

• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

DUNEDIN CANMORE

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Village in the Sky



The Story of High Rise Living in Oxbgangs

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Foreword

The 'Comiston Luxury Flats' were the creation of the Housing Committee of Edinburgh Town Council in 1960. They were part of the Council's strategy to meet the city's housing needs by making use of the new 'skyscraper' concept which enabled more homes to be built on scarce land. The new High Rises had improved standards of layout, design and finish, and offered much-needed good quality homes for families. Three 15 storey blocks were erected in the Oxfords area and were generally regarded as a luxurious 'village in the sky', and a far cry from the overcrowded tenements of the Old Town.

Generations of children have been raised in the High Rises and some of their stories are told and illustrated in this booklet.

Over forty years after the High Flats were developed, the City of Edinburgh Council remains committed, along with its partners like Dunedin Canmore, to ensure that new homes are fit for 21st century living. The issues of land scarcity and affordable housing still cause concern - perhaps now even more so. The new homes, built on the site of the High Rises, have been designed in consultation with local people, and provide a mixture of homes, including provision for the elderly and disabled. They address a local desire for 'low rise' housing with the need to build as many homes as possible on the site.

With this booklet, the people of Oxfords celebrate the good times of living in the High Rises. I am confident that this sense of community and a feeling of belonging will be retained and developed through the co-operation of all those in the new "Village". I am also certain that the community planning agenda will enable local residents to have a greater say over how services are delivered in their area.

This booklet will be of interest to new and returning residents to the area. On behalf of the Council I would like to welcome them all to their new homes and a revitalised community.

Councillor Jenny Dawe
Leader City of Edinburgh Council
August 2007

The End of an Era and the Start of the New

Oxgangs High Rise Flats, originally known as Comiston Luxury Flats, have come to the end of an era and the area is soon to undergo major changes. The journey started in 2000 with the Oxgangs High Rise Tenants Association campaigning for refurbishment. Surveys were carried out and costs estimated. The crucial question was what would offer the best value for money - renovation or demolition? Either way, a huge commitment was required in terms of both time and money. Undaunted, the Tenants' Association realised there was an opportunity to achieve major regeneration in the area, the first since the replacing of the prefabs (and that was not yesterday!). This was the start of many meetings, phone calls, letters, e-mails and much nagging! Photographs of conditions were taken to support the letters etc and the local councillor, Andrew Scobie, became involved, along with housing officials, the Tenants Federation and many others. Next was our (then) local MSP Iain Gray. He was taken on a tour of Capelaw, Caerketton and Allermuir. The pressure was maintained with more phone calls, letters and e-mails and was finally rewarded with a visit from the then Communities Minister, Margaret Curran. Finally, success! £10 million was awarded for the rebuild of the 240 flats..... but this was only the start. The Tenants Association had worked long and hard and wanted to stay involved and ensure that the people of the community got what was needed.

It had to be defined what we were trying to rebuild, hopefully more than just houses. This was the start of many hours of training, reading material and more meetings. The next stage involved sifting through applications for a Housing Association to become the new landlord, followed by interviewing and then deciding who could best deliver our vision. A brief then had to be created for the architects making sure we remembered what was feasible, what had worked in the past, and what had not more training!!!

So now our Oxgangs High Rise Regeneration Group was established consisting of Oxgangs High Rise Tenants Association (with the support of Steve Mason), Canmore and Dunedin Housing Associations, Edinburgh Housing and development staff, Firrhill Community Council, Oxgangs Central Tenants and Resident Association and Firrhill Drive Tenants and Residents Association. Additional invaluable advice was also offered by the police and many other organisations.

Now, before the regeneration, the old has to be cleared to make way for

the new. **DEMOLITION.** Finding new houses for the existing tenants has been a challenge as many people have been keen to stay in the area.

It is the start of a new era and I hope all will continue to support the Oxfangs High Rise Regeneration Group. It has taken huge commitment but we look forward to creating and renewing our famous community spirit.

Heather Levy
August 2007



**Former residents of the Oxfangs High Rise flats
meet outside Pentland Community Centre
on Capelaw Court Demolition Day 17 April 2005**

Contents

1	Foreword by Councillor Jenny Dawe, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council
2	Foreword by Heather Levy
4	Contents
5	Introduction
6	Brief History of Oxgangs
7	1960s - Growing Giants
8	1960s - My Journey Part 1 by Heather Levy
10	1960s - My Story by Susan Weir
11	1960s - Life in the Sixties in 12/1 Capelaw Court by the Murray Family
12	Photographs overlooking the prefabs to the Pentland Hills
13	1960s - They're Hanging out Washing Comiston Way - Evening Dispatch article
14	1960s - The Flats Part 1 - Anonymous
18	1960s - Comiston Flats' Faults Noted - Evening News article
18	1960s - Oxgangs and Comiston Residents Association News Articles
19	1970s - Lesley Jeavon's Memories of the Flats and Oxgangs
21	1970s - Getting Up to Mischief by Alan Dall
22	1970s - Robbie Cormack's Story
23	My Journey II - 1970s by Heather Levy
24	1980s - Fire in the Flats - Evenings News article
25	1980s - Fire in the Flats - Photographs
26	1980s - The Flats Part 2 - Anonymous
28	1980s - Living in the Flats by Tabitha Haston & My Journey III - 1980s by Heather Levy
29	1990s - Memories of the High Rise - poem by Nadine
30	1990s - My Journey IV - 1990s by Heather Levy
31	1990s - The Flats 1998 - 2003 by Owen Levy
33	2000s - My Journey V - The New Millennium - 2005 by Heather Levy
34	2000s - My Life and Times in the Flats by Eileen Farquharson
36	2000s - From High Rise Flats to Flat - Extract from the Metro Newspaper April 2005
37	2000s - Capelaw Flats Song by Chris Mahoney & Regeneration by Blair Heary
38	2000s - Dunedin Canmore Housing Association
40	Acknowledgements

Introduction

For the thousands of people who lived in them since they were built in the 1960s, the high rise flats in Oxbgangs (Caerketton, Allermuir and Capelaw) were a lot more than just a dwelling place; it was a 'village in the sky'. The 'village' has now been demolished and the new Dunedin Canmore housing development is well underway on the land once occupied by the 'village in the sky'.



**Construction work on the
'Comiston Luxury Flats' 1960**

Thanks to some of the former residents, we have collected some of the memories, stories and recollections of what life was really like living in the 'village in the sky'. Opinion is divided over the standard of life in the towers and while for some the memories focus on the knackered lift, the mould on the walls and the youths loitering in the stairwells, for others it is the three day parties at Hogmanay, the open doors and the fact that everyone knew everyone else's business which have made the flats so memorable.

When the first block of flats was due to be demolished, Heather Levy, Chairperson of Oxbgangs and Firrhill Community Forum, made an appeal to local people to hand in stories, photos and other memorabilia of their life in the flats. She was inundated with so much material -photos, poetry, stories and press clippings - she decided to share it with the local community which resulted in the 'Village in the Sky' exhibition. Using the material, George Williamson, Senior Community Learning & Development Worker with the City of Edinburgh Council, wrote a play titled 'Multi Storeys' which was performed to rave reviews at Pentland Community Centre.

