent in the city, allowing architects the freedom to experiment and evolve their own aesthetic. Edinburgh's early washhouses began as much weaker versions of the popular architecture of the day, with Edwardian Baroque giving way to Queen Anne. However, the majority of Edinburgh's washhouses built in the first three decades of the twentieth century were 'simple and unpretentious' roughcast washing halls, without innovative construction methods, or the feature façade that would typify many designs of the 1920s and 1930s. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Edinburgh's washhouses did not adopt the smooth lines and Art Deco styling of the roadhouse or the adventurous transatlantic modernism of the cinema. However, neither did they follow advances in design seen in new industrial buildings or those built for other public utilities. This may explain the lack of interest in them as a building type, and as we shall see later, the almost complete absence of concern over their loss.

The design of washhouses was assisted by two influential books that appeared in the 1890s and 1900s: *Public Baths and Washhouses* by Robert Owen Allsop (1894), and *Modern Public Baths and Wash-houses* by Alfred William Stephens Cross (1906). Cross, an architect, was the acknowledged expert on the design of baths and washhouses, and with his son Kenneth was to dominate the profession for many years.<sup>26</sup> Although it contained similar recommendations to Allsop, Cross's book, revised in 1930, was to prove particularly influential as it contained clear instructions alongside detailed plans and design drawings.

Cross recommended that the public washhouse should be combined with the public baths, but that its

entrance should always be separate and confined to a side or back street. As users of the washhouse would be troublesome and would require overlooking, a turnstile or barrier gate should be provided to prevent entry to the building without payment, although Alsop points out quite sensibly that this was likely to impede users of the washhouse with heavy burdens of washing. Cross recommended a simple lofty apartment combining the washhouse and drying chamber, with an adjacent room for mangling and ironing. The washing hall's design should be simple with steel trusses and roof-top ventilation and natural lighting. The internal walls should be faced in light coloured enamelled bricks above a dado of salt-glazed bricks. The building should have a spacious entrance lobby or waiting room provided with fixed seating, and could be connected (to the baths) by an administration lobby or corridor often shared with the second class baths. There should be ample provision of lavatories and cloakroom space with room for the temporary accommodation of baskets or prams used to transport washing. Cross also recommends a Matron's office and suggests a supervised crèche.

#### THE EDINBURGH PUBLIC WASHHOUSES

The role of site selection for, and design of, the washhouses was undertaken by the City Superintendent of Works Department who provided detailed drawings and an estimated cost to the Council's Plans and Works Committee. From 1887 there was a specific Public Baths Sub-committee, renamed in 1904 the Baths and Washhouses Sub-committee. There would also be assistance from the Burgh Assessor in the process. After being passed by the Dean of Guild Court, the city's building regulation body, the drawings and estimates would then go out to tender. The estimated cost was then submitted again to the Committee who would scrutinise the plans and costs involved and agree, disagree or suggest improvements. On at least two occasions the Committee voted extra monies to enable the building to be built in stone rather than brick.

The tenders were drawn up by the City Superintendent's office, and were divided according to the separate trades: engineering work, mason work, slater work, plumbing work, steelwork, joiner

work, plaster work, glazier work and asphalt work. At South Gray's Close the masonry work by William Elliot comprised almost half the budget, but with all subsequent washhouses engineering or laundry engineering works would occupy the lion's share, often up to 50% of the overall costs. Not surprisingly this work often went to specialists: Bradford & Co. of Salford undertook Causewayside and Aimers McLean of Galashiels worked on Union Street and Henderson Row. This led to complaints from Edinburgh, Leith and District Master Plumbers who considered their traditional role in the construction process was being marginalised.

In Edinburgh planning and design largely followed the detailed instructions set out by Cross, with the obvious exception of combining the washhouse and baths. All contained a large simple washing hall, early examples being built in glazed brick, brick and/or stone with later buildings in brick, roughcast externally with cement margins around windows. The lighting was from high side windows, with cast iron vents or recessed panels underneath. There was a slate roof with patent glazed rooflights and a raised rooftop ridge ventilator, mostly glazed but louvred at either end, and roofed in zinc. The natural ventilation of the building was very important, as exhausts from the drying chambers were vital to keep the hall at a useable temperature. The raised ridge ventilator was shielded by a weak masonry flourish to the gable, usually a pitched parapet following the profile of the louvered lantern behind, but occasionally stepped. In the end gables of the washing hall there was often a semi-circular arched window with central three-part keystone, almost identical to the blank arched recesses used to enliven the gables on many of the City Architect's tenements, for example those at Prestonfield (1927-30). Gables mainly had simple stone or artificial stone skews and skew-puts. Those elevations that faced a public street often had added architectural features, as did buildings in the city centre which often used stone rather than harled brick. The use of stone in central buildings was still a strong Council aspiration until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The washing halls ranged from 80 to 105 feet long and 35 to 55 feet wide, and were lined internally with white glazed bricks, occasionally with lower courses of black bricks. An open steel-trussed and plated roof of minimal dimensions allowed light from glazing in

the timber lined roof to flood the space. The washing hall had washing stalls or compartments, analogous to the individual plunge bath compartments. Each contained tubs for washing and rinsing and a cast iron steam boiling tub with cover and lid. These were often grouped in ranges of ten or twelve, and immediately adjacent to them at the end of the rows were the steam, and later electrically-driven, hydro-extractors provided to spin the laundry and extract moisture. Next were the 'horses', iron horizontal rails drawn out on rollers individually from heated chambers that dried the laundry. There was one for each stall, numbered to match, and they were normally on the opposite side of the hall. The process of washing will be discussed below.

Besides the hall, depending on the size of the site, there was often a single or two storey administration and entrance block housing offices for the caretaker and staff. The entrance doorway was normally enlivened with cement margins and a weak cartouche, cornice or pediment. Internally, there was a storage area for prams and go-carts, a waiting room, and toilets for users of the washhouses. Mainly upstairs, the crèche had an attendant's room and toilets for the children, although where space allowed there was a ground floor open play area under a covered verandah.

The engine room and steam boiler were often at the opposite end of the washing hall from the offices, in a separate building or where possible in a basement under the washing hall itself. The steam boiler was large, one example being over 20 feet long and 8 feet in diameter. It served machinery including steam calorifiers and engines, and powered the shafts that served the hydro-extractors. A tall brick chimney was located to the corner of the site, and could be up to 200 feet tall. Early washhouses were served by coal but by the mid 1920s some had begun to utilise electricity. Until their closure in the 1970s the early washhouses, including Lochrin, were still using coal, shovelled in chambers manually, akin to a ship's boiler room.

**South Gray's Close Public Washhouse** (south side of High Street, near Blackfriars Street) was opened by Lord Provost James Russell on 29 November 1892. Like the Infirmary Street baths it was designed by the City Superintendent of Works Department under

Robert Morham (1839–1912). Morham had worked with the noted architects David Rhind and David Bryce before becoming principal assistant to David Cousin, City Superintendent of Works, in 1866. He succeeded Cousin in 1873 and proved to be a talented architect, responsible for the design of many of Edinburgh's public buildings, including the public baths at Infirmary Street, Glenogle (Stockbridge) and Caledonian Crescent, Dalry. Few images remain of Edinburgh's first washhouse, but the washing hall was faced in glazed brick, and lit by round headed windows in faience-faced dormers.

The *Scotsman* article on the opening of South Gray's Close washhouse noted that within a quarter of a mile radius of the site there was a population of around 20,000, with around 2500 one-roomed houses. Within this heavily overcrowded area there was limited access to hot water or space to do washing. The death rate in the immediate area was 30 per 1000 as compared to a general city wide figure of 16-18 per 1000. In 1910 the infant mortality rates for the city as a whole were an average of 110 per 1000, but in affluent areas this fell to around 45 per 1000. In the Cowgate ward, immediately adjacent to the washhouse, the figure was a terrifying 277 per 1000.

The Town Council genuinely thought that the delivery of a washhouse would lead to a material reduction in death and infant mortality rates, as well as offering a valuable opportunity to alleviate the conditions of the poor. On the opening of a city washhouse in 1916 Councillor Stewart, Convenor of the Plans and Works Committee, remarked that after housing 'the provision of washhouse accommodation was the most important thing that the corporation could take up for the comfort of the citizens living in small houses'.<sup>27</sup> It is clear that measures introduced by the Council over the next half century considerably improved the health of the population, and the washhouses certainly played their part in this success.

South Gray's Close suffered by being Edinburgh's prototype. It was built on a very restricted site with limited accessibility within one of the most heavily overcrowded parts of the city. Despite a huge local demand it initially contained only 26 washing tubs and a decade after opening the ventilation and 'poisonous' fumes were dubbed a 'disgrace to Edinburgh'. There were also long queues and groups of women waiting within the building. This is not to say it was not popular, as despite the problems by the turn of the



century over 25,000 people were using the building annually (individual paid washes), and this rose to a remarkable 65,000 washes in 1908, an increase of 10,000 on the previous year. The washhouse was altered several times and extended in 1914, and eventually hosted 76 tubs before its closure.

