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BAXTER, G., GRAY, D., MORRISON, K., REID, P., VERGUNST, J. and WILLIAMS, D., 2010. The 'main street' in Kirkwall: a pilot research project; draft report. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

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# **The 'Main Street' in Kirkwall: a Pilot Research Project**

## **Draft Report**

**Graeme Baxter, David Gray, Katie Morrison, Peter Reid,**

**Jo Vergunst and Dorothy Williams**

**October 2010**

## The 'Main Street' in Kirkwall: a Pilot Research Project

### 1. Introduction

In July 2010, researchers from Robert Gordon University, in collaboration with the University of Aberdeen, conducted a pilot research project which investigated the role of the 'main street' (i.e. Bridge Street, Albert Street, Broad Street and Victoria Street) in sustaining cultural identity, community, and a sense of place in Kirkwall, and in Orkney more widely. This project built on previous research conducted by Robert Gordon University which examined journey making and travel behaviour in Kirkwall as part of a wider study looking at car culture in the town.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Methodologies and Participants

#### *Photographic Exhibition*

With the assistance of the Orkney Library & Archive, the research team mounted a week-long photographic exhibition in the foyer of Kirkwall Library, from 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010. This exhibition consisted of old photographs of the main street provided by the Orkney Library & Archive; some contemporary photographs taken by the researchers; and a small number of 'merged' images which combined old and current main street scenes (see below).



The exhibition proved very popular and was viewed by almost 150 people, who were each asked about the importance of the main street to their own lives.

#### *Other face-to-face discussions*

In addition to those at the photographic exhibition, a number of other face-to-face discussions took place with Orkney residents (see Table 1). These included a focus group with nine members of the Orkney Family History Society; and a number of impromptu

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<sup>1</sup> MVA Consultants and Robert Gordon University (2009). Understanding attitudes: research into Kirkwall's car culture. Report for Orkney Islands Council.

discussions with, for example, occupants of the Ould Men’s Hut<sup>2</sup>, volunteers at the RNLI Lifeboat Station, and youths occupying the benches on Kirk Green.

<b>Table 1: Number of Participants</b>	
<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>
Photo exhibition	148
Focus group	9
Extended interviews	3
Other impromptu discussions	16
<b>Totals</b>	<b>176</b>

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the participants by gender, and by actual or approximate age. The participants were divided evenly in terms of gender. Almost two-thirds (63.6%) of the participants were, or appeared to be, aged 50 or over.

<b>Table 2: Gender and approximate age of participants</b>						
<b>Age group</b>	<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>		<b>Totals</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Teens	6	3.4	6	3.4	<b>12</b>	<b>6.8</b>
20s	6	3.4	6	3.4	<b>12</b>	<b>6.8</b>
30s	9	5.1	7	4.0	<b>16</b>	<b>9.1</b>
40s	11	6.3	13	7.4	<b>24</b>	<b>13.6</b>
50s	22	12.5	26	14.8	<b>48</b>	<b>27.3</b>
60s	25	14.2	24	13.6	<b>49</b>	<b>27.8</b>
70s	7	4.0	6	3.4	<b>13</b>	<b>7.4</b>
80s	2	1.1	-	-	<b>2</b>	<b>1.1</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3, meanwhile, provides an indication of the residential status of the participants. Just over 90% of the participants were residents of Orkney, with 77 (43.8%) being born-and-bred Orcadians, and 82 (46.6%) being incomers, or “ferry loupers”. The period in which these incomers had lived in Orkney ranged from a matter of weeks to around 40 years.<sup>3</sup> Five participants were born in Orkney, but now live on mainland Scotland; while the remaining 12 were non-Orcadian visitors, currently in Orkney for business or on holiday.

<sup>2</sup> The Ould Men’s Hut, also known as the ‘Pierhead Parliament’, is a small building at the entrance to Kirkwall’s West Pier. Built with a donation from a local worthie, the hut is now run and maintained by Orkney Islands Council. Keys are available, from the council, for men over 60 years of age, who use it as a meeting place. A local magazine, *Living Orkney*, runs a regular monthly column ‘View fae the Ould Men’s Hut’.

<sup>3</sup> The Orkney Population Change Study (Hall Aitken, 2009) notes that 20% of the Orkney population, and around 13% of the Kirkwall population, are ‘in-migrants’ who have moved to Orkney from elsewhere within the last 10 years.