Brief History of Oxfangs

When people moved out of the city to the Oxfangs area in the 1940s and 1950s, there was almost a sense of it being a frontier community - out in the countryside, remote and difficult to reach from the city, and bearing the brunt of the icy winds and weather rolling down from the Pentland Hills. Its rural roots are taken from the name: Oxfangs derives from the area of a farm that could be ploughed by a single ox. The original farmstead in Oxfangs was built on the land which is now occupied by the Police Station. It lay on a drover's path from the Pentlands, and was also a walking ground for the gentry, linked by paths to the Hermitage of Braid. The first sign of residential housing in Oxfangs was the self-builds for post office workers and the pre-war prefabs.

All this lies in contrast to the ultra modern high rise flats planned by the City Council in the mid 1950s. The 'Village in the Sky' at Oxfangs was full of innovative technology and architecture - all electric flats with underfloor heating, inside toilets, communal laundry facilities at the bottom of stairs, private balconies with spectacular views over the Forth, the city skyline and the Pentland Hills. This was no run down estate but a flagship project designed to lure skilled workers to the city from rural areas, or rehousing workers from other areas that were being developed. Most of the new residents were young, aspiring, working families, able to afford the high rents.

THE SCOTSMAN, MONDAY, JULY 3, 1961



Multi-storey flats at Comiston, Edinburgh.



Edinburgh Evening News, Wednesday, February 15, 1961

Growing 'Giants' Will Mean Home to 240 Families

WITH an open view to the rolling slopes of the Pentland Hills, the multi-storey flats at Oxbgangs are steadily progressing upwards.

One of the three 15-storey blocks is practically complete outside and plasterers and painters are busy inside. The second block nearby climbs steadily alongside its neighbour, and the stump of the third building shows above the deep foundations.

Each block has 60 flats and 20 maisonettes, with a launderette on the ground floor. Passenger lifts are being installed, and all the heating is provided by electricity.

The maisonettes, to fit into the building design, are on two floors, and provide interesting, compact houses which have a character of their own. The flats themselves are amply spacious in a small area.

Soaring 140 feet into the air, the multi-stories dwarf the other extensive housing developments which the Housing Committee of Edinburgh Town Council have completed in recent years in the Oxbgangs area, yet they, too, are dwarfed by the backdrop scenery of the Pentlands.



RIGHT—Fifteen storeys high. A full view of the flats.



MAN on top of the city is working on the roof of the new flats. From this windy perch he can look down on the crane (above) and the partly built second block of flats and the shopping centre. In the background : the Oxbgangs development and the Pentlands



— Pointing the spaces between the pre-cast slabs is a lonely job for Otto Netz.



— Concrete floors being piped in from ground level—one of the ways in which machinery is speeding up the building work.



— Underfloor heating cables, similar to the ones used in the Mound "blanket," are fitted before the concrete floor is laid on top. There are no open fires in the building, and power plugs are fitted in each room. Two refuse chutes run from the top of the building for rubbish disposal.

Oxgangs - My Journey Part I -1960s

We moved into 1/4 Capelaw Court in February 1962. I was nearly three, and my mother was heavily pregnant with my brother, and it was COLD. My brother was born in April, and being on the first floor we had no lift, and bumping a big pram up two flights of stairs must have been hard work. This was one of the reasons you relied on your neighbours so much: everyone was in the same situation, and everyone mucked in to make life easier. I grew up calling our next door neighbours Aunty Mo and Uncle Eddie, and still do. Lifelong friendships were formed by both children and adults.

My first vivid memory of life in the flats was standing up on tip toes in bare feet on the warm underfloor heated tiles, looking out the window at the snow dancing in the HUGE park and listening to the wind whistling, and feeling so safe and secure. Maybe that's why the high rise flats still evoke that feeling of safety, even allowing for the fact that the lovely warm floor kept cracking and cost a fortune to use. It was made of the new wonder material asbestos!!

Summers were spent in that same park learning everything from tennis to rounders, skipping and elastics. The 'Tunnels' (which were water pipes left over from the building work) beside the drying area was your gang hut. We were easily amused, and you had nothing but the limits of your imagination to keep you back.

It felt like you met the whole community when on a hike to the Braid Burn Valley. There you would sit on the grassy steps and watch the puppet show in the Fairy Ring or go 'guddling'* for minnows in the burn. You were never finished rolling down those slopes, either your eggs at Easter or your body in the summer (how we missed rolling right into the Burn I will never know!).

Another good thing about living in the valley of the Pentlands was there were always plenty of slopes for sledging. In the summer you sat on your Christmas Annual on top of a roller skate and sledged.....down Firrhill Drive (by the end of the summer holidays the street was littered with pages from the Beano, Thunderbirds and the Mandy) or on a baking tray in the winter on the snowy slopes in the Braid Burn Valley.

Christmas was fun trying to guess whose dad was playing Santa. At New

1960s □ □ **1970s** □ □ **1980s** □ □ **1990s** □ □ **2000s**

Year, I never knew you could fit so many children in one bed and you never had to leave the building. Your village was all indoors and Hogmanay lasted for days.

Although I was too young to realise it, this was the start of a strong, self contained community.

Heather Levy (nee Martin)

*fishing



**Heather (aged 3) with her younger brother
Graham Martin and neighbour Eleanor Dow (both aged 1 year)**

My Story

As a child growing up in the 60s from a baby to the age of 9, living on the 12th floor of Capelaw Court felt like the most natural habitat in the world.

The flats to me were exciting, fun and full of friends. There always seemed to be plenty to do. I remember after one night of very strong winds, going downstairs to find half of the brick wall which surrounded the communal drying area had been blown down. This was brilliant for the kids as the part of the wall which had been left had step shapes forming an instant adventure playground.

When children were playing outside and the ice cream van came round, it wasn't as if you could just nip indoors and get some money when you lived on the 12th floor - if you tried to do that the van would be gone by the time you got back. Instead, you would shout up to your mum to throw money out of the window. Of course with twelve floors up, I was usually hoarse before my mum would hear me and look out. If you were lucky enough, your mum would throw down some money wrapped in newspaper.

Although strictly forbidden, playing beside the burn was a favourite pastime. The giant concrete pipes positioned at the side of the flats for children to play on came in handy for "slapping" your wet socks on in an attempt to dry them after falling in the burn.

I remember my younger brother collecting tadpoles and keeping them in a goldfish tank on our 12th floor balcony. I watched each day fascinated as the tadpoles began to change and grow frog legs. Unfortunately, one morning a few tiny dead frogs were discovered on the ground at the bottom of the flats. The frogs had grown enough to jump out the tank and off the balcony. Being the 60s and the time of curlers and head scarves for women, my mum improvised with a hairnet over the tank until she could persuade my brother to return the frogs to the burn.

My strongest memory of living in the flats as a child can still be seen today - loads of green open space and spectacular views of the hills.