The absence of a crèche was noted even as it opened. Initially users at South Gray's Close were permitted to bring two children into the washhouse on the condition they kept clear of the engine room. Clearly allowing children inside a working hall with scalding hot steam, water and pipework was unacceptable and all subsequent washhouses in the city contained a crèche, which according to the *Building News* of 1917 was 'a commendable provision peculiar to Edinburgh'.<sup>28</sup> The peculiarity was also mentioned in the Carnegie Trust's 1918 study which noted the difficulties experienced in Glasgow, which had no facilities for children. Crèches had a female attendant who looked after the children (aged under five) of women using the washhouse. The crèches contained toys for the children to play with and basic educational facilities, alongside a room for the attendant and separate toilets for the children. They were often in an upper room away from the washing process, although where room on the ground floor was available an outdoor play space and covered verandah were provided. It has been suggested that the popularity of nurseries within the washhouses spurred the provision of council nurseries, and certainly at Tollcross one later opened immediately adjacent to the washhouse.

**Allan Street Public Washhouse** in Stockbridge was designed in 1901 and opened by Councillor Dobie on 7 January 1903. Although perhaps hard to imagine today, Edinburgh's second washhouse was situated in a densely populated area with longstanding social problems. Its plain appearance was almost a cause for celebration. 'The utmost economy has been observed in the treatment of the building, in which, being of the most plain and substantial character, and lying as it does in a somewhat narrow lane, architectural features have been sternly repressed.'<sup>29</sup>

It was built by James Kinnear & Sons at a cost of £4500 (excluding site costs) and contained 40 stalls and a prominent 100 foot high brick chimney. Unlike its predecessor it contained a crèche and attendant's

room. The area had been the subject of a Council improvement programme centred on Bedford Street, and initially the washhouse was to be linked to this. However, it was later agreed to open it as a public washhouse to serve a wider population. In the three years to July 1908 it was reported that there had been a rise of 35,000 (from 53,446 to 88,000) in those using the two public washhouses in South Gray's Close and Stockbridge; Allan Street alone accommodated over 30,000 washes in 1908. However, shortly after it opened Allan Street was criticised as unnecessary by some, perhaps because the Stockbridge area was being rapidly cleared of slums and many of the replacement dwellings were being provided with proper washing facilities. It was finally closed in 1928, on the opening of Henderson Row washhouse, and was demolished four years later.

Although Morham was still Superintendent of Works, he acknowledged that the credit for Allan Street was mainly due to James Williamson, who had done the 'greater part of the work'.<sup>30</sup> James Anderson Williamson (1860–1935) had joined the Council in 1880 following a year working with the prominent Edinburgh firm of Peddie & Kinnear. Morham retired in 1908 but before this date had begun to rely heavily on assistants, especially Williamson, who became his Deputy in 1898. Williamson would succeed him as City Superintendent of Works, the post being officially renamed City Architect in 1919. It is thought Williamson was largely responsible for Portobello Public Baths (1898) and he certainly designed Morningside Public Library (1905).<sup>31</sup> His designs range from Free Renaissance (Portobello baths), to 'Wrenaissance' (Morningside Library) to a Roman Edwardian Baroque at Portobello Town Hall (1912–14).

Williamson and his architectural team would design the next half dozen washhouses, work which was important enough to be included in his obituary.<sup>32</sup> He was primarily assisted in their design by the Dundonian George White (1874–1964), whose initials appear on the documents for Portobello. It appears that many of the washhouses in Edinburgh were designed by a team of architects, often a lead architect and a job or assistant architect. Before 1925 the design drawings are stamped only for the City Architect, but from that date the initials of individual designers appear directly on the drawings.

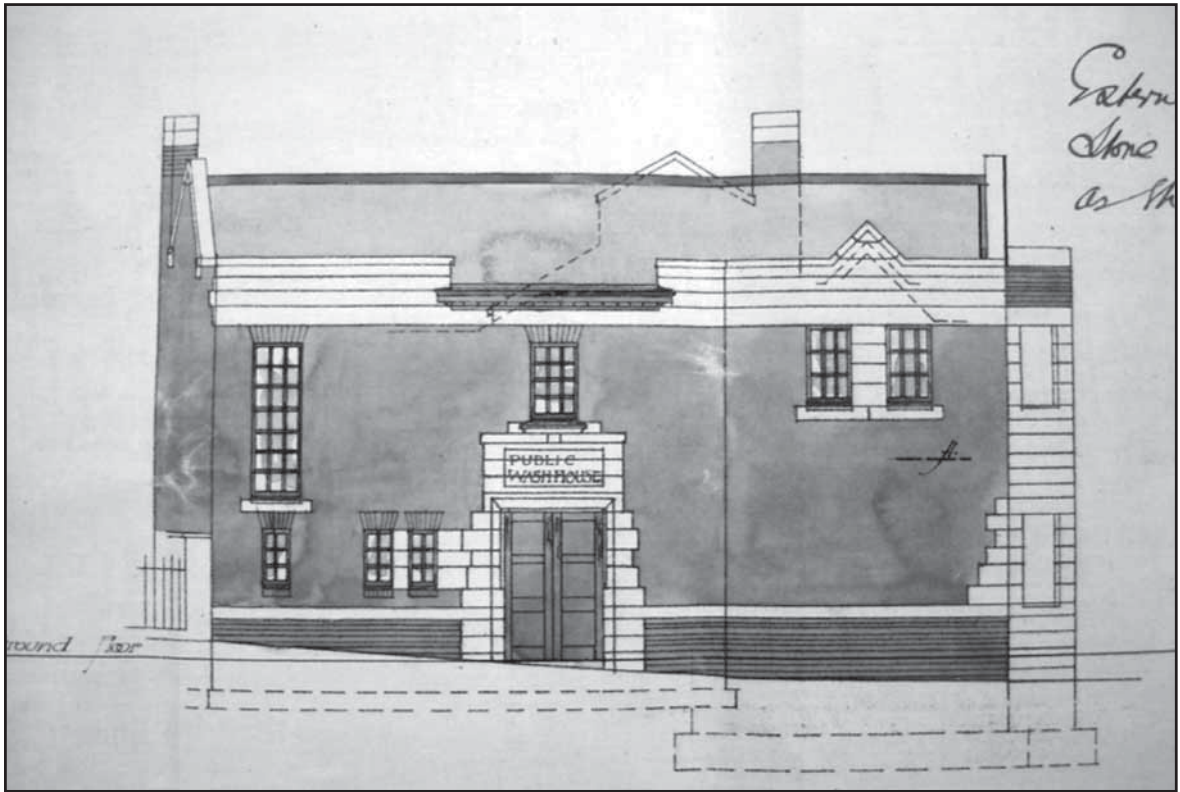


Fig. 1. Simon Square Public Washhouse. Design drawing for front elevation by City Superintendent of Works, J. A. Williamson, January 1907. (*Edinburgh Dean of Guild Court Records, Courtesy of Edinburgh City Archives*)

Despite their popularity, South Gray's Close and Allan Street attracted criticism for both their initial and ongoing costs. The 1879 Act had empowered the Council to provide washhouses by means of a charge on the rates, and naturally any burden on Edinburgh's ratepayers was met with strong opposition from some quarters. In 1893–94 in its first year of operation South Gray's Close had made £318 against management costs of £407, a deficit of £88. Not including the capital expenditure or interest payments, between 1894–95 and 1901–02 South Gray's Close made a yearly loss of between £224 and £404, and the deficit increased year on year. Receipts in this period were an average of £535 and expenditure (on maintenance and management) an average of £876. These figures set an unfortunate financial pattern for public washhouses in the city.

In 1903 the Public Baths Sub Committee of the Plans and Works Committee discussed the provision of four sites for new washhouses in Dalry, West Port, Calton and St Leonards. A washhouse at St Leonards

was urgent, it being, after the central Old Town, the most densely populated and neglected ward in the city. However, there was considerable debate within the committee on whether a new washhouse was necessary, or whether the extension of South Gray's Close, on land already purchased for this reason, was preferable. One of the councillors, Judge MacPherson, argued that a washhouse should not be viewed as a matter of profit and loss, and that from the Council's enquiries beforehand they had not been expected to pay for themselves. Others supported this view, seeing their endowment as a matter of public health. However, many within the Council were concerned with the deficits experienced by the existing washhouses, and the St Leonards plan was shelved for a spell by a vote of 25 to 16.<sup>33</sup>

**Simon Square Public Washhouse** in St Leonards was finally opened by Councillor MacPherson on 30 July 1908. It was built for £5200 with a site cost of £2000 and initially had 40 stalls, later increased to

56. Two decades later the deprived St Leonard's area it served would be the subject of two major Council housing improvement programmes.<sup>34</sup>

With Allan Street the lack of architectural aplomb was celebrated, but Simon Square was designed with care and ability making it the most impressive and architecturally distinguished public washhouse built in Edinburgh (fig. 1). It occupied a visible corner site, rather than a back street like its predecessors and, although, owing to the clientele, it was perhaps not as distinguished as other public buildings, the odour of shame that led Cross to recommend relegating the washhouse entrance to a subsidiary lane was slowly being replaced by a civic pride in the service to Edinburgh's poorer citizens.

