

[places]

GLENROTHES TOWN ART



In 2010 Historic Scotland undertook a study of the public art of Glenrothes. Glenrothes has a distinctive and diverse collection of art works set within a carefully planned urban landscape, dating from 1965 to the present. Often taking the history of the area as its inspiration, the art defines the identity of the town. The study has highlighted the importance of Glenrothes in the story of Scotland's public art and also tells us much about the development of our five New Towns. The works are unique, but can also be appreciated as a collective whole, and a small number were recently recognised as listed buildings. To see these wonderful art works and to take part in suggested walks highlighting specific themes you can visit our website map (see back cover).

[ART FOR THE PUBLIC]

Traditionally, civic art focused on public figures or commemorative works, emphasising an illustrious career or the concept of success through, for example, sculptures of significant people set on plinths. The later half of the 20th century saw the emergence of a more locally relevant and socially aware approach to public art using simple materials and a hands-on, collaborative approach. The creation and expansion of the Scottish New Towns during this period provided an ideal canvas to allow these ideas to take shape.

In 1968 an artist was employed long-term by the Glenrothes Development Corporation to work with the planners, architects and engineers on artistic projects that would contribute to the making of the town. This significant step was the first formal appointment of its kind in the UK and a ground-breaking achievement.

The public art of Glenrothes is notable for its pioneering spirit and sense of creative freedom. More than 140 art works exist today, varying greatly from the figurative to the abstract and from the humorous to the contemplative, often using recurring themes and concepts. There are both prominent landmark sculptures and more enclosed, hidden pieces to be enjoyed more often by residents than visitors. The art works are not all freestanding and there are many murals and sculptures set within buildings, walkways and underpasses. Industrial building materials like concrete, brick, stone and steel predominate while a handful of pieces use bronze.



© Malcolm Robertson

Use your smartphone to scan this QR code for a video introducing Glenrothes and its fantastic public art.
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/glenrothestownart



[TOWN ARTISTS]



David Harding supervises as children place their tiles in Huntly Drive (1971)



Detail of the patterned tiles (2011)

From the beginning, the town's first artist, David Harding (1968-78), considered it important to involve local people in the creation of the work. For example, groups of primary school children modelled their own ceramic tiles and cemented them onto walls near their play areas. Many of the sculptures were quickly adopted as local meeting places and, in some cases, games developed around them.



David Harding, OBE



Malcolm Robertson prepares children's portraits for 'The Audience' featuring over 200 individual tiles (1993)



Detail from 'The Audience' at Newcastle precinct (Photo taken in 2011)

The appointment of a 'Town Artist' and the pioneering approach taken to public art in Glenrothes aroused widespread interest in the UK and abroad with the artists invited to speak on the subject in many countries including the USA, Japan and Australia. David Harding went on to found the influential Environmental Art Department at Glasgow School of Art in 1985 and was awarded an OBE in 2002. From 1978 onwards, Malcolm Robertson proved the perfect choice to continue to develop the Town Art of Glenrothes in the spirit established by David. He began his own studio in 1991 and continues to work internationally in partnership with communities and local authorities, producing and exhibiting public sculpture and artwork.



Malcolm Robertson



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[THE CHANGING ROLE OF GLENROTHES]

Glenrothes was designated in 1948 under the New Towns (Scotland) Act 1946 as Scotland's second post-war New Town, after East Kilbride (1947). The original plan was to build a new settlement for a population of around 34,000. The planning, development, management and promotion of Glenrothes was the responsibility of the Glenrothes Development Corporation (GDC), appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Richard Doyle, General Manager of the GDC, with the Glenrothes Master Plan in 1976



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Careful consideration was given to the form and infrastructure of the town, focusing on individual suburb neighbourhoods (known as precincts), each with their own architectural identity. Engineers, builders and architects were tasked with creating not only good quality

Aerial view of Caskieberran and Tanshall precincts (1989)

mass housing but green spaces, tree planting, wildlife corridors and soft and hard landscaping. This was seen as an equally important part of the process, helping to provide a sense of place and connection to the land that a New Town was felt to need in order to become a successful place where people would want to live and raise children.



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Playing in the Pipe Tunnels in the Newcastle precinct (early 1970s)



Construction of the Rothes Colliery (1956)

Glenrothes was not intended to be a Glasgow overspill town, although it did later take this role. It was populated in the early 1950s by mining families moving from the West of Scotland and the declining Lothian coalfields who were to work at a new super coal mine in the area. This 'Super Pit' was named the Rothes Colliery and was officially opened by the Queen in 1957. At its peak it employed over 1,500 miners. However, in 1961 the mine closed as a result of unstemmable flooding and geological problems.

The pit closure almost resulted in further development of Glenrothes being stopped. Central Government decided instead to change the town's role by appointing Glenrothes as one of the

economic focal points for Central Scotland. The Glenrothes Development Corporation was successful in attracting modern electronics factories to the town and during the mid-1970s, the town also became the headquarters of Fife Regional Council. Today, it is the administrative centre for Fife. The ongoing programme of public art in Glenrothes throughout this period of change helped establish an individual identity for the town as it adapted and evolved.