Susan Weir (nee Murray)

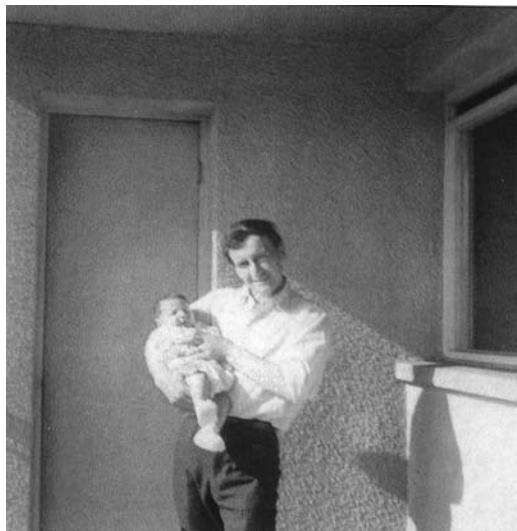
Life in the Sixties in 12/1 Capelaw Court - A House with a View

As a new building, Capelaw Court was home mostly to young couples with young children. It was thought that we would be isolated and lonely, but nothing could be further from the truth. On the ground floor there were communal washing areas, with washing machines and driers and there was always someone to chat to. Neighbours across the landing, and in the maisonettes, were always ready and willing to help out - be it looking after children or doing shopping. Shopping in those days was close by as the local shops in Oxfangs provided most things. There was a newsagent, butcher, greengrocer, dairy, fish shop, hairdresser and even a hardware shop. These shops provided another great meeting place where customers and shop assistants were on first name terms.

Life in Capelaw, Allermuir and Caerketton Court was like living in a large community rolled into one. Adults and children alike made friends and there were regular coffee days, birthday and other special parties. As the children grew up together they went on to nursery and then to school.

In the summer, the park was a great place where the kids ran freely and the adults relaxed. We had some great times and lots of fun in the flats and we know we will never have another house with a view like the one from 12/1 Capelaw court.

The Murray Family



Gordon Johnstone with his baby son Keith c1965
Their flat in Caerketton Court was their first family home

1960s □ □ □1970s□ □ □1980s□ □ □1990s□ □ □2000s



Photograph looking over prefabs to the Pentland Hills



**Photograph looking over the prefabs, showing local
grocer's van**

EVENING DISPATCH, Monday, October 30, 1961

THEY'RE HANGING OUT WASHING COMISTON WAY

It might look like a decorated cartwheel or a new-fangled sideshow dreamed up for a funfair. But it's neither. It's a view of hanging out the washing — the Comiston way.

It's one out-of-the-window view for tenants who live in Edinburgh's new multi-storey flats at Comiston. The designers came up with this novel idea in backgreens which not only means no un-

upper-floor tenants... like the one on left, looking over the trim gardens of bungalows alongside the Braid Burn to Braidburn Valley Park.

And just to keep the picture record straight, this is the view (below) the flats themselves provide for the rest of Comiston.

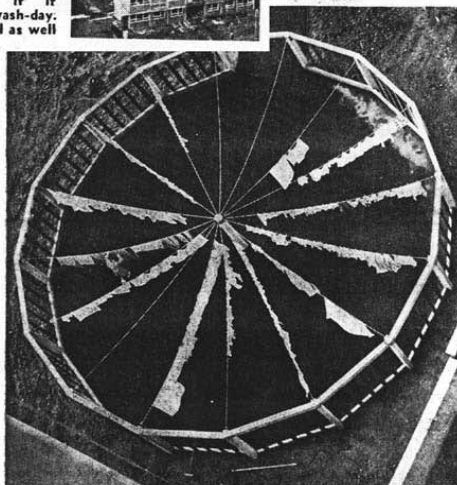
Pictures by
Dispatch photographer,
HAMISH CAMPBELL

sightly forest of clothes poles, but saves space. The clothes lines radiate from one central pole — just like spokes in a wheel.

But for the top-flat housewife it must seem a long, long way down to that "clothes corral" if it suddenly rains on wash-day. There are beautiful as well



GUESS WHAT?



The designers came up with this novel idea in backgreens which not only means no un-

sightly forest of clothes poles, but saves space. The clothes lines radiate from one central pole — just like spokes in a wheel.

The Flats - Part 1

This demolition of the flats marks the end of an era. For forty years the tower blocks in Oxgangs have been part of the skyline. In the 1960s they were to be the shape of the modern house, the cutting edge of design. I lived in the flats twice: the first time was as a child with my parents and sister and the second time was as an adult with a family of my own.

My parents were some of the first tenants who moved in during the 1960s. They moved there with my sister before I was born so my first memories are of living there. As a child all the people I knew lived in my block, and as I grew and started school the majority of my classmates were drawn from the three blocks. At the time they were built, they were luxury flats. All the tenants were families, with children of similar ages, so everyone had a lot in common. At this time they really were like vertical villages.

There were 60 flats with 20 maisonettes in each block with each having two bedrooms. They had underfloor heating, from the thermoplastic tiles on the floor, which was controlled by a thermostat. The heat came through the large brown tiles that covered the floors, but you couldn't fit a carpet or the heat would be blocked out, so we had big rugs in the rooms. In the winter my sister and I used to dare each other to stand on the cold tiles, to see how long it was until you had to stand on the rug to get your circulation back. They also had a two bar electric fire in the living room. On the left hand side of the building was the odd lift and on the right hand side the lift served the even floors. There were five floors that ran the length of the building (2, 5, 8, 11 and 14). The maisonettes were on these floors, and the other floors had a small landing with just two flats. Between the flats was a stair balcony, which had a big, blue glass panelled sliding door, that both flats on the landing had access via a fire door in the bathroom. When I was a baby, my Mum used to put my pram on the balcony so that I had fresh air and was away from her doing the housework. As I got older (probably about 2) I used to play on the balcony with my toys. I don't remember ever throwing anything over the balcony, so I must have been told that if it went over it was lost forever, because I don't think my Mum would have run down twelve floors to retrieve it. However, I do remember watching the little people pass down below or standing between the railings with my mouth open to let the wind blow into it, and making my mouth so dry it stole my voice. Then I would have to go in and get a drink before it would work again.

If it was raining and I couldn't get out to play, I would ask my Mum to take

my bike down to the 11th floor so that I could ride it on the long landing. That was the place I learnt to ride my bike without stabilisers. Back and forth along the landing, each time getting a little more confident, and leaning less against the walls.

All the floors had a chute room and in the chute room was a mini incinerator for the disposal of sanitary towels. I would always be happy to take the rubbish out and put it into the chute. Once you closed the chute door, the rubbish could be heard tumbling down to the bins below. If you opened the chute, you could hear it tumble all the way to the ground.



Child cycling c1963 in the turning point of the car park area to the side of the building

Downstairs there were two sets of double doors at the front and the back of the building, making it airy and open. There was a red tiled floor between the doors and the walls were tiled too in yellow with a blue diamond design that looked like a smiley face on it. Opposite the lifts were large boards with the house numbers listed and peoples names on them.

There were four laundry rooms down on the ground floor, each equipped with a sink, washing machine and spin dryer. These laundry rooms were open to all residents and access was free of charge as it was inclusive in the rent. All the residents used them and I think they had assigned days and times of access. I would watch my Mum as she washed woollies or my dolly's clothes in the big porcelain sink. I would help my Mum when I was little by loading the spin dryer with wet clothes and then closing it up, and pushing the big red button to start it spinning. It was really loud and if you put your hands on the outside you could feel the vibrations making their way up your arms until they went numb. I used to make a noise when placing my hand on it so that my voice started to vibrate as well.