Williamson's design drawings show a brick structure with stone detailing but at the last moment the Plans and Works Committee voted an extra £120 to enable it to be entirely built in red and white sandstone. The masonry works by Alexander Robb occupied a third of the budget. At this period the difference in cost between building in stone and building in brick was negligible. The significance of the engineering works and machinery can be seen in their 42% share of the budget.

Its two-storey façade had a dressed white stone parapet fronting a slate roof above an asymmetrical façade. The front doorway had a wide large stone plaque above the door emblazoned with PUBLIC WASHHOUSES in Roman letters. Above this was a break in the parapet with a straight projecting dentilled cornice acting as a pediment. To the left a tall multi-pane stair window rose above three small ground floor windows. To the right of the façade a small gabled of stone echoes a seventeenth century Scots dormer. There are shades of the modernism of Charles Rennie Mackintosh in the asymmetrical façade although the side elevation facing Paul Street/Gilmour Street reverts to traditional Edwardian Queen Anne with a two-storey canted bay window. The washing hall was 80 feet long, 40 feet wide and 23 feet high, with a slate roof and louvred ridge lantern together with two substantial twin stone dormers, which gave the building an ecclesiastical appearance, much like a Victorian church hall. Its presence in the locality was announced by a tall brick chimney rising from the centre of the site.

To avoid the problems at South Gray's Close great care was taken to address safety within the washhouse



Fig. 2. Front elevation of Lochrin Public Washhouse prior to demolition, c. 2000. (Courtesy David Rintoul.)

and also to cope with high temperatures by adequate ventilation. The year after it opened a utilitarian soup kitchen was constructed on open ground immediately adjacent, slightly harming its setting. Simon Square was immediately popular, with an unprecedented 47,447 uses in its first year of opening. In 1913 it made a clear profit of £100, the only washhouse to do so, before the modernised Murdoch Terrace repeated the feat momentarily in the 1970s.

**Greenside Lane Public Washhouse** was designed in 1908 and opened by Councillor Stewart, Convenor of the Plans and Works Committee, on 25 October the following year. It was converted very cheaply (£650) from an existing 60 foot long tenement, which ended up being largely reconstructed. The conversion was chiefly a housing project with four Council dwellings being provided under the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1900. Perhaps because of this it was not particularly satisfactory, initially containing only 18 tubs, although interestingly it included the historically resonant facility of air-drying laundry on the slopes of Calton Hill. In 1913 it was extended at a cost of £1500 to provide 32 tubs and was altered again in 1927, before closing in October the following year.

**Lochrin Public Washhouse** in Tollcross was designed by Williamson in 1912 and opened by Councillor Stewart on 4 June 1914 (fig. 2). It took four months to construct at a cost of around £6500. It was built, again by James Kinnear & Sons, on a portion of the Fountainbridge slaughterhouse site adjacent to J. A. Carfrae's superb Tollcross Primary School of 1911, in

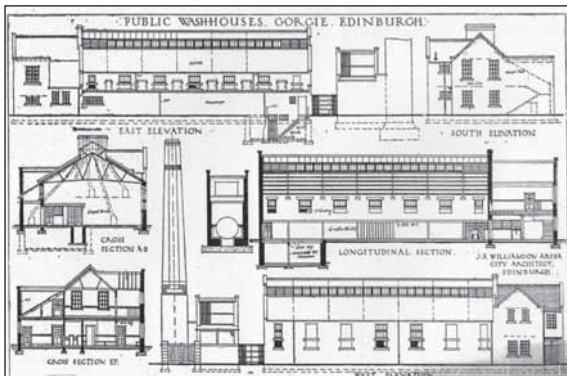


Fig. 3. Elevations and sections of McLeod Street Public Washhouse, Gorgie. (*Building News*, February 21 1917.)

an area reconfigured in an early exercise in municipal town planning. Like Simon Square it had a degree of architectural sophistication, perhaps because its city centre site and prominent location argued for a higher quality finish. It had a two-storey frontage building constructed in coursed stone with blonde stone dressings in a very weak 'Wrenaissance' style with partly mansarded roof. The pediment over the door featured a cartouche with the Edinburgh coat of arms. To the rear was a large washing hall 105 feet in length and 41 feet in breadth with 80 washing stalls. The hall was the last to be lit by dormers, as later washhouses had windows set in walls.

**McLeod Street Public Washhouse** in Gorgie, was designed in 1914 and opened by Lord Provost Robert Inches and Councillor Stewart on 1 November 1916. Gorgie was an area of dense late nineteenth century working class housing with a large proportion of two- and three-room houses. Although costing a similar amount to Lochrin (£6500), and being designed only two years later, McLeod Street was a very different affair. The stone pediment, doorpiece and dormers of Lochrin were dispensed with in McLeod Street's simple roughcast brick walls. Its design may be partly due to its suburban location, but it seems to have heralded a move away from Williamson's Edwardian aesthetic into the more utilitarian approach adopted from this date onwards (figs 3 and 4).

It was built with an 80 foot long washing hall parallel to the street and lit by window openings with louvres in their lower portion. At one end was a simple two-storey gabled entrance block, domestic

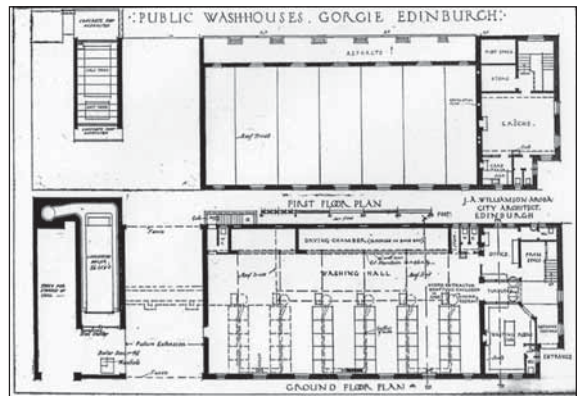


Fig. 4. Plan of McLeod Street Public Washhouse, Gorgie. (*Building News*, February 21 1917.)

in both scale and character. This contained the administration offices and a crèche upstairs. The entrance has a simple dentilled cornice above the door. All is plain and rendered under a slate roof with stone skewes. In the washing hall were 40 stalls, but this was later increased to 60, with the opportunity to extend the building to incorporate 80 if necessary. McLeod Street proved popular, with an average of 52,000 washers in the years 1936–38, and annual receipts of around £1170.

In the three years prior to the outbreak of the First World War the number of individual washes in the four Council washhouses had risen from 166,436 to 195,738. By now the cost was 2d for the first hour and a modified charge thereafter.

In 1919 Williamson presented a report to the Plans and Works Committee on the provision of wash houses based on the needs of specific areas within the City. It became known as the District Scheme and aimed to concentrate their siting in poor, densely populated areas. The report helped stave off the objections that had been raised in Stockbridge and refereed between competing district councillors and overtly political manoeuvring.

The report clearly suggested that Leith needed a washhouse, although a joint washhouse serving both Edinburgh and Leith was initially mooted.<sup>55</sup> The following year Leith was amalgamated within, or acquired by, Edinburgh (depending on where people's allegiances lay). A public washhouse for Leith was within the 1920 amalgamation agreement, although it would not be until January 1928 that this would be achieved. The report also

suggested that new washhouses should be provided for Abbeymount, Portobello and Dumbiedykes, and by the end of 1920 the City Architect had prepared draft plans for all three.

Also in 1919, a deputation from Simon Square asked the Committee to provide a registration or booking system to address the huge demand of 1600 users a week that had led to queues from 5 am, and on one occasion at New Year, from 10 pm the previous evening. The committee introduced a three week trial whereby tickets could be booked for use the following day, but this resulted in afternoon queues to book tickets. The obvious answer was an additional washhouse for St Leonards, but the Committee reverted to the previous arrangement with discretion on booking left to the superintendent, and washhouse users limited to four hours daily. The deputation also asked the Committee to consider opening the washhouse earlier in the morning, but in the immediate aftermath of the war there was still a shortage of coal and any increase in opening hours was postponed.

The early washhouses were supervised by the Superintendent of Public Baths, who for many years was the award-winning swimmer, William Watt. However, in 1920 as the popularity and number of washhouses grew, Councillor Carmichael proposed separate superintendents for baths and washhouses, and the following year Mr R. J. Hardie was appointed the first Superintendent of all Corporation washhouses. He was followed in May 1924 by James D. Forsyth, appointed from a field of 200, with an annual salary of £175 (with a bonus of £75). The salary rose to £340 by the late 1930s when the yearly costs of all washhouse staff reached £7000.

Men still occupied managerial positions within the washhouses alongside the Superintendent and boiler stokers. When, in 1920, Councillor Baxter raised again the proposal that women should be employed as managers in the washhouses, as 'they would do far better than men as this was their special work', he was rebuked by George Stark, later Convenor of the Plans and Works Committee, who regarded this idea as 'burlesque', stating that women 'could not agree amongst themselves, and if they had to go to a woman arbiter it could only make things worse'.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, despite such attitudes, the washhouses did provide an early working environment for women, with jobs for attendants, cash takers and crèche

attendants.<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, users of the washhouses were resolutely female.