'Giant Hands', Collydean (1980)

[TOWN ART IN DETAIL]

[EX TERRA (1965)]

Ex Terra by renowned sculptor Benno Schotz (1891-1984) was the first major work of public art in Glenrothes. Welded in bronze, it depicts a maternal figure emerging tree-like from the ground, symbolising the growth of the town. The Latin title of the piece is a shortened version of the Glenrothes Development Corporation's motto – *Ex Terra Vis* – 'From the Earth Comes Life' which refers to Glenrothes roots in the mining industry. Benno Schotz became Head of Sculpture at the Glasgow School of Art in 1938 and was appointed the Queen's Sculptor in Ordinary for Scotland in 1963. *Ex Terra* is one of his most significant public works. He also created the superb altar crucifix (1957) and Madonna sculpture (1960) at St Paul's Church in Glenrothes.



The sculptor, Benno Schotz, studies transistors from an electronics factory in Glenrothes



'Ex Terra' unveiling ceremony (1965)



[HENGE (1970)]



Copyright: David Harding

David Harding inspects the completed work (1970)

This henge sculpture by David Harding exemplifies the type of personal and distinctive narrative public art which Glenrothes excels at and the artist considers it one of his most important projects. The work is interactive and encourages the viewer to move into



Copyright: Peter Goldsmith

the sculpture. A closer look reveals a wide range of symbols and quotations from popular culture and inspirational figures. Each concrete stone decreases in size, the smallest with Celtic disc forms and song titles by Bob Dylan and The Beatles. The largest outermost stone includes a quote from Ghandi, "Man's best monument is not a thing of stone but consists in living deeds and in the memory which survives in the minds of those he served". The work was inspired by the Neolithic stone circle at nearby Balbirnie which was uncovered in 1950 and relocated in 1970.

[WESTERN AVENUE UNDERPASS – UNTITLED, KNOWN AS 'INDUSTRY, PAST AND PRESENT' (1970)]

This untitled work, known as 'Industry, Past and Present', is considered one of the best among a number of underpass artworks in Glenrothes. Dramatic in scale and intricate in its design, it is a significant feature in the landscape. The work draws heavily on Glenrothes mining, paper and electronics industries, anchoring the design firmly to its surroundings. David Harding created patterned reliefs for a number of pedestrian underpasses taking concrete casting techniques to their limit. Social and symbolic messages were sometimes included in the imagery. In this instance, the names of the builders who helped to create the work are also discreetly incorporated.



Copyright: David Harding

The names of builders who helped are immortalised in concrete

[FEEDING HIPPOS (1973), THE THIRSTY HIPPOS (1976), DEATH OF THE HIPPO (1977)]

From 1972, post-graduate students were engaged on one year contracts to assist the Town Artist. Stanley Bonnar created the first group of hippos which have since become synonymous with Glenrothes. His original mould was used by David Harding to create different groups, each with its own distinctive concept and setting. The six hippos going for a drink in a paddling pool is the largest. Bonnar later became the Town Artist of East Kilbride.



'Feeding Hippos' – The three hungry hippos of Caskieberran (1973)



'Death of the Hippo' – A wall halves a solitary hippo surrounded by mushrooms in Woodside (1977)



The 'Thirsty Hippos' are lowered into place in the Riverside Park paddling pool (1976)

[THE BIRDS (1980)]

Prominently sited on North Street in front of the County Offices, this dynamic sculpture is characterised by a sense of forward and upward motion with the weight of the rock juxtaposed with the lightness of the birds. The Birds is an interesting work by Town Artist, Malcolm Robertson. It shows the development of a distinctive style which remains faithful to the ethos and spirit of the Glenrothes Town Art.



[GIANT IRISES (1986)]

Prominently located beside a major roundabout, this light-hearted work plays effectively with ideas of scale and is a natural successor to Glenrothes' giant concrete mushrooms of the 1970s. Devised and constructed in steel and fibreglass by Malcolm Robertson for the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988 and moved to their current site in 1989, they won an award for the 'Most Amusing Artifact' at the festival and have been adopted in many Glenrothes logos and promotional publications since.



Copyright: Malcolm Robertson

[VARIOUS SCULPTURES]



Cast in bronze in 1989, an exact replica of 'the Dream' by Malcolm Robertson was gifted to Glenrothes' twin town of Böblingen in Germany



The largest of Glenrothes numerous mushroom groups is at Cluny Drive in Pitteuchar (1974, David Harding and Stanley Bonnar)



Sit down and watch 'The Empty Television' in Pitcoudie (1977, David Harding with Stanley Bonnar and John Gray)



'The Working Men' (1993) by Malcolm Robertson at Rothies Halls commemorates Glenrothes links to the mining industry



'Heritage' (1976) by David Harding consists of 14 white concrete columns representing architectural styles of earlier cultures including Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Inca and Aztec



'Forest Screens' (1990) by Malcolm Robertson uses industrial materials to depict natural forms – a recurring theme

[HISTORIC SCOTLAND]

This booklet is part of a series celebrating Scotland's unique places. Each gives a brief overview of the town, city or countryside area and explores the value that the historic environment brings to these places, looking at key buildings and structures, and highlights aspects which make them special. ***This booklet also accompanies an interactive website map which will guide you on a fascinating tour of the art in the town.***

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/glenrothestownart

Historic Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government charged with ensuring that our historic environment provides a strong foundation in building a successful future for Scotland. One of our duties is to compile and maintain statutory lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. We have a dedicated team which researches and assesses listing proposals:

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WEBLINKS AND FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Weblinks: www.davidharding.net/article12/article1203.php

Further Reading: Glenrothes Development Corporation: David Harding and Nigel East, 'Glenrothes Town Artist' (1975); The Arts In Glenrothes (1980). Keith Ferguson, A History of Glenrothes (1982). Glenrothes Development Corporation, Glenrothes Town Art Guide (1984).

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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Front Cover illustration: Industry, Past and Present by David Harding (1971)

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