Then it was out to the drying green with the clothes to hang them up. The drying green was at the rear of the building screened from the road by

two walls. It had a rough black surface and was dotted around with metal poles for the rope lines. There always seemed to be enough wind coming over the park or down from the hills to dry the clothes quickly. It was fun to twist around the poles until you were dizzy, or try to climb up to the top to touch the ropes. You could also climb up the walls, as they had a decorative brick effect, which we used as hand and footholds to reach the top.

At the side of the flats leading up to the shops there were railings embedded in the pavement. I used to play on them with my sister, doing somersaults with your hands behind you. When it was really windy we would walk up the road with one hand in Mum's and the other gripping hard on the railing for support. When I was older, I had to go hand over hand using the railings just to keep my feet, because the wind would whip down the road like a wind tunnel.

Once when I was at school, I was playing on a big boulder in the Burn near the concrete bridge, when I slipped and fell. I struck my eye on the side of the rock, which had luckily worn smooth. When I went to find my Mum with my squelchy shoes and dripping clothes, I met Mrs Kay (a neighbour from another block), who gave me an old penny for my sore eye. When I found my Mum, I got a row for playing on the rock and a row for getting soaked. Mrs Kay let me keep the penny and I ended up with a real keeker of a black eye to show my friend so it ended up being a good day!



Caerketton Court c1961.
Note the drying area

All the children got to play downstairs. I suppose because there was always someone nearby if we needed anything. If you had to go home there was usually someone's mum (in the laundry room or at the drying green) that you could ask to call the lift if you couldn't reach the button. Or one of the older children would call it for you and reach for the highest button, so you wouldn't have to walk up so many flights of stairs. If no-one was about then I would call up to my Mum to send the lift down and she would be there, waiting for me on the 11th floor.

When I was able to call the lift for myself, a whole new set of games opened up. My friends and I would often play 'Beat-the-Lift'. At the time you could go all the way up to the 15th floor by the stairs to where the lift housing was. We would take the lift up to the 14th floor and then race it down, or race the lifts against each other. We also played by running up and down the stair, sometimes in a relay floor to floor, criss-crossing on through landings, or sometimes an all out race at full pelt from top to bottom. The lift shafts often flooded and then the lifts would be off. While the water was pumped away it never bothered the children having to walk up the stairs to home.

At the right hand side of the building and set into the park, was a small play area, made up of concrete blocks, about a foot square, in varying heights and three concrete tunnels set into tarmac. I would play in the tunnels using them as a den or on the blocks. Jumping up and down from one to the other, while avoiding the shark infested water below. The tunnels were also used as a den when we played hide and seek or chasey. When my friends and I got older, we would climb on top of the tunnels, and jump back and forth on them. You had to be careful, because a fall meant really bad skint knees, not to mention a row from your Mum if she found out.

At the foot of the block by the car park, there was a square slabbed area surrounded by a footpath. It was here that a few of us met up to play 'You Can't Cross the Red River', 'Giant Steps and Baby Steps' and 'British Bulldogs'.

My parents, sister and I moved out of the flats when I was about 9 years old but we continued to live in the Oxfangs area.

Anonymous

Edinburgh Evening News, Tuesday, September 25, 1962

COUNCILLORS TO VISIT THE COMISTON FLATS

Householders in the Comiston area of Edinburgh will show their three ward councillors tonight the signs of deterioration and building defects which have appeared in their new houses.

Tenants in the multi-storey blocks which tower over the area, and occupiers of other houses, have complained to Treasurer H. A. Brechin, Bailie Mrs C. B. M. Filsell, and Councillor Maurice Ferry about the condition of some of the property. Cracks have appeared in plaster work, and in one of the multi-storey blocks dampness is affecting rooms to the seventh-storey level.

The Housing Committee of Edinburgh Town Council are to receive a special report on the state of the multi-storey blocks which were completed only a few months ago. Bailie Mrs Filsell told the Evening News that she and her colleagues were meeting members of the Firrhill Residents' Association this evening and would tour the area to inspect the houses.

**Oxgangs and Comiston
Residents
Association 10.02.1964**

A Busy Year

ONE year old on Monday is the Oxgangs and Comiston Residents' Association—a body which can look back with justifiable pride on their achievements over the last 12 months.

They have already enrolled 600 members, organised "keep fit" and dressmaking classes, run whist drives, special evenings, and a children's gala day, and taken up several problems of local amenities with Ward councillors.

"Moving to a new housing area brings problems," said Mr Charles J. Smith, Field Officer attached to Edinburgh Corporation, who has been assisting the association with their development. "Friendships built up in older areas are left behind — along with clubs and associations.

"It takes time to transform a new area into a community and calls for real effort—such as the residents in the Comiston and Oxgangs district have made since they formed their own association."

To make sure that the association's work continues to flourish, a good turn-out of residents is hoped for at the first annual general meeting on Monday at Hunter's Tryst School when new office-bearers will be elected and suggestions can be made for the future of the association.

Evening News 07.01.1963

Residents' Meeting

TREASURER H. A. BRECHIN will preside at the inaugural meeting of the proposed Comiston-Oxgangs Residents' Association in Hunter's Tryst Primary School, Oxgangs, on Thursday evening.

Like other similar organisations, the new association will act as a focal point for expressing the needs of the district and provide opportunities for developing social, recreational, educational and cultural interests.

The interim committee, who were elected at a public meeting a few months ago, hope that every family in the area will be represented at Thursday's meeting.

1970s - Lesley Jeavon's Memories of the Flats and Oxfangs

My mum Ann lived in the flats from 1972 to 1996 so my whole childhood was spent there. We lived at 6/1 Caerketton Court and my maiden name was Ainslie. I was born in 1971 and my brother Scott was born in 1968.

Unlike a lot of flats and modern houses, the windows were lovely and big and not too high up the wall. In the living room and bedrooms, the windows stretched from wall to wall. You didn't need net curtains or have to close your curtains at night as no-one could see in so we always had our curtains pulled right back and the place was nice and bright and airy and we had the most wonderful view of the Braid Hills from our house.

Even as a kid, I thought the flats were really well designed - the amount of cupboard space was great and each room had a window. People describe housing estates and blocks of flats as concrete jungles or prisons but Oxfangs and the high flats never felt like that. Loads of estates don't have a lot of greenery around but we had a huge choice of places to go... there was a grassy area surrounding the flats, it was seconds to Colinton Mains Park or Braid Burn Park or a few minutes to the City Hospital woods or the Braid Hills.

I loved the whole community of the flats and there was always someone to play with and somewhere to play - even in the rain. My happiest memories are roller skating up and down the shiny smooth ground floor corridors at the start of the 80s when roller skating and disco were all the rage (it was better than tripping on uneven paving and cheaper than going to Coasters!)

Bonfire night was always great. Weeks before, scrap for burning would just be piled on the grass between the three flats and everyone went to see the fire on bonfire night, or you could watch from your window. If your parents didn't have any money for fireworks you could watch someone else's, and I think I once lost my jacket spud so someone gave me some of their grub! It was a real community!