**Causewayside Public Washhouse** in Newington was designed in 1920 and opened by Lord Provost Thomas Hutchison on 13 October 1922. It was sited to take the pressure off Simon Square and serve the wider Newington area. At £20,000, with an additional £1300 for site costs, it would be, alongside Leith, the most expensive washhouse built in the city, although little of this sum was translated into architecture. It had a very plain appearance with the usual roughcast washing hall, in this case with a stepped gable and stone skew putts. On Causewayside it had a one storey administration block entered under a weak broken pediment, with an adjoining veranda covering an outside play area for the crèche. The rear gable of the washing hall ended a long vista from Newington Road, and was treated with three windows, the central one taller and slightly arched giving it a vaguely ecclesiastical appearance. Internally, the 105 foot by 35 foot hall contained 60 tubs and drying horses, with scope to extend the number to 80. Its expense was largely due to the high construction costs that followed the end of the First World War, a period in which retail prices had risen by over 200%.

In 1922 Councillor Carmichael, convenor of the Plans and Works Committee, admitted that, although sites had already been acquired and plans prepared for three new washhouses in the city, the slowing down in capital expenditure, together with the straitened economic times would likely result in delays to their construction. This was indeed prophetic as Abbeyhill and Portobello did not open until 1926 and 1927 respectively and the planned washhouse at Dumbiedykes Lane, to relieve pressure on Simon Square, was never built.

That same year the deficiency on operation of washhouses was £10,380, which represented a charge of approximately ½d per £1 on the burgh assessments (rates). Although the deficit was considerable, Provost Hutchison believed it possible to lower it by increasing the number of users. This was not an idle boast, as by May 1925 440,000 washers had used the washhouses in Edinburgh and the figures were still rising.

**Abbeymount Public Washhouse** (on Abbeyhill) had a long gestation period. First mooted in 1913 it was postponed by the war and later squabbling among the

councillors. It was eventually designed by Williamson in 1923, approved in 1924 and was finally opened by Lord Provost William Sleigh on 31 March 1926. An extended waiting area was added two years later. Although built to a similar scale as Causewayside, it cost a total of £15,300, around £5000 less. It had 70 washing tubs, and utilised the steeply sloping site by the railway line to place its boilers and machinery in the basement.

**Portobello Public Washhouse** was opened by Lord Provost Stevenson on 17 March 1927 in Livingston Place, later renamed Adelphi Grove, off the High Street. It cost a similar amount to Abbeymount, and was the last to be designed, in early 1925, by City Architect J. A. Williamson and his assistant George White. The main washing hall was 105 feet long and hosted 80 tubs. The building contained a single storey administration wing with the usual accommodation.

Portobello was the first to have its main machinery powered by electricity rather than coal, probably because the Power Station was adjacent, but also perhaps to address the acute coal shortages which had shut all washhouses for a period the previous year. Henceforth most of the washhouses would be constructed with an electricity transformer house adjacent, a building type the City Architect's department designed again and again in the 1920s and 1930s. Within the washhouse the 11 hydro extractors were able to be operated individually rather than being run from one engine, another first for Portobello.

The design of Portobello was again plain, although a not altogether unsuccessful attempt was made to articulate the long nine-bay street facade of the washing hall with alternate parapets and overhanging eaves.

Williamson retired reluctantly in June 1925 after 45 years working for the Council. The next City Architect would be Ebenezer James MacRae (1881–1951), the son of a Western Isles clergyman. MacRae was educated in Edinburgh and had joined the Superintendent of Works Department in 1908, after serving his articles with Archibald Macpherson (1851–1927). He had been Assistant Depute to Williamson since 1919 and then became his Depute in 1924. The very capable MacRae led a large Architects Department, and in 1926 inherited the architectural staff from the City Engineers Office, who had until then been engaged on council housing schemes

throughout the city. His team would transform many parts of the city during his 21 year tenure.

MacRae and his staff were responsible for the design of the last four washhouses built in the city. The first two, Leith and Henderson Row, were converted from existing buildings, and consequently were of less architectural interest in their own right.

**Leith Public Washhouse**, also known as Bonnington Road or Great Junction Street Washhouse, was designed in 1926 by Malcolm Murchison (1895–1960), later MacRae's chief housing assistant and later still housing executive officer for the City. It utilised a former electricity generating station and its reused façade showed the scars of alteration. At a cost of £20,000 it would be the largest washhouse in Edinburgh, with 100 tubs and a separate ironing room.

The endowment of a washhouse was part of the 1920 Edinburgh and Leith amalgamation settlement, and on its opening on 12 January 1928 Lord Provost Stevenson hinted warmly at the evident tensions by adding that 'he thought the Council had now just about given Leith all that it needed – and so they might give the Corporation a little breathing space to do something for other parts of the city'. Further bridge-building was achieved when Councillor Bilton, Convenor of the Plans and Works Committee, stated that Leith now had the biggest and most up-to-date washhouse in the world, and as a final gesture the washing facilities were to be free for the first three days.<sup>38</sup> The wisdom of providing such an expensive facility was soon vindicated as Leith became the most popular and efficient washhouse in the city, with queues often forming in the early hours of the morning.

**Henderson Row Washhouse** at Canonmills was in a converted bus garage, which itself had utilised a former tramway power station. Built at a cost of £15,000 to serve the St Stephens and Broughton districts it was opened by Baillie Hay on 17 October 1928. The Allan Street washhouse closed simultaneously. The frontage to Henderson Row was only a single storey high but the fall in ground accommodated a deep basement housing the engine room and boilers. It had 80 tubs, 11 hydro extractors, and a 200 foot high chimney.



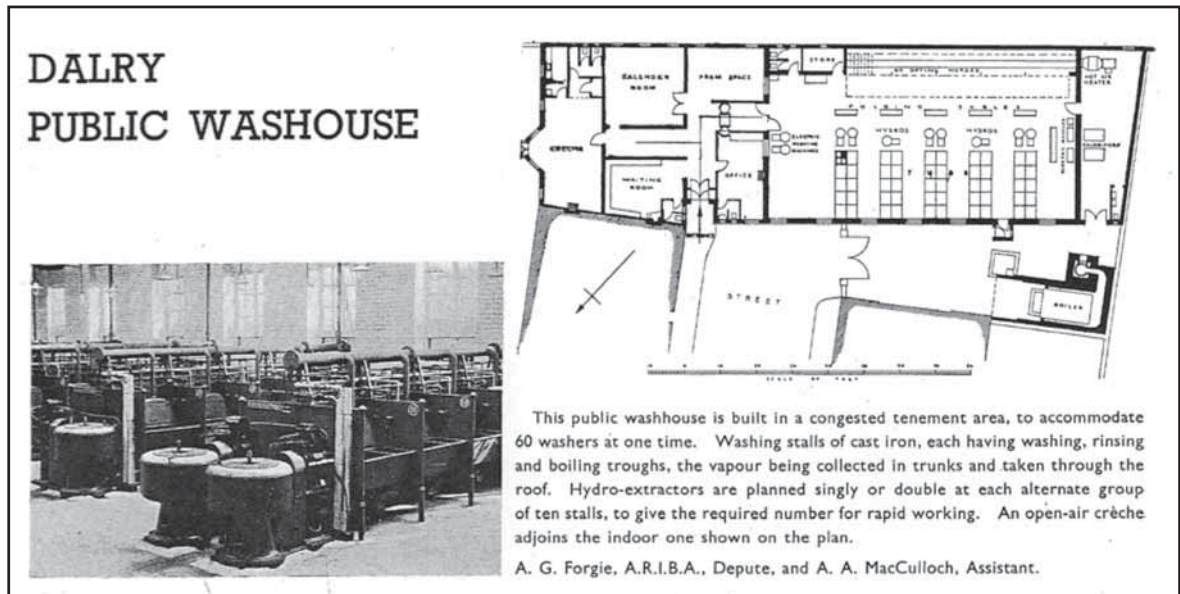
Fig. 5. Photograph of front elevation of Union St Public Washhouse, 2010. (Courtesy Historic Scotland.)

By 1930 the city had nine washhouses with 662 washing stalls and drying horses. Construction costs

that year equated to around £180 per tub, but since 1927 there had been a 50% increase in the number of washings and a 70% increase in revenue. By 1932 the cost of a single wash had risen to 3d for the first hour for ordinary stalls, and 1½d for every half hour afterwards. That same year the Council recorded the operation of washhouses to measure their efficiency and usage. Leith was recorded as operating at 89% actual to potential efficiency. Simon Square was close behind on 87%, followed by Abbeymount on 83% and McLeod Street on 75%. South Gray's Close, Causewayside, McLeod Street and Lochrin had efficiencies in the low 70s, Henderson Row in the mid 60s, but Portobello was down at 47% efficiency. Perhaps in these straitened economic times some washing was still done the traditional Portobello way, on the beach. Whatever the efficiencies, the year saw over 650,000 individual washes in the city.

The last two washhouses designed under MacRae, Union Street and Murdoch Terrace, opened in 1933 and 1934, costing £15,200 and £13,000 respectively.