<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Orcadian resident	77	43.8
Incomer	82	46.6
Orcadian visitor	5	2.8
Other visitor	12	6.8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

### ***Photographs of Broad Street and Kirk Green***

In order to monitor activity and movement on the main street at different times of the day, the researchers took photographs of three different views of the Broad Street and Kirk Green area every hour, on the hour, between 9am and 6pm each day, during the period 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010. This has resulted in 204 photographs, which have each been coded in terms of their content (i.e. number of vehicles parked or in movement; people walking; people window shopping; groups of people chatting; people eating lunch or drinking alcohol; people simply 'hanging about', etc.) This data currently awaits further analysis.

### ***'Movement maps'***

On three separate occasions during the week, the researchers spent some time observing and logging, on blank maps, the movement of individuals in and through the Broad Street and Kirk Green area. This data also awaits further analysis.

### ***'Behaviour maps'***

On two separate occasions during the week, the researchers also spent some time observing and logging, on blank maps, the behaviour of individuals and groups in the Broad Street and Kirk Green area (i.e. chatting, window shopping; taking photographs; talking on mobile phones; eating lunch; drinking alcohol, etc.). Again, this data awaits further analysis.

### ***Other data***

The researchers also collected a range of other data, including: observational notes on particular incidents of relevance (e.g. 'road rage' and 'pedestrian rage' on the main street, blackenings and hen nights); additional photographs (e.g. of a Kirkwall City Pipe Band display, death notices in shop windows); Orkney Islands Council reports; and local press coverage of incidents discussed by participants (e.g. road accidents, criminal activities, shop and business closures).

### ***Facebook site***

Prior to the fieldwork visit to Kirkwall, the researchers created a Facebook group page devoted to the project (at <http://tinyurl.com/22r7dqf>). At the time of writing (22 October 2010) the group has 43 members (39 from outwith Robert Gordon University). Copies of current, old and 'merged' photos were uploaded, and efforts were made to start online discussions, but with no success. More recently, some additional photos have been uploaded, together with some illustrative quotes and comments from fieldwork participants. However, this has encouraged only two group members to add comments of their own to some of the photos.

### 3. Themes Emerging

A number of themes emerged from this pilot project, and these are covered on the following pages, together with illustrative quotes from participants.

#### Changes in the main street

Several participants observed how little, structurally, the main street had changed over the years:-

*“You won’t find many places that have changed so little.”*

*“It’s affa’ little changed. Just one or two tweaks here and there.”*

#### Changes in shops and businesses

Most comments, however, related to the changing nature of the shops and businesses occupying the main street:-

*“The physical appearance I suppose has no’ really changed that much, but you’ve lost an awful lot o’ yer really wee, small shops that used to be in the streets. You’ve only got a couple o’ butchers now. And there used to be wool shops. There used to be just all different things like that. All that older places just disappear. They’ve been long gone.”*

Indeed, the general demise of small, independent, family-run, ‘practical’/‘useful’ businesses, was bemoaned by many residents, who often reminisced about particular favourites:-

*“Some of the old shops are closing as no-one wants to continue on when the current owners retire. The younger family members don’t want that sort of life. It’s sad.”*

*“Things haven’t changed that much. Just changing businesses. There’s a lot less family-owned businesses, although some, like Shearer’s and Groundwater’s, still exist. The changes have been for the worse, though. Although that’s probably always the case when you get older – rosy memories!”*

*“As a 14 year old, I bought Woodbines from Peedie Charlie. He was a small Italian who used to stand with an untipped cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth.”*

*“Foubister’s, he was the only one then who sold pipe tobacco. He had all these big tins, of tea and so on. It was absolutely fabulous. It sounds so quaint now.”*

*“I was trying to find bulbs for my bike’s dynamo. There used to be Miller’s on Kiln Corner, and Tulloch’s just next door at Kiln Corner. There was Flett’s. They would all sell bike accessories. Bulbs, dynamo bulbs and things like that. I can’t get them in Kirkwall. There’s no place sells screw-on dynamo bulbs now.”*

Several residents were also critical of the increasing number of 'trinket-type' shops aimed largely at tourists. This was seen to have adversely affected the character of the street, and has clearly impacted upon some people's need to frequent many of the main street shops:-

*"We visit Broad Street nearly every day. It's becoming more and more tourist-based, unfortunately."*

*"There's been a loss of specialised shops, replaced by touristy, trinket shops."*

*"And it's a problem getting clothes and stuff we like here – it's all touristy shops."*

*"At one time you used to be able to buy anything. But now, with the cruise liners, it's all much more touristy shops."*