It was the same if there was a bunch of kids in our house at teatime. They would always be fed and our door was never locked though you could always hear the landing doors open, which was a kind of security. We also had loads of kids staying over and we'd go to each other's houses in our pyjamas! For a long time, I knew at least one family on each floor of my

block and loads of others from the other two. I knew loads of people who lived around the flats too and even their dogs - the lovely Sinclair's old black Labrador, Jet, who'd always be sat outside the butchers, and Billy Ridgby with his old black and white sheepdogs which he'd always be out walking along the Burn.

I used to love the old concrete play area - the tunnels and stepping stones (always surrounded by bits of broken glass!). They were taken away and replaced by coloured metal frames. There were also railings going up the steps at the side of the flats and we used to love doing 'burleys' on the bars.

The hill outside Caerketton was loads of fun - at Easter we would roll our eggs down it - and when it snowed it was great for sledging. Before the railings were put up along the Burn there would always be kids sledging so fast they would end up in the Burn!

There were bad times too as I remember people used to piss in the lifts and in the tunnels. We were burgled a few times. We knew that some of the tenants were alcoholics or on drugs and they were responsible for many of the burglaries. There were squatters too who scared us. My brother used to ride on the top of the lifts, play 'tap door run' or tap people's windows with toy soldiers on a bit of black thread swung over from our balcony and then he'd pull it up quickly and hide so that the kids playing outside would be in trouble for throwing stones. He and his pals would also get into trouble for accidentally smashing windows with footballs and Babs, the real old matriarch caretaker with curlers in her hair, headscarf and fag dangling on lip real Andy Cap style, would come out drunk and swear at them!

Lesley Jeavons (nee Ainslie)

Getting up to Mischief

I vividly recall the witch of Capelaw Court, Mrs Cameron, who lived at 1/1, was always hassling us about playing football in the drying green and tennis in the wee square beside the washies. We used to tie her door to her neighbours door (the Taylors), knock on both and laugh hysterically as they fought against each other to open the doors!!

What else? Everybody sitting around in the hot summers. Mums, Dads and kids, brilliant community spirit, doors always open if you needed help. If your Mum wasn't in, you had tea at your neighbour's house instead.

Best of all I was the first to use the "Odd" lift after it's installation in the early 70s. I befriended the two lift engineers Ken and Eric (I must have been about 6 or 7) and they used to send me to the shops for them and in turn they used to let me sit on top of the lift with them as they moved from floor to floor. I obviously paid attention because years later I made a lift key out of half a bike pump and it was game on! At its peak we must have had 10 of us sitting on top of the lift. Giggling away to ourselves like the daft bunch of laddies we were. Thankfully, nobody was killed and we ended up getting bored with lift surfing!!

Oh, another story and probably more dangerous than the lift surfing. Balcony dreeping!!!! Start at the 14th floor and climb down outside of the building via the middle balconies that everybody's fire exit opened on to. Many a time we'd have reached the eighth floor and you would hear the police sirens in the distance, facilitating a rapid escape to the sanctuary of the City Hospital woods!!! Again, nobody was killed during this act of teenage madness so we were either very good at it or very lucky!!!

Other minor misdemeanors include flooding the washies, blocking the rubbish chute, followed by climbing down the chute and the long lost art of burn jumping.

These are my memories of a great seventeen years spent at 14/2 Capelaw Court. I was even born there, as was my little sister Evelyn. The flats were a great place to live back then but they've outlived their usefulness as multi-storey blocks have now had their day.

I'll never forget my time there though - they were the best days of my life!!

Alan Dall

Robbie Cormack's Story

As a youngster in the early 70s, I lived in 9/1 Allermuir Court and there was never a dull moment especially on the occasions when the lift would stick and the engineer would have to get us out. I always remember the breathtaking views over the city and the surrounding areas. Each morning I would walk up the steps on the grass banking behind the flats to attend my first primary school, Hunters Tryst. I remember kicking a football on the grass in front of Allermuir and fishing in the Braid Burn for minnows. It's sad to see the flats go.

Robbie Cormack



Gala Day in Colinton Mains Park c1973

My Journey II -1970s

By the 1970s, we had been rehoused to 12/44 Allermuir Court with that dreaded cracking floor. I always remember the views. No matter how many photos you took, you never truly captured the breathtaking splendour of them. You could watch the Festival Fireworks from the comfort of your room or stand on the veranda and watch the rain coming over the Firth of Forth from Fife. But the winds!!! As we were so high up, the wind seemed noisier and could we get winds! Was it my imagination or could you feel the flats move?

Like other families in the flats, we were growing and there were four of us in one bedroom. Families wanted to move on to bigger houses with more space and a garden. You grew tired of everyone knowing your business and there was no such thing as a secret and we all know how many secrets a teenager has! The difficulties of high rise living were no longer funny. The lifts were constantly breaking down. What seemed like an adventure to see where the lift doors would open was now very annoying. To guess where the lift would stop or if the lift would go past the ground floor to the foundations was scary (the builders had forgotten to fill in the foundations). It was no laughing matter to have to walk up twelve floors with a baby and a pushchair and shopping. One of my brothers was 'chesty' and the damp and the poor heating was affecting his chest. It was time to move.

As other families were moving out of the flats, we moved up the hill to a semi-detached. Some like ourselves stayed in Oxfords whilst others moved to another new generation of new build housing at Wester Hailes and some even moved out to Livingston. However, my mother complained of loneliness and some of her former neighbours complained about loneliness too. Their new neighbours did not want to get involved with their new community and the flats were used more as temporary housing for families rather than a permanent base. It had reached a stage where you no longer wanted to admit that you lived in the flats.

Heather Levy (nee Martin)

Evening News 20.1.1981

Tragedy of tower block fire

As Edinburgh firemen fought to control a blaze started by vandals in a city tower block, an elderly resident suffered a fatal heart attack.

The man died while trying to mop up water which had gushed from a broken hydrant on the landing outside his flat.

He was Mr John Keith (73), of 5/1 Caerketton court, Firrhill. Police said today that a report on his death had been sent to the procurator-fiscal in Edinburgh.

One of the neighbours, Mrs Jeanette Stewart, of 5/8, said that residents were angry and upset.

"The fire happened late on Saturday night in the empty flat at 11/4, and investigations have shown that there was a break-in and four separate fires were started in the flat, which still had some furniture.

"When the fire brigade arrived, they switched on the water supply to the dry riser, which carries water to the various floors.

"However, the hydrant on our landing had been damaged for some time and water just poured out everywhere," said Mrs Stewart.

Along with Mr Keith and other neighbours, Mrs Stewart and her husband David had started mopping up while firemen came to repair the hydrant on the landing in order to get the water to the fire, six floors higher.

Mr Keith was using a heavy brush to sweep away some of the water, which was pouring down the stairs.

Suddenly, he clutched at his chest and collapsed into the water," said Mrs Stewart.

An ambulance was called, but Mr Keith was found to be dead on arrival at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Mr Keith and his wife were among the first tenants to move into the tower block 20 years ago and were described as a quiet couple.

"As far as I can tell, the dry riser on our landing has been broken for some time, but no-one noticed it had been turned to the open position until it was too late," said Mrs Stewart, whose flat was damaged by water.

Lothian and Borders Police said today they were still investigating the blaze.