**Union Street Public Washhouse** was designed in 1931 by James Archibald Tweedie (1895–1962); his assistant, George Clark Robb (1903–1980), did the detailed construction drawings (fig. 5). Tweedie, the son of an Edinburgh architect, was perhaps a low-key,



This public washhouse is built in a congested tenement area, to accommodate 60 washers at one time. Washing stalls of cast iron, each having washing, rinsing and boiling troughs, the vapour being collected in trunks and taken through the roof. Hydro-extractors are planned singly or double at each alternate group of ten stalls, to give the required number for rapid working. An open-air crèche adjoins the indoor one shown on the plan.

A. G. Forgie, A.R.I.B.A., Depute, and A. A. MacCulloch, Assistant.

Fig. 6. Plan and photograph of Murdoch Terrace Public Washhouse, Dalry. (Official Architect, September 1941.)

but nonetheless crucial, member of MacRae's team, assisting him with the design of housing at Piershill, as well as Edinburgh's distinctive police boxes. Robb worked for MacRae for a decade and was responsible for the layout of Saughton, along with tenements in Niddrie and the Royston Mains area of Granton, including Royston Mains Crescent, made of facing brick (1936).

Union Street was built to replace the unsatisfactory washhouse at Greenside Place that had closed in 1928. Opened by Lord Provost Thomson on 15 March 1933, it is safe to say that it was the finest washhouse designed under MacRae's tenure as City Architect, and today is the best surviving example in the city. The frontage building has a two storey coursed stone façade with multi-pane sash windows and an asymmetrical dressed stone entrance doorway with central keystone below a straight cornice. It is topped by a hipped slate roof and a tall, red brick, octagonal chimney faces the street. Construction drawings of the roughcast washing hall at the rear of the site show 58 washing tubs.<sup>39</sup>

Its design complements the architecture of the New Town, but also conforms to the traditionally styled architecture favoured by Macrae for his infill developments in central Edinburgh. For long undervalued, there has been a recent re-evaluation of MacRae's work, and particularly his 'conservative surgery' in historic Edinburgh.<sup>40</sup> His designs utilise rough cut coursed sandstone walls, finely constructed with recessed pointing, slate roofs, multi-pane windows and detailing gleaned from seventeenth century Scottish architecture. Examples can be seen in the infill tenements on the Canongate, and in the nearby substantial housing development at St Leonards, on the Pleasance. Like many of the washhouses and major housing developments undertaken by the City, an electricity substation was constructed at the same time, in this case a particularly handsome and admirably constructed stone example immediately to the north.

**Murdoch Terrace Public Washhouse** was the last to be built in the city (fig. 6). It served Dalry, a densely populated late nineteenth century working class suburb. In the early 1930s there had been a considerable debate, and consequently delay, in deciding which district should have priority for a new washhouse. In March 1931 the Committee Treasurer,

who opposed a washhouse, noted that in the 'scramble among various districts' Dalry had won, but he was still unconvinced by the arguments for either the site or the need. Despite this, the district's councillor insisted that the ward had 'more two roomed houses without adequate facilities for carrying out the essential amenities of life than perhaps any other ward in the town'.<sup>41</sup> The debate was won by 25 votes to 10. One of the councillors repeated that the 'supplying of washhouses was one of the greatest social services the city had ever inaugurated'. Another voted for Dalry, in the hope that a second washhouse for Leith would follow.

Dalry was designed in 1932 by Alexander Garden Forgie (1893–1959) and his assistant Andrew Arnott MacCulloch (1875–1961) and was opened by the Lord Provost on 28 February 1934. Forgie had become Macrae's Principal Assistant in 1926, his Depute in 1930, and in July 1946 succeeded him as City Architect. MacCulloch had worked with MacRae's predecessor and was a skilled draughtsman.

The washhouse, which cost around £13,000, was built at the end of a street of tenements overlooking the Union Canal, the site costing £1220 in 1931. A few years later the entrance to the street would receive the area's finest public building, the Dundee Street or Fountainbridge Library by John A. W. Grant (1885–1959). The washhouse, however, was not in the same architectural league, its utilitarian design reverting to roughcast brick as befitted its suburban location. Originally the washhouse hosted 50 tubs but by this date electric irons and mangles had been installed as a matter of course. Murdoch Terrace also included three electric washing machines, a portent of the future, although at 9d per hour beyond the finances of many. It also had a crèche and external tarmac play area with swings accessed by French windows.

The popularity of washhouses continued and in 1938 sites had been approved for the construction of washhouses at Halmyre Street, Leith, and the long delayed Dumbiedykes Lane, St Leonards, to relieve pressure on Simon Square. Despite the major demand in these areas, both schemes were halted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1938 almost 700,000 washes were made; Leith alone catered for 117,000, with receipts of just over £3000. Even the least popular, Causewayside, had 47,000 washes per year, with receipts of just over £1000. From 1936 to 1938 the annual receipts from



the washhouses had remained constant at just over £17,000, but ominously expenditure was now around the £40,000 mark, which left around £20,000 to be met from the public purse.

#### THE WASHING PROCESS

The washing process started with a flotilla of prams, pushchairs and go-carts that ferried the washing between home and washhouse. Many women queued in the early hours of the morning managing to get a washing done before it was time to take their children to school. Where booking did not operate, on entry women would receive a ticket with their stall number and time of entry. A deposit would be taken, part of which was refundable on return. Often washers would have to wait in a queue or in the waiting room before entry to the washing hall. Before modernisation the halls contained twin rows of washing stalls, normally 10 or 12, with each having a liberal supply of hot water, a steam boiling trough, cast iron washing and rinsing

tubs and a drip table or steep tub served with live steam for the softening and removal of dirt (fig. 7).

Users brought or purchased washing powder and used bars of soap for difficult stains. The women were often assisted by young boys who helped turn mangle handles and then carry the washing home. Clothing was washed in soapy suds, known colloquially in Edinburgh as 'graith', then rubbed on a scrubbing board, a process known as 'reechles' and then rinsed – the 'syne'. A good wash could consist of a graith, three reechles and a syne.<sup>42</sup>

After washing the groups of stalls were generally served with shared steam-driven hydro-extractors which spun the washing at a high speed (1250 revolutions per minute), squeezing the moisture out and rendering them nearly (55-60%) dry. The hydro-extractors were normally placed at the end of each set of stalls, and the early examples required assistance from the caretaker to start and stop.

The washing would then be placed on the drying horses for a short time. In early washhouses the horses were installed beside the stalls but in Edinburgh they



Fig. 7. Interior of Lochrin Public Washhouse. Photograph taken on last day of operation, 31 March 1977. (Courtesy Brian Scotchburn Snell, photographer.)

## THE PUBLIC WASHHOUSES OF EDINBURGH

were set against one wall, individually numbered to match the stall (fig. 8). The individual ‘horses’ were iron, panel-faced, horizontal rails pulled out on rollers from large longitudinal drying chambers, which had a series of outlets in which hot air generated over steam coils was driven at great pressure. Temperatures reached 150 degrees, which dried clothing thoroughly in around fifteen to twenty minutes. A couple of these drying horses remain on display in the People’s Story Museum in Edinburgh’s Canongate, as part of a display on the public washhouses.<sup>43</sup> There were also ironing tables with electric irons and tables for folding clothes, again placed near the ranges of stalls.

Later large washing machines would be installed in the modernised washhouses, replacing the tubs. Georgina Keenan describes the process:<sup>44</sup>

The wash house – oh it was great. I used tae go to Abbeyhill wash house. If you didnae have an old pram, you got hold of an old pram, just the frame. Ye had your bath sitting on it wi soap powder an’ everything., and you’d go one week and you’s book up when you came out – you’d book up the following week. It didnae cost very much but you got a good washin’ done there.

Coming from the wall there used tae be a back tae back, two lines – you had a tub and you had a boiler and you were all next tae one another. You washed away, put them in the boiler and after you’d put your white things in an’ they were boilin’ away and you did your coloured things. They were black tubs like iron, you got them rinsed. There was a ‘great big round thing – you’d take them down tae the man and he used tae put your things in there tae wring them and then, you put them on the horses to dry. Well they were about 18-20 inches and they were along another wall – they used tae pull out and you hung your clothes over the rails. It was a hot place! You were usually there two or three hours. You always met someone you knew and they used tae have a wee nursery for the kids. There used to be a person there who watched them.



Fig. 8. Interior of McLeod St Public Washhouse. Photograph showing drying horses, 31 March 1977. (Courtesy Brian Scotchburn Snell, photographer.)

POST 1945 DECLINE AND FALL  
OF THE WASHHOUSES

Questions first started to be asked about the need for publicly funded washhouses in the late 1950s. The first casualty was South Gray's Close, Edinburgh's first public washhouse, which closed on 4 November 1961. Before its closure it had been taking only £5 a day owing to a large drop in admissions, the result of the substantial depopulation of the surrounding area. The building had also required around £8000 of investment for a new boiler. As many feared, this set in motion the decline of the washhouses, and the following year plans were drawn up to close both Lochrin and McLeod Street. A public outcry and a 400-strong petition reversed this decision and persuaded the Council to advertise their facilities, reopen the nurseries and look into evening opening to boost their use. The Council also investigated modernising the washhouses by introducing electric washing machines, drying tumblers and ironing machines.