### **Closure of Woolworths**

An overwhelming majority of participants discussed the negative impact of the closure of the local Woolworths store, in December 2008. Some chose to highlight the range of goods it used to sell:-

*"Woolies is such a huge loss. You would get everything there. Whether you needed it or not, you always came away with something."*

*"It just had everything. Young people could go in there and listen to music. And families could go in there and buy clothes for their kids, and toys for kids. Everything imaginable under the one roof."*

Others chose to emphasise the store's social function, as a meeting place, or as a place to shelter during inclement weather:-

*"It's a big loss to Kirkwall. Many people would just go into see people and catch up. Just a good place to go and meet people."*

*"Woolies is a big loss. It really was good. And it was a place to meet people, and to get in out of the rain. It's never properly been replaced. A lot of people feel the heart has gone out of the street."*

Some participants described the store almost as an extension of the street, because, with two entrances, it could also be used as a thoroughfare:-

*"It was really part of the street. You could walk through it and out through the back."*

*"I worked in Woolies for a while. I couldn't go down in its last few days – it was just too sad. It's much quieter without Woolies. People used it as a through way, as well as a shop and a meeting place."*

A small number of participants either highlighted the fact that the Kirkwall store had been one of the chain's more profitable branches, or discussed the economic impact of the closure, in terms of job losses<sup>4</sup>:-

*"It wis one o' the best Woolies in Scotland, as far as turnover went, I believe. It was quite soul-destroying to see it jist close doon."*

*"When I bought a holiday home up here, I kitted it all out from Woolies. It was one of the most profitable in the country."*

*"There were 30 jobs lost with the Woolies closure."*

While a small number of older residents noted, with some irony, that considerable fears and objections were raised when Woolworths first arrived in Kirkwall in the 1950s:-

*"It's a great loss. And yet there was a lot of opposition to the opening of a national chain store when it first arrived."*

*"Woolies had a job getting premises here, because the toon council kept them oot as long as they possibly could."*

The site of the Woolworths store is now occupied by a branch of the Mountain Warehouse outdoor clothing and supplies chain<sup>5</sup>. Participants expressed considerable surprise, and some disappointment, at its continued presence on the site:-

*"There's no mountains in Orkney, and everything's always reduced in price. I don't know how they make a profit."*

*"It's better than it being boarded up, I guess. But it seems pointless – there are no mountains on Orkney."*

*"Mountain Warehouse, why they came here, it beats me. I jist canna see how they can be runnin' at a profit. Because half the place is closed, and you're no' buyin' an anorak every day."*

*"It's sad. Shops like Mountain Warehouse are intruding, they should have no place on the street."*

Some residents noted that particular shops in the main street had begun to respond to, and take advantage of, Woolworths' demise, by selling goods previously stocked by the store:-

*"Some places have started stocking the things they did. It's just about knowing where to go and minding they have that."*

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<sup>4</sup> *The Orcadian* online for week 22-28 December 2008 notes that 34 employees lost their jobs.

<sup>5</sup> *The Scotsman* of 25 August 2009 reported that Mountain Warehouse had agreed a 10-year FRI (Full Repairing and Insuring) lease subject to 5-yearly reviews at an initial rent of £45,000 p.a.



*“The other shops have started stocking things. OTE [Orkney Television Enterprise] have started to stock china.”*

### **Impact of supermarkets on the main street**

Three supermarkets – Tesco, Lidl, and the Co-op – are situated on the edge of Kirkwall town centre, on Pickaquoy Road. The Co-op has been located there for over 20 years, Lidl's has been there since 2006, while Tesco took over a Somerfield store on the site in 2008. The Tesco building is currently a temporary one, as an expanded store, with almost twice the net sales area, is being constructed on an adjacent site and is expected to open before the end of 2010 (Orkney Islands Council, 2009).

Many of our participants believe that these supermarkets have had, and increasingly will have, an impact on the main street. However, opinions were decidedly mixed on whether this was a 'good' or a 'bad' thing.<sup>6</sup> Some residents appreciate the accessibility, convenience and the prices of the supermarkets:-

*“You go to Tesco because it's all just there – it's laziness, really.”*

*“I shop in the three supermarkets now. It's convenient, and you can't get everything in the main street. Also, you need so much time to go to each shop for everything you need.”*

Indeed, some residents blame the local shopkeepers for driving customers away towards the supermarkets because of their own unreasonably high prices and the quality of their goods and services:-

*“The shops are suffering so much with the supermarkets. It can't be helped. People don't want to stop using the street, but they have to go where it's cheapest.”*