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1960s □ □ 1970s □ □ **1980s** □ □ 1990s □ □ 2000s



Fire in the Flats

The Flats – Part 2

When I was married and had a child of my own, we were offered a house in the flats. It was the same one I had grown up in but this time it was a house on the 11th floor and was one of the maisonettes. My house had one bedroom upstairs and the rest of the rooms were downstairs on the 10th floor and because I had grown up there I had no worries about returning there to raise my own family. However, there were many differences when I returned!

My house still had the little two bar fire in the living room but the underfloor heating no longer worked and would be too expensive to run even if it had. The chute room doors were now all locked and the incinerators did not work. Downstairs there was now only one large laundry room with three sinks, three washing machines, and what looked like the spin and tumble dryers. Now, you had to buy tokens from the caretaker to use the facility and the doors were locked unless it was in use. Most people didn't need to use it as they had their own washing machines. The dryer green had changed too, the two walls had been removed and all that was left of them was a scar in the tarmac. It was now open to the elements as well as everyone passing down the street so it was rarely if ever used.

There didn't seem to be many families in the block and people tended to keep to themselves. There were many empty flats dotted about with metal padlocked doors to keep out the vandals. On the lower floor, mesh was put on the windows to stop them getting smashed and there was a huge metal door at the entrance which clanged shut every time it was opened. There was an intercom system and both side doors were one way doors and the other double doors had been bricked up. The stair balcony doors were padlocked shut and there were doors on the 14th floor over the stairs to stop anyone accessing the lift housing or the roof. The atmosphere too seemed different as people barely talked while waiting on or using the lift. The lifts were often out of action which was very annoying as it was usually after I was laden with bags after doing my weekly shopping. The caretaker in my block was very good and would offer to help by watching a child, pram or shopping while I made the journey upstairs.

In my home, the upstairs bedroom had black mould growing on the wall and on part of the ceiling. When it rained, water would leak in the windowsills and along the crack in the ceiling to drip and a puddle of water would form on my bed. A modernisation programme was undertaken with the lifts

updated, the houses rewired and electric central heating fitted. Windows were double-glazed which helped to keep our homes warmer and combat the mould. Kitchens were modernised and new units installed. I was sad to lose my big old-fashioned sink with its wooden draining board but I did manage to keep my pulley. As far as I was concerned this was an essential tool with four children in the house.

As my house was a maisonette, I had a little balcony off my living room so I didn't have to use the drying green downstairs. I did have to persuade the pigeon family who started to nest there to relocate first! In the summer evenings we often stood on the balcony and looked down at the bats flying below. They nested in the lift housing and would come out in the evening to hunt for bugs. They would swoop so close to the building that you were sure that they would collide, then at the last minute they would veer away from each other.

In the winter, the car park would frequently flood and there would be an enormous puddle for days, so you would have to go out of the side door to avoid it. One day on my way to nursery I had taken a double buggy, with my daughter and son in it. When we got out of the block there was a gust of wind, which tore the buggy out of my hands and hurled it across the paving slabs. If it hadn't been for the little railing around the edge, it would have ended up in the Burn with the children still in it.

The best thing though about living in the flats that had not changed is the most spectacular views. From my living room I had a panoramic view of the Pentland Hills and from my kitchen window I was able to see all the way over to Fife on a clear day. Even today it is the one thing I miss.

Anonymous



Photograph of
Allermuir, Capelaw and Caerketton

Living in the Flats

Living in the flats wasn't always great. There was the hike up 10 flights of stairs every time the lift was out of order, the mess some people used to make of the lifts and the occasional awkward neighbour that moved in. However, aside from all that, I still consider living there to be the best time of my life. When I lived there it wasn't just home but a place in what I consider to have been a brilliant community.

It was the little things that made it good, like playing football on the landing with your neighbours or the 40 minute round trip to the shops that should have only taken 10 minutes if you didn't have to stop and talk to almost everyone you passed. Even the mischievous things you did like deliberately sticking the lift doors so that the doors would open on the concrete walls so that we could write our names without getting into trouble for graffiti from our parents. I'll be sad to see them go as they were such a huge part of my childhood and I never envisaged living anywhere else when I grew up.

However, I'll always have my memories. They were the best days of my life.
Tabitha Haston

My Journey III - 1980s

The start of the 1980s saw Caerketton suffering from a major fire resulting in the tragic death of an elderly resident. The flats were rapidly falling into a severe state of disrepair. The cladding on the side of the blocks was starting to fall off. The windows let more wind in than a wind tunnel and the lifts were still breaking down even after the motors had been replaced. It transpired the original motors were the wrong size and were too small. Much as I wanted to bring my family up in Oxfangs, there were no council houses available for rent unless you took one of the flats and by this time you had to be really desperate to want one of these flats. You could not afford to heat them and the new brick radiators on white meter were useless and expensive. The damp was starting to make pretty patterns on the walls, furniture and your lungs.

Heather Levy (nee Martin)

Memories of the High Rise

I was four when we moved into them
My Mum, brother and me
It was a bit scary to begin with on the second floor,
But then we moved to the tenth
And that was even more

My friends and me had races
Up and down the lifts and stairs
The girls always used to win
The boys went in the bin

One Christmas while Mum cooked our lunch
I was with a bunch
Who were locked out
The turkey wasn't burnt
But we sure did learnt

In the flats I made lots of friends
Up the stairs and round the bends
We made lots of noise
And played with loads of toys

Once in the lift, I was stuck
With my brother whose name is Josh
He was a bit upset
Until out we did get

One morning I did wake
To a man trying to escape
Like Spiderman he did climb
Away from the Policeman

Amazing views from on high
Beautiful fireworks in the sky
The wild wind blowing
All these things I am knowing

Nadine (11)

My Journey IV - 1990s

I was back living in Oxgangs but not in the flats. In the background, the flats were falling apart but not the spirit. Although people were not aware of it, the spirit of the residents living in the flats was just as strong. Yes, the damp was taking over and the new windows were falling apart. Doorways were being sealed off for security reasons. The holey wall that had been blown down in the winter, as it was every year, due to the high winds, was still nothing but a pile of rubble. Tenants were campaigning for security cameras and entry phone systems on the front doors.

How many times was the Fire Brigade called out to the flats last night? The chutes were constantly being set alight. Or, how did Spiderman leave his flat at the weekend? By the front door or 'dreeeping' down the front of the building from veranda to veranda, to avoid the long arm of the law and P.C Hume? But was that the flats changing or was it society? Instead of trudging over the park or cutting through the Gas Houses to go to 'Mothers and Toddlers' at Colinton Mains Church or pushing a pram up the hill to the "Comm"* , you could now go to the bottom of the stairs (where the pram stores used to be) to visit the new Oxgangs Neighbourhood Centre.

There were other changes as well - Safeway's and a new library (although the library was supposed to have been built in the 60s) and Tesco. But no swimming pool! People were becoming aware of losing land, like the playing fields, to more housing, but not affordable housing. It's easy to build houses but what about services? By now we had an ageing community, but still a strong community, as Tesco found out. Our campaign against Tesco building a new store on open space at Colinton Mains went all the way to the House of Lords.

Heather Levy (nee Martin)

* Pentland Community Centre

The Flats 1998-2003

Never before have I been so glad to hear the alarm clock. Usually it's thrown against the wall and its back to sleep.....but not this morning. Today, I am going to the flats. I'm going to Nana's. I'm dressed and we are off. In the distance I can see my destination clear as day and every step makes them slightly bigger which always amazed me. My Nana stayed on the 4th floor in Capelaw Court, which was always my preferred block out of the three flats, simply because it was next to the Burn..... and I loved the Burn.