In 1964 Murdoch Terrace was the first to be modernised with electric washing machines at the considerable cost of £31,000, despite a petition by the users against the removal of the cast iron tubs, perhaps an example of the 'conservative nature' of women noted by Campbell in the Carnegie Report? However, that same year it had been estimated that bringing the others up to this standard would cost around £225,000, and they were still losing money.

In July 1969 the Council's Civic Amenities Committee recommended the closure of nine out of the ten remaining washhouses, retaining only the modernised Murdoch Terrace. At this stage the washhouses were running at a yearly loss of £85,000 (annual income £25,000 against expenditure of £110,000). Individual washes had fallen from the huge pre-war figures of around 700,000, to 539,000 in 1955, and by 1968 the figure had fallen further to only 210,000.<sup>45</sup>

Again, the huge resulting public outcry led to the full Council voting against the recommendation and the further modernisation of the remaining washhouses with automated facilities was investigated. Leith was subsequently modernised in 1973 at a cost of £40,000, and soon afterwards Causewayside was similarly updated. At this time there were still around 25,000 homes in the city without proper washing facilities.

It was clear that modernisation of all city washhouses would be prohibitively expensive and, besides, their use was steadily decreasing. They increasingly suffered from the competition of private coin-operated launderettes and the increase in the use of automatic washing machines. Domestic washing machines had first appeared in the 1950s, and although initially expensive their use increased throughout the following decades. Such competition also led to the decline of another competitor to the washhouses, the commercial laundries, although like the washhouses a few survived into the later twentieth century.

Part of the problem was one of image. The washhouses were widely seen as a throwback to the Depression and the preserve of the poorest in society. Many saw such places as an unwelcome anachronism, and even an embarrassment in post-war society, especially one being forged in the white heat of technology. The odour of shame was once again apparent.

As with South Gray's Close, the potential customers for many of the washhouses were fewer thanks to redevelopment and population movements. The washhouses were originally designed for densely populated overcrowded urban areas with families living in one- or two-room houses in tenements. Council clearance programmes had replaced many of these substandard properties and those that remained had largely been upgraded with housing grants for modern conveniences.<sup>46</sup> Other areas had also begun to be gentrified.

In addition, from the early 1920s onwards, under Council improvement programmes following slum clearance, new council housing for displaced families had been provided at Lochend, Prestonfield and Niddrie Mains. This new housing was constructed towards the periphery of the city rather than in traditional tenemented areas, although MacRae's infill developments in St Leonard's were a notable and worthy exception. Those left in the 'single ends' were frequently elderly; up to a half of washhouse users in the early 1980s were pensioners. Many users had no domestic hot water supply, and either could not afford, or could not accommodate, pulleys and plumbing for washing machines.<sup>47</sup>

However it was the financial argument that finally triumphed. Even in their pre-war heyday the washhouses had rarely made a profit and the ratepayers of Edinburgh, through their political representatives,

began to balk at footing the bill. Throughout the early 1970s there were calls to close the washhouses, petitions against their closure and rowdy meetings in the City Chambers against the 'intolerable injustice' of their closure.<sup>48</sup> Supporters argued that the subsidy to the washhouses was no different to Council expenditure on the Meadowbank Sports Centre (£118,000) or the Royal Commonwealth Pool (£68,000).

But by May 1975, when the washhouses were running at an annual loss of £200,000 (expenditure £240,000 against an income of £38,000), it was finally agreed to close all of the unmodernised washhouses as part of a two year phased programme. Only the two modernised buildings at Murdoch Terrace and Leith, and a third at Causewayside (about to be modernised) would be retained. It was claimed these three could cater for up to 80% of those currently using the facilities.

Politically the fight was run on partisan grounds, the Conservatives leading calls for the closure of the washhouses while Labour saw their survival as a 'moral obligation' to those in substandard homes. Tory Councillors Tony Lester, Margaret MacAlpine and Malcolm Rifkind spoke against them. Rifkind was a particularly prominent opponent, and in 1971 he raised a motion to close all but Murdoch Terrace, the only washhouse that had recently been profitable, suggesting it would be cheaper to give all 2000 regular users of the washhouses in the city £50 each rather than keep them open.<sup>49</sup> Even one of the Tory councillors, Mrs Kathleen Macfie, herself a washhouse user, did not believe they should be subsidised by the rates. Labour councillors James Cook, John Kidd, Jim McNally, Gavin Strang and George Foulkes voiced their support for the washhouses. In 1976, shortly before its closure, Foulkes and his Tory counterpart Tony Lester visited Simon Square, rolled up their sleeves and washed for the cameras.

The fight to save the washhouses was an emotive one, co-ordinated by the Washhouse Association and led by Mrs Mary Logan of Dalry, a combative, yet politically astute housewife, dubbed the 'Queen of the Steamies'. In October 1971 she berated the Council, 'We find you were willing to spend £2 million on an opera house that will drain your resources yet you deem [*sic*] to deny people who are unfortunate to live in sub-standard houses a vital necessity'.<sup>50</sup> The SOS – 'Save our Steamies' – campaign was one of the

largest public agitations of the time. Councillor Betty Mackintosh remarked that she 'had more letters about the closure of these washhouses than on any other single subject I've dealt with'. Councillor Jack Kane remarked ruefully that he wished that the people of Edinburgh could be as constructive and vocal on other issues.

Despite such support the closures began in 1977. Initially Henderson Row and Portobello were shut on a 12 month experimental period, but they were never to reopen. They had been annually losing £15,790 and £17,130 respectively. That same year Union Street, Abbeymount, Macleod Street and Lochrin closed. By 1978 only the three modernised washhouses remained open in the city. Leith and Causewayside were then re-modernised with automated washing machines, although extensive plans to equip Murdoch Terrace with a new boiler and washing machines at a cost of £63,000 were scrapped in November 1979.<sup>51</sup>

In the modernised washhouses the price of one full wash rose to 50p an hour, compared to only 32p for several washes in the traditional washhouses. Many traditionalists were unimpressed with the new facilities, and Leith was dubbed a glorified launderette. However the revamped washhouses were still seen as better than washing machines for 'proper' washing, and were still far cheaper than the private launderettes.

The late 1970s saw a brief resurgence in the washhouses' fortunes as younger people, students, middle class women and even men used the facilities. However, in 1979, despite two increases in charges in three months, they were still found to be running at an annual deficit of £99,000. In November 1979 the three remaining washhouses closed to the public on Saturday mornings, ostensibly as a result of Government expenditure cuts, but many saw this as a ploy to hasten their closure.<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning of 1981 the Committee again decided to close the remaining washhouses, as a 'luxury we can no longer afford'<sup>53</sup> One crucial Council vote in April that year only failed because two Tory Councillors were abroad and an Independent voted with Labour. That same month a full wash in the modernised washhouses rose from 98p to £1.50, rising again in July to £1.80. Despite the price hikes it was estimated that the running costs for 1982–83 would be £235,325 against a projected income of only £52,000. At this point Murdoch Terrace, Leith and

Causewayside were running at 39%, 35% and 26% capacity respectively, and the Edinburgh ratepayer subsidised every wash to the tune of £2.14.<sup>54</sup>

As a last resort it was decided to re-publicise the modernised washhouses, by this stage a long way from the public's perception of the 'steamie'. A stay of execution in November 1981 saw the launch of an advertising campaign at a cost of £1436. The campaign included special buses laid on to the three remaining washhouses, 10,000 leaflets aimed to boost their use, and even a promotional video was made. However, the three washhouses continued to decline, seeing a 15% drop in use between 1981 and 1982, and overall a drop of 27% since 1978–79.

In August 1982 the full Council finally decided to close the three remaining washhouses with a predictably close vote of 31 to 30. There was a last-gasp effort to save Leith by claiming its closure broke the rules of the 1920 amalgamation between Edinburgh and Leith. However, although certainly not in the spirit of the amalgamation, there was no legal impediment to its closure.

The last three washhouses – Leith, Causewayside, and Murdoch Terrace – closed at 8 pm on 1 October 1982. At Murdoch Terrace a mock funeral, complete with coffin, was held. Campaigners held placards titled 'We want to wash our dirty linen in public' and the political dimension was noted with 'dirty play by Tories' and 'On election day we will remember'.

#### POPULARITY WITH THE PUBLIC

Although initially public washhouses had been constructed to serve an important public health role, by the time of their closure they had become synonymous with their social and community functions. Their closure led to one of the largest public campaigns in Edinburgh with numerous demonstrations and political infighting. Jessie Campbell used the washhouse at Abbeyhill, and was involved in the campaigns to save it in the 1960s.<sup>55</sup>

There was no way you could wash these things in the house. You couldn't get a washin' done not like towels, sheets, anything big, so the wash house was handy and you could make as much mess in the wash house as you liked and use as much water as you liked 'cos the answer to a clean wash is the rinsing. If you went with your rollers in, your hair would come out lovely. That's why you see lots o' women in thae photographs with headscarves on and

rollers in. The steam used to make your hair great. There was a good atmosphere in the wash house, very friendly. There was no trouble. Everybody helped one another. You didn't have to ask to have a fold, you just went over and automatically everybody just mucked in. There was one day when a woman come in with a sore back and she was told to stand aside and all the other women got stuck in to her washing. If they opened the wash house again i'd be down there today. It wasn't for the want of us trying to save it; we tried but it wasn't a success.