*“The refrigeration of the food was very poor, with soggy cardboard – you'd never get that in Tesco. With Tesco, there's an improvement of ranges and affordability.”*

*“We don't use the main street shops as much now. It's Tesco, for the prices and the range. There are things that you have to get from the main street, though. Although we've had out-of-date stock from some of the main street shops.”*

Others, however, are deterred by the ethos and the impersonality of the supermarkets and go out of their way to support the local shops and buy local produce:-

*“I still prefer going shop-to-shop in the main street, rather than the supermarket. It's the personal service. You get to know the shopkeepers.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, following the appearance of a story on the construction of the new Tesco store on the BBC Radio Orkney Facebook site, on 15 September 2010, a similar range of opinions was noticeable during the subsequent online discussion.

*"I tend to stick to the local shops on the main street. You need to support the local shops to keep that sense of community."*

*"Oradians will still want local produce, and they'll still choose local meat over Tesco meat. You want to go to the local bakers for fresh bread, rather than a plastic one from Tesco."*

Several respondents, though, indicated that they continue to use both the supermarkets and the local shops:-

*"I do go to Tesco and Lidl, for fresh fruit and so on, but I try to do most of my shopping at the smaller shops."*

*"We still go to the local shops, but if it's a big shop we will go to Tesco."*

The new, extended Tesco store has met with considerable resistance from town centre retailers, particularly the members of Kirkwall Town Centre Businesses (KTCB). Established in June 2006, KTCB represents independent Kirkwall town centre businesses and aims to "promote and celebrate the commercial heart of the town" (KTCB, 2009). KTCB objected to the new store on the grounds that it would have "detrimental effect on Kirkwall town centre" (Orkney Islands Council, 2009). They were also concerned about the validity of a 2008 council-funded study, the *Orkney Retail Study* (Hargest & Wallace Planning, 2008), the results of which went a long way to persuade the council that the new Tesco "is unlikely to have a significant impact on the viability and vitality of the Kirkwall town centre" (Orkney Islands Council, 2009). Indeed, KTCB then commissioned their own piece of research, *Kirkwall town centre – looking forward* [by Brian Burns and Associates, unavailable online], which the council dismissed as providing "insufficient evidence" of significant detrimental impact on the town centre (Orkney Islands Council, 2009).

Interestingly, though, two shopkeepers participated in the main street project (neither of whom appeared to be KTCB members), and neither was particularly concerned about the potential impact of the new Tesco store. Indeed, one of them currently has a contract to supply Tesco with goods; while the other believes that Tesco could not really be regarded as a competitor *"because it's the cheaper end o' the market that they're dealing wi'."*

## Information exchange on the main street

Most of the participants appear to still regard the main street (and the business premises located there), as an important place for meeting acquaintances and exchanging information and news:-

*“You can’t go down the street without meeting someone. You always see someone you know.”*

*“You can’t come down the street without meeting people you know. In fact if you do, it’s an unusual day.”*

*“I’m always meeting people and stopping for a chat. I like that you might see someone you haven’t seen in a while and stop up against the wall for a chat.”*

*“It’s all about community. You chat to all the local shopkeepers. You get to know the people behind the counter at the bank. That’s what community is all about.”*

Indeed, several individuals observed that, at times, this can be something of a drawback, particularly if they have lots of things to do, or appointments to keep:-

*“You’ll get that on the street yet – folk standing yarning. The day you’re busy and don’t really have time to stop is the day you’ll meet everyone.”*

*“You can’t come to the street without meeting people. It’s nice, but it can be a pest if I’ve got a place to be, or a meeting.”*

*“If I have an appointment I’ll see so many people to yarn to, and if I have nowhere to go I’ll see no one. When you’ve the least time, I have to say ‘I hiv to go, I’ve got an appointment in five minutes’.”*

However, a number of older, Orcadian residents felt that that importance of the main street as a place for serendipitous encounters and information exchange has been gradually eroded by the influx of both incomers and tourists:-

*“I never meet anyone I know, and that’s because of all the outsiders.”*

*“You see less and less people you know on the street. It’s getting diluted with the outsiders.”*

*“There’s an awful lot of incomers, so you don’t know the folk that you see on the street.”*

*“It’s not like it used to be. I hardly ever meet anyone I know. In fact, a wee while ago, me and a friend said ‘Let’s wait and see how long it is before we meet somebody we know’. And it was 20 minutes before we saw someone. It’s all tourists and incomers.”*