Me and my Nana would often take walks, with her pet dog Bonnie, down the path running along the Burn and if, on that day, we were feeling adventurous we would even cross the road and follow the Burn right through the Braid Burn Valley to the end of Morningside. In the summer if you looked hard enough you could find ducks with ducklings. Every year the same duck, with a black beak and yellow spot on top, would have ducklings and Nana and I found it very amusing to follow the little balls of black and yellow fluff down the Burn. One animal I will never forget seeing in the Burn was a heron. It was beautiful, stood very tall and slender with such poise and elegance.

I was always very glad that my Nana stayed on the 4th floor because I'm very scared of lifts and would often just run up the stairs which led to very cheap exercise! I loved the flats for the fact that it was like a little village in its own right. For example, opposite Nana on the 4th floor was a lady called Laura, whose own dog produced Nana's dog Bonnie. Underneath on the 3rd floor you had Eileen, Alan and Mark who were very close friends, so close that Nana gave them a key so that if I ever went down and was locked out, there was a key for me to get in. 2nd floor you had Liz, a close friend of Nana's and mine. She also had a dog, called Lady, and we would often meet in the morning in mid dog-walk and finish our walk together. My older sister had a brief stay on the 5th floor. It was nice having her stay so close, but it was a real pain as well! I will never forget the night she knocked on the door in her pyjamas at 9pm (which was late for Nana) and asked to sleep in her house because she had watched a scary film and was too scared to sleep by herself! Next door to my sister lived a very kind woman from India. The saying goes "win a mans heart through his stomach" and that's exactly what she did with her beautiful homemade curries and pakoras. So between the 2nd and 5th floors you had seven very close friends whom you saw everyday and bumped into very often.

There was a ritual amongst all children that lived in Capelaw - a common rule. Rush home from school, get changed and look out the window, down to the car park to watch for people and you could bet your bottom dollar that once one person went down and waited patiently, when spotted waiting, every child under the age of 18 would rush down the stairs - with the result the whole flat would be playing football together. Sometimes the teams were even, the people that lived in odd numbers against people who lived in even numbers and you always felt safe because you were with five friends. If your parents were out, your pal's mum would keep an eye out for you.

Christmas was a time of year that everyone looked forward to in Capelaw. When the time came to put up your decorations, boy did Capelaw do it right!!!! At least one person per floor would have some kind of decorative light in their window, whether it be a sleigh, a reindeer or just some fairy lights. This was absolutely fantastic because from a distance in the dark when you looked at Capelaw all the lights in the windows made it look like a giant square Christmas tree and nothing brings home the feeling of Christmas more than a big decorated Christmas tree. You could not help but hum Jingle Bells to yourself!

The flats were a memorable place to stay in. There were always some pals outside ready for a game of 'footie', or someone walking past that you knew. There was such a warm feeling of family right throughout the flats because of the strong bonds that were built by many people that lived there. To put it simply, the only thing stopping you and your neighbours living in one big happy house was the concrete floors. Everyone knew each other and everyone spoke which is such a rare occurrence nowadays. Everyone who lived in the flats felt like a member of one big family. One big family that knew each other very well and shared lots of experiences and memories together. So when you see the flats being toppled, just remember that it's not just bits of concrete that are being destroyed; it's one building that contains 40 years of emotions, memories and bonds that belonged to one very happy family.

Owen Levy

My Journey V - The New Millennium - 2005

By this time I was helping support the campaign for the refurbishment of the flats. As we all know the Oxgangs High Rise Tenants Association was successful in working with the Council and Dunedin Canmore to secure the money for the new build - replacing the crumbling flats for new 21st century housing 'A House for Life'. However, as all the last tenants of the flats were celebrating the demolition of our High Rise, the original tenants were not.

I, as many others, had had a wonderful childhood growing up in the flats. Granted the flats had become like a black hole sucking the energy out of the community but they were not always like that. It was there that I learnt the meaning of community spirit. I have lived in many different communities over the years, both here in Scotland and abroad, but what we have here in Oxgangs seems to me to be unique. Yes, I wanted to celebrate the success of the regeneration, but I also wanted to celebrate what we had, and feared we could lose that 'Community Spirit'.

It was suggested I go to the People's Story Museum to see what they had recorded of our history. There was nothing. It was like we never existed. The people that helped create our strong community were getting old or had passed away. So it's up to you and me to carry on this wonderful legacy that is worth more than any money to help maintain and sustain the community.

As part of the Oxgangs High Rise Steering Group, I have been heavily involved with the design of the new housing and community space. Hopefully, we have taken into account the mistakes that have been made in the past and remembered the good parts - which are predominately the people and the community.

Capelaw Court was demolished on the 17th of April 2005 at 12 noon. The start of making way for the new build but..... it was heart breaking. All I could think of was all the people I had loved in that building that were now dead. It was like watching a giant gravestone being destroyed. I felt physically sick, as if someone had ripped my heart out and that feeling took days to leave me. I went to see the rubble and had another cry. What had I done? Then two days later I got a phone call "look at the pictures on the internet, there's a really spooky one of the demolition". Many people see different things in the dust cloud, but I could see a face - the 'Ghost of Capelaw' - and somehow I feel comforted by it. I hope that same community spirit of the original build lives on and thrives in the new build.

Heather Levy (nee Martin)

My Life and Times in the Flats

When we moved into the flats in 1995, we wondered what life was going to be like. Never mind, it did not take long to find out life was never dull!! Like constant bin fires. It happened so often that often we were on first name terms with the fire brigade and they never caught the culprit. Or, some people never buzzed up to speak to their friends, they just shouted up 14 flights and then waited for an answer. What a pain, especially when it was late at night. Or, another occasion when a certain person tried to evade the police and decided to scale the outside of the building from the tenth floor and went down to practically the ground, then realised the police were waiting for him so decided to climb up to the sixth floor and tried to go through that way to try to avoid the police and ended up back where he started!

There have been times when we have had fatalities from these blocks. For whatever reason a death is a death and it's the families that they leave behind who wonder why things like this happen. Could it be alcohol, drugs, loneliness, an accident, violence? Who knows? Regardless of everything life still has to go on.

If it was not the lifts breaking down and being off for sometimes a week at a time, and if you lived between floors where the lift did not stop, then you had to walk either one flight up or one flight down. That was alright if you did not have bags of messages, or a baby and a pram or buggy to carry as well. There were numerous problems with these flats as they were not wind and water tight. The rooms were big and the night storage heating was expensive and ineffective. There was no insulation between floors and noise was a constant problem. If you heard loud music it was more likely to be coming from 8 - 9 floors away rather than 2 floors away.

The Council and the Tenant's Association had numerous meetings to make the blocks more secure. This included the installation of CCTV, outside and inside the blocks, a secure front and side door and a concierge service which was manned from 8am to 11pm. This gave the tenants some security unless someone abused this by wedging the side door open so anyone could get in and cause havoc.