The washhouse provided plentiful hot water and allowed women to wash large items of bedding, nappies and clothes dirtied by industrial workplaces. Many insisted that it was not possible to wash such items properly in the home or in washing machines, and the washhouses were much cheaper than private launderettes, especially for large families. Before the widespread provision of public nurseries the crèche allowed the women a rare break from looking after their children, and early opening hours meant mothers could do the family wash and still take their children to school afterwards.

Those in small houses, often older premises with no facilities and those left behind by redevelopment schemes, could wash for themselves and others. Increasingly the elderly found the washhouse a valuable community resource, and it was noted as an important element in the provision of public health care. In a masculine society it also allowed women a place, other than the pub, to meet and gossip with friends. In the days before community centres they performed a valuable social function and provided an atmosphere that fostered a political awareness amongst the women which eventually led to the well organised and supported campaigns and demonstrations against their closure. 'You'd get a rare blether and hear all the local gossip. You knew everybody that went at the time. It was like going to a club really'.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike the restrictions in many other cities, there were no high washing-stall partitions to reduce theft and disputes, and women mixed freely within the building. Women helped each other, but for any man unlucky to be facing the gauntlet for the first time it was perhaps an intimidating environment, the clientele having a well-established working class banter honed over the years. *The Scotsman* reported that the closure of the washhouses, as well as affecting social cohesion, was a comment on the times, and the death of the work ethic amongst the public.

In Glasgow the public washhouse was popularly

known as a ‘Steamie’, although Edinburgh didn’t initially adopt this colloquialism. The confirmation of this name in the public imagination has been reinforced by the stage play ‘The Steamie’, written by Tony Roper in 1983, incidentally the year after the washhouses finally closed in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. The play was first performed in 1987 and has been revived several times and also televised. It was set within a 1950s Glasgow washhouse at Hogmanay, a popular day for washing as the New Year could be brought in with cleanliness.<sup>57</sup> ‘It was far superior to daein’ the washin’ in the hoose ... You went oot at seven o’clock and you came back at nine with a beautiful wash, wash, dried and mangled, just ready to be put away.’<sup>58</sup>

The history of Edinburgh’s washhouses, despite the many thousands who used them, is largely oral, with few published descriptions of their development or use. A few photographic images survive, largely from the modernisation process or associated with the campaigns against closure. A local landscape architect and photographer, Brian Snell, visited Lochrin and McLeod St Public Washhouses on 31 March 1977, on the last day of operation, and took a full set of evocative photographs (see figs 7 and 8). Edinburgh City Libraries hold an undated 10 minute long VHS video cassette entitled ‘Wash day the easy way’, produced for Edinburgh District Council. It almost certainly dates from the promotional campaign of 1981 and is keen to show how far the Council’s ‘laundries’ had come from the ‘steamie’ image showing a wide variety of customers, with cars replacing prams delivering laundry. The film also makes the point that the washhouse has machinery not available elsewhere and that clothing could be washed, dried and pressed, and therefore ‘ready to wear’ in one short visit. A Scottish Television (STV) video, available online, and dating from 1974, shows Edinburgh housewives’ displeasure at the imminent closure of the washhouses and their dislike of Laundromats.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly it shows that many of the original reasons for providing washhouses for families in small flats with no drying greens still applied. A butcher’s wife insists the washhouse is the only place she can properly clean her husband’s aprons.

Today only four former washhouse buildings remain out of the total of thirteen public washhouses originally constructed, and at the time of writing two of them are threatened with demolition. As described above, their lack of architectural pretension may have contributed to their demise, as few seem to have deemed the buildings important, or worth preserving. Many were demolished without recognition or even recording, and they appear in none of the voluminous architectural guides to the city

Until very recently none of the surviving buildings was listed for architectural or historic merit and only one of the buildings had been photographed by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (RCAHMS) prior to demolition. No architectural analysis seems to have been either sought or deemed necessary, even when, in the case of Leith, the adjacent swimming baths were listed in 1992. Lochrin at Tollcross, one of the finer architectural expressions seems to have survived until as late as 2004, when it was demolished without fanfare. Despite being a stone-built building of some character in central Edinburgh, the planning report makes no mention of the building on the site.

There is certainly a sense that the structures have had little of the fond remembrance and shared experiences from which public baths, dance halls or cinemas have benefitted.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the close associations with poverty were harder to romanticise, or the original users had an inability or unwillingness to articulate their worth prior to the loss of the buildings.

Of the demolished washhouses, both Allan Street and Greenside Place were replaced by newer washhouses in the 1930s and both disappeared early in that decade. South Gray’s Close was demolished after it closed in the early 1960s.

Although, as was common with industrial buildings throughout Britain some were demolished soon after they closed, others were initially retained by the Council and survived for some time in other uses. Leith was demolished ten years after closure in the 1990s, ironically after the adjoining swimming pool was refurbished. As mentioned above, Lochrin seems to have survived in industrial use until its complete loss in 2004.

Causewayside public washhouse limped on as a warehouse until January 1993, when it became the only washhouse to be recorded by RCAHMS. It was demolished soon after and a dull block of flats now occupies the site. ‘The Steamie’ public house on Newington Road is the only clue to its existence in the vicinity. The same fate befell Simon Square, which was demolished after falling into dereliction in 1989. A solitary red stone gatepost on Richmond Lane is the only remnant. Murdoch Terrace and Henderson Row appear to have been demolished not long after they closed, although it is hard to find out exactly when they disappeared.

Portobello and McLeod Street, Gorgie, were both converted to community centres in 1979 and 1981 respectively, and the former remains in use today. Portobello was converted at a cost of £90,000 in a project that created 25 jobs.<sup>61</sup> Although its disused boiler room and chimney were demolished in 1993, the conversion has retained the character of the building relatively intact. Unfortunately, more recently McLeod Street has suffered from a lack of maintenance, and the Council has recently agreed to sell it on the closed market to a plumbing supplier, Plumb Center, for demolition.

After closure Abbeymount was used by the

Gateway Exchange Project, and as a venue in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.<sup>62</sup> In 1987 in Théâtre de la Basoche’s production of ‘Le Lavoir’ French actresses utilised an imported 20 foot wash tub in their performance. Afterwards it was converted to a car garage and showroom, its current use. Sadly, the frontage buildings were removed and only the washing hall remains, itself much altered in the conversion with its rooftop ridge ventilator removed and the roof profile simplified. The usual arched gable window has been infilled, but is still visible. It is currently proposed for demolition as part of a student housing development on the site.<sup>63</sup>

Union Street is the best surviving washhouse in Edinburgh and the most successful example of reuse. It has served as the base for Edinburgh Printmakers since soon after its closure as a washhouse in 1977 and is still leased for that purpose from the Council, although they are due to vacate the premises shortly. The main washing hall is now used for printing machines and even retains some of the original internal signage. The upstairs former crèche is used for exhibitions. As a result of a request by the author this washhouse was listed by Historic Scotland in 2010, albeit at Category C, the lowest category.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

Although there are no published studies on Edinburgh’s washhouses, contemporary publications of the period addressed the general use and architecture of the building type. A few references to Edinburgh’s washhouses occur in the architectural press, and Agnes Campbell, *A Report on the Public Baths and Washhouses in the UK* (Edinburgh 1918) is particularly informative. A great deal of information, mainly on the opening of washhouses, can be found in the *Scotsman* archive, now online. Edinburgh Central Library holds a scrapbook of related newspaper articles, mainly from the *Scotsman* and *Edinburgh Evening News*, and *Edinburgh and Leith Post Office Directories*. It also holds reports by the City Architect on individual washhouses. Useful Council sources include J. D. Imrie, City Chamberlain, *City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh: Review of the Activities of the Corporation for the year 1938* (Edinburgh 1938), and in Edinburgh City Archives, the architectural drawings from the Dean of Guild records, and minutes of committees such as the Public Baths Sub Committee and the Plans and Works Committee, although they have not been individually footnoted here. Architects and their work can be found in the online Dictionary of Scottish Architects, [www.scottisharchitects.org.uk](http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk). In addition to the photographic sources mentioned in the text the SCRAN website [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk) contains many useful images.

1 In Edinburgh an underground drain had been provided in the Cowgate in the mid nineteenth century, but many of the

subdivided and decayed tenements could not access it and waterways like the Water of Leith still provided an open sewer.

- 2 In 1861 34% of the Scottish population lived in one-room houses, 37% in houses of two rooms, and 1% of families lived in rooms without windows. Even before the First World War, 50% of the Scottish population lived in one- and two-room houses. The definition of house differs throughout the UK. In Scotland a house is an individual dwelling, and thus can be a single room within a larger house or tenement.
- 3 Many converted houses contained internal rooms, some of which were even underground. The common parts were often in the centre of the building with no access to natural light or fresh air. Later infill housing development in Edinburgh in the 1930s always had stairs lit by rear windows, and each landing served only two flats.
- 4 Ian H. Adams, *The Making of Urban Scotland* (London 1978), p. 134.
- 5 Pre-1919 social housing schemes in Edinburgh under the provisions of the 1890 Housing Act include High School Yards (1897) and Tron Square (1900), both on the Cowgate, Portsburgh Square (1901) off the Grassmarket, and McLeod Street (1898) in Gorgie. These early municipal housing schemes were designed by the City Engineer, but after Adam Horsburgh Campbell retired in 1926, his duties passed to the City Architect.
- 6 Edwin Chadwick, *Report from the Poor Law Commissioners*

- into the *Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (London 1842).
- 7 Adams, *Making of Urban Scotland*, p. 190.
  - 8 The President of the Committee for Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Washhouses in 1844 was C. J. Blomfield, Bishop of London. Another influential figure in the formation of the 1846 Act was William Quekett, Curate of St George in the East.
  - 9 Helen Clark, 'Living in one or two rooms in the city', in Annette Carruthers (ed.), *The Scottish Home* (Edinburgh 1996), p. 77. In tenements erected in McLeod Street, Tynecastle, in 1898 washhouses were provided for every five houses: *Scotsman*, 5 November 1907.
  - 10 St Georges Baths at the Pierhead, Liverpool, opened in 1829, were designed by the Senior Surveyor of Liverpool Corporation, John Foster Jr, for £24,481, and £6,000 for correcting damage to the foundations. Although publicly funded it was run privately and was beyond the means of the poor, until it was taken over and run by the local authority after the 1846 Act: Ian Gordon and Simon Inglis, *Great Lengths: The Historic Indoor Swimming Pools of Britain* (Swindon 2009). See also SAVE Britain's Heritage, *Taking the Plunge: The Architecture of Bathing* (London 1982).
  - 11 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB 2004), Kitty Wilkinson (1786-1860). Her effort was later supported by the Liverpool District Provident Society, and reforming citizens lobbied the Council. Wilkinson also looked after orphans of the cholera epidemic, founded a school and became, alongside her husband Thomas, superintendent of a public washhouse in the city. She was recently commemorated in a stained glass window in Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral.
  - 12 London's first washhouse opened in May 1845 at Glasshouse Yard near London Docks.
  - 13 The *Penny Encyclopaedia* of 1841 noted that 'the English are not much inclined to swimming'.
  - 14 Rural areas in Scotland had to wait until the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1894, but few washhouses were built in rural authorities, an exception being Alva, a Hillfoots mill town.
  - 15 Agnes Campbell, *A Report on the Public Baths and Washhouses in the UK* (Edinburgh 1918), for the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, whose trustees wanted to assess the provision of aid towards public baths.
  - 16 In 1684 even the skinners who washed their skins and wool in the loch complained of the stale environment and the lack of running water: Rab Houston, 'Fire and Filth: Edinburgh's Environment, 1660-1760', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (BOEC), New Series 3 (1994), p. 26.
  - 17 Several well heads remain throughout the city; the one at the foot of the West Bow, designed by Robert Mylne in 1681, was one of only eight in the late seventeenth century.
  - 18 Calton Hill was widely used for drying of linen. An image of two women laying out clothing appears in Samuel D. Swarbreck's well-known lithograph of 1837.
  - 19 ODNB, James Rae (1716-1791). There was a baths at Portobello, designed by City Superintendent of Works William Sibbald (d. 1809). Plans of the subscription baths at Seafield designed by John Paterson were published in the *Edinburgh Almanack* for 1812. A subscription baths at 17-19a Hill Street, in association with a drawing academy, was designed by George Angus in 1825-28: Helen Smailes, 'A Genteel Academy: The Edinburgh Drawing Institution, 1825-1836', *BOEC*, NS 4, pp. 37-38. See also W. N. Boog Watson, 'Early Baths and Bagnios in Edinburgh', *BOEC* 34, pt 2 (1979), pp. 57-67.
  - 20 It was the first such legislation in the UK. Against the advice of the two Royal Colleges Littlejohn pushed the Town Council to include the section (208) concerning compulsory notification of specified diseases by doctors: H. P. Tait, *A Doctor and Two Policemen: The History of Edinburgh Public Health Department, 1862-1974* (Edinburgh 1974); ODNB, Dr Henry Littlejohn.
  - 21 The Infirmary Street Baths were designed by Morham in an Italianate style in 1885 and opened on 25 July 1887. The building was listed Category B in 1989. The womens' pool facing Infirmary Street was severely damaged by a fire in 1960 and the main pool closed in 1995. After deteriorating for many years the buildings were restored and extended by Malcolm Fraser architects in 2006-09 as a new home for the Dovecot Studios, Scotland's leading tapestry company. This use retained the impressive internal dimensions of the main swimming hall, including its fine open timber roof.
  - 22 Alongside this the philanthropist William Harley set up a public baths in 1800.
  - 23 Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Scotland (RCAHMS), DC7046 and DC7386 – 7392.
  - 24 *Building News*, No. 3242, 21 & 28 February 1917.
  - 25 Quoted in 'Health and Hygiene' section of Looking at Buildings website [www.lookingatbuildings.org.uk/](http://www.lookingatbuildings.org.uk/), created by Pevsner Architectural Guides.
  - 26 Alfred W. S. Cross and Kenneth M. B. Cross, *Modern Public Baths and Wash-houses* (London 1930).
  - 27 *Scotsman*, 2 November 1916.
  - 28 *Building News*, No. 3242, 21 & 28 February 1917.
  - 29 *Scotsman*, 8 January 1903.
  - 30 *Idem*.
  - 31 Williamson was also responsible for Edinburgh's first, and arguably best, post-1919 Housing Act council housing in Chesser Avenue, Gorgie. Williamson himself regarded his most significant achievement as the major rebuilding of the cattle markets at Gorgie, 1909-12, including a slaughterhouse, restaurant, livestock shelters and corn exchange. Gorgie was an exemplary project and much admired both in the UK and abroad.
  - 32 *Scotsman*, 22 March 1935.
  - 33 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 30 June 1903.
  - 34 The Second St Leonards Improvement Scheme, approved in 1931, identified for clearance an area containing around 1600 houses with 5500 inhabitants. In some parts the density reached up to 400 people per acre, but the average was 166. MacRae's Report of 1934 showed that almost half the dwellings were one-room houses. Within the whole area there were only two baths, both of which were unusable.
  - 35 The Carnegie Trust Report of 1918 suggested Leith already had a public washhouse, but this may have been a semi-private facility and must have closed on the opening of the Great Junction Street building.
  - 36 *Scotsman*, 23 December 1920.
  - 37 In Liverpool Kitty Wilkinson and her husband had been the first joint superintendents of Liverpool's first washhouse.
  - 38 *Scotsman*, 13 January 1928.
  - 39 Construction drawings for the harled washing hall by George Robb are in the possession of the author, his great nephew.
  - 40 Jim Johnson and Lou Rosenberg, *Renewing Old Edinburgh, The enduring Legacy of Patrick Geddes* (Glendaruel 2010).
  - 41 *Scotsman*, 6 March 1931.
  - 42 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 September 1981.
  - 43 The People's Story, 163 Canongate, Edinburgh.
  - 44 *Leith lives – Ye're never done – Leith local history project* (Edinburgh, Manpower Services Commission, 1988).
  - 45 *Scotsman*, 16 July 1969.



- 46 The (Housing (Scotland) Act 1969 included an emphasis on addressing substandard housing.
- 47 By 1965, 5.1% of Edinburgh's housing was deemed 'unfit' or had a life of less than five years. Around 10% of houses lacked exclusive use of a WC. The availability of home improvement grants and other incentives from the 1980s reduced these figures.
- 48 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 28 October 1971.
- 49 By the mid 1970s the Tories were arguing that the washhouses were only used every year by 2000 people when there were 17,000 households in the city with no bathrooms.
- 50 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 October 1971.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 27 November 1979.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 15 November 1979.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 27 January 1981.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 13 February 1981.
- 55 Helen Clark and Elizabeth Carnegie, *She was aye Workin', Memories of Tenement Women in Edinburgh and Glasgow* (Edinburgh 2003), p. 122.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 57 'The Steamie' is also the political blog of the *Scotsman*, reflecting the gossip of the washhouse.
- 58 Clark, 'Living in one or two Rooms in the City', in Carruthers (ed.), *Sottish Home* (note 9), p. 77.
- 59 <http://programmes.stv.tv/the-football-years/1974/the-year-in-question/230514-edinburgh-housewives-protest-at-closure-of-the-steamies/>
- 60 Edinburgh has more Victorian swimming baths in use than any other British city.
- 61 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 26 November 1977.
- 62 The Gateway Exchange was founded by Sara and Jimmy Boyle, assisted by Sebastian Horsley. It served as a centre for ex-offenders, drug addicts and those suffering from mental health issues.
- 63 Since this was written the Abbeymount Washhouse has been demolished.