Life was never dull living there. If there was nothing on TV, you could go onto your balcony and see what was going on outside: from police arriving to see crowds of youths up to no good, police looking for certain people to arrest with an outstanding warrant, loud music being played and all this happened at all times of the night.

But after saying all that, when I was living at 3/1 Capelaw Court, I had some good neighbours. If you ran out of things, all you needed to do was knock on

a door. If you were getting a delivery from somewhere, you could leave your key with one of your neighbours and you knew your house was in safe hands. They were not pretty blocks of flats to look at - they had the name 'Cell Block H' but sometimes it's better the devil you know as we knew numerous tenants living throughout the three blocks.

So what went wrong? The Council unfortunately let them run down as it's expensive to keep up with the repairs and the blocks were past their sell-by-date. The day a tenant found major cracks in their wall whilst redecorating was the deciding factor for the Tenant's Association to start their campaign to demolish the High Rises, replace the housing stock and to regenerate the area. This has resulted in funding of £10 million from the Scottish Executive being invested in the regeneration of the local area.

Living in the flats has opened my eyes but you can say that if tenants take an interest in where they live and fight for things, it can make a huge difference.

- Make sure that they do not take 'NO' for an answer
- Fight for what is right
- Be involved from the start to the finish of a project

It makes me proud to say all of this. It has been a long journey and sacrifices have been made by ourselves and our families. The result is that tenants on the housing lists will now have a choice of brand new, warm insulated homes. I have gained a lot of new knowledge and experience working on this project. I would like to thank everyone who joined in the campaign and although we did not always see eye to eye, remember IT IS THE END PRODUCT THAT COUNTS.

Eileen Farquharson, Chair Oxfangs High Rise Tenants Association & Chair Oxfangs Steering Group



Demolition of Capelaw Court 17 April 2005
Photograph showing the ghostly face during Capelaw's demolition

Metro Newspaper 18 April 2005



Taking a tumble: The Sixties block of 'luxury' apartments is felled in just three seconds

From high-rise flats to... flat

TV VIEWERS worldwide witnessed the demolition of a 17-storey tower block in Edinburgh yesterday.

Hundreds of residents watched the flats reduced to 7,000 tonnes of rubble in just three seconds.

The building, in the Oxbgangs area of the city, was blown up to make way for 240 new homes as part of a £10million regeneration programme.

National Geographic screened the demolition of the 1960s-built complex live. The building was

BY MIKE TAIT

originally praised because of its spectacular views across the city to the coast, and were originally known as the Comiston Luxury Flats.

But after years of complaints about dampness, crumbling plaster work and cracks in walls, residents eventually campaigned to have it demolished.

Before the explosion, a siren sounded to scare off birds nesting in the building.

One spectator wearing a kilt

caused some alarm when he leapt over a barrier and ran towards the building. But he ran past the inner barrier and out of sight of police and stewards supervising the demolition.

Another two streakers – one wearing a black thong – also tore past the tower block prior to the explosion.

Before the demolition, experts weakened the structure by removing asbestos, kitchens, bathrooms and even skirting boards from the 80 flats.



CAPELAW FLATS SONG

Capelaw is coming down
 Capelaw is coming down
 It will leave a hole in the sky
 And when it is all down
 And when it is all down
 Next time will be a better try

All folk are gathering there
 The park is like a fair
 VIPs, press and children too
 All the world will be along
 All wondering where they belong
 And who to push the button do

Caerketton will be next
 And it will not be hexed
 It will leave a hole in the ground
 And what will take its place
 When they build the second phase
 With houses, shops and a lovely park

So Allermuir's time will come
 It will not be outdone
 For it'll be the very best for sure
 Being built on a beauty spot
 It'll be the best of the lot
 Folk'll want to stay for evermore

Capelaw is coming down
 Capelaw is coming down
 It will leave a hole in the sky
 And when it is all down
 And when it is all down
 Next time will be a better try
 Folk'll want to stay for evermore

Chris Mahoney

REGENERATION

Capelaw, Caerketton and
 Allermuir towers,
 Beneath their gaze the city
 cowers,

Swept along in the urban sprawl,
 Standing proud and standing tall,

But it's time for the towers to
 disappear,
 As their sell-by date draws ever
 near,

Cast off the shackles of urban
 blight and decay,
 Replace them with housing for
 the modern day,

Affordable homes for the young
 and the old,
 Absent from misery, dampness
 and cold,

An expanding community, the
 complex will nourish,
 Bonds will form and friendships
 will flourish,

Rekindling the spirit from
 decades gone by,
 From the days in the tower blocks
 up in the sky.

Blair Heary

In the autumn of 2003 the City of Edinburgh Council appointed Dunedin Canmore Housing Association as developer for the regeneration of central Oxfangs, with a brief to replace the three existing tower blocks with good quality rented family housing.

The views of tenants always play an important part in the Association's preparation of plans for the future, and Oxfangs was no exception. We believe strongly in the need for balanced communities, focusing on providing housing which builds on the diversity of existing neighbourhoods, or which encourages the creation of thriving and sustainable new communities. During the years of design development, we consulted closely with the Oxfangs Hi-Rise Steering Group, who worked with the architects Patience and Highmore to produce design proposals to meet local needs and aspirations, and allow local people to feel involved rather than excluded by developments.

Properties were built with timber kit frames, with a mixture of cladding, i.e. facing bricks, smooth and rough render and wood panelling. Fibre Glass insulation was installed under flooring and in the roof space.

Tenants who had had their homes demolished had the "Right To Return" to the area and their needs were given first priority.

The Association and the Steering Group feel that the regeneration of the area provides an excellent mix of housing, and also great landscaping, improving the overall look and feel of the area. The design provides a broad mixture of house and flat sizes, catering for a variety of household types including the elderly and disabled. A central feature of the design proposals is a lochan. As well as being an important flood control measure it will also be a recreational feature of the area and provide a focus for the non-housing aspects of the project.

Already we have seen our first tenants move in to their new homes. On 27th February 2007 Communities Minister Rhona Brankin welcomed the first tenant to return to Oxfangs after the demolition of the three tower blocks and officially opened the first phase of the redevelopment.

Work is progressing well on the remaining properties in the first phase and it is hoped they will be completed by September 2007. Planning consent has been received for Phase 2 of the construction programme and a site start is anticipated in May 2007 with completion in autumn 2009. This Phase will include 85 new housing units, two retail outlets, six community workspaces and provision for a children's nursery.

Ewan Fraser, Chief Executive, Dunedin Canmore Housing Association

1960s □ □ □ 1970s □ □ □ 1980s □ □ □ 1990s □ □ □ **2000s**



Examples of the type of flats and houses currently being built by Dunedin Canmore on the former site of the High Flats in Otagang



The Neighbourhood Masterplan for the new housing development

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This booklet has been produced in a partnership between the local community, the City of Edinburgh Council South West Community Learning & Development Team and Dunedin Canmore Housing Association.

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This booklet contains a selection of extracts from the 'Village in the Sky' exhibition held in Pentland Community Centre in November 2006. Some of the stories have been edited due to limited space.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their experiences and memories and to those who have donated photographs and memorabilia to the exhibition. We apologise if there is any material in this booklet which we have inadvertently attributed incorrectly. The exhibition materials will be donated to the City of Edinburgh Council People's Story Museum and the Living Memory Project.

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