*“I’ll go down on a Sunday to get my papers from Stevenson’s shop, and I’ll walk up the street, and by the time I get to Broad Street I’ll have passed maybe a score of people and I probably haven’t spoken to one of them. Now if I go back 50 years, there is absolutely no way I could have done that. Chances are I’d have known every one of them, those 20 people that I met. And I’d have been obliged to speak to them. It would have been an offence if you’d walked past someone you knew and didn’t say anything. It’s changed.”*

A small number of individuals suggested other reasons for encountering fewer acquaintances on the main street, including a general trend towards shopping in the supermarkets rather than the main street, and the relocation of the auction mart from Junction Road (on the current site of the Orkney Library & Archive) to Grainshore Road at Hatston, on the outskirts of the town:-

*“I don’t do that much shopping, but I do feel that the aisles in the supermarket is probably now the place where they bump into people and have a yarn.”*

*“Before, on a Monday, Kirkwall was just teeming with country folk coming to the auction mart. It wis the farmers’ day off. They came into the auction mart and their wives did their shopping, and met, and had coffee or whatever. But now the auction mart’s oot at Hatston, so that tak’s them off the streets.”*

Interestingly, a small number of individuals indicated that they adopt a different approach to walking along the main street during the summer months, when they believe there is less chance of encountering acquaintances:-

*“Especially in the summer I tend to keep my head down – I know I’ll hardly know anyone as there are so many tourists in.”*

*“Kirkwallians almost switch off in the summer months – their heads are down as they know most people will be tourists. In December, it’s head up and calling out to people you know.”*

#### **Types of information exchanged**

In terms of the types of information exchanged on the street, it is probably fair to say that most participants were more guarded when faced with this particular line of questioning. This was most obvious during the focus group: when these questions were asked, the unease amongst the group was palpable.

Many participants appeared reluctant to go into details, preferring to describe the information simply as local “news” or “gossip”:-

*“There’s gossip exchanged – the usual.”*

*“It’s both personal news and gossip.”*

*"It's just general news that's happening locally. We're not speaking about the war in Iraq."*

Some participants did provide slightly more detail, noting that the information might relate to: personal family events; local births, marriages and deaths; local social and sporting activities; or local council or business affairs.

*"When I meet someone I know it tends to be someone roughly in my age bracket. And I'll ask them about their family, and they're asking me about mine. That's usually the opening gambit and then it could stray onto anything that's topical."*

*"You get to know who has died, and who hasn't, and things like that."*

*"It's news about births, marriages and deaths. Or are you going to such and such a concert?"*

*"We're very active in local things, so it tends to be things like where the next outing is to. One thing I have learned is that the women won't share their family recipes!"*

*"You might read the football score in the paper, then you'll see a guy who was playing in the street, and he'll give you extra details, things you wouldn't otherwise find out."*

*"It tends to be stuff like 'Who's selling what', and 'Who's buying what hotel'."*

*"You occasionally hear rumours about the council and their plans, but it can turn out to be nothing."*

A minority of participants discussed particular examples, which it would perhaps be inappropriate to discuss in any great detail here. These included: a high-profile murder which took place in Kirkwall in 1994; a number of suicides of young Orkney men; some recent examples of criminal activity on the Islands, including a robbery and a suspected armed stand-off with police; and an extra-marital affair.

### **Reliability of the information exchanged**

When asked about the general reliability of information exchanged on the street, many individuals suggested that, while the information might become embellished during the process, there was usually some element of truth behind the information obtained:-

*"You always hear stories, and although they grow legs they're fairly accurate."*

*"There's always an element of truth to it – maybe about 60 to 70% – but the Chinese whispers do happen."*

*“You always hear something. But there’s a saying: ‘You fart in Kirkwall and by the time you get to Stromness you’ve filled your breeks.’”*

*“There’s always an element of truth behind it, but things just get added on. And somebody hears something else, and they add this on. So you really have to be fairly careful, o’ what you believe and no’ believe at the time. It’s very difficult because somebody will come in and say ‘Did you hear this?’ And I think, ‘That’s slightly different from what I heard’. It just goes on and on.”*

Indeed, a number of the participants indicated that they make judgements on the accuracy of the information obtained based on the perceived reliability of the informant:-

*“It’s usually pretty reliable, but that is who I talk to. It’s not always the case for other folk.”*

*“Half the time the stories aren’t true. It depends on what it is and who you talk to.”*

*“It’s like any place – the bush telegraph. But you know, by who you’ve heard it from, how much truth there’s likely to be in it.”*

Despite the doubts expressed about the reliability of information obtained on the streets, some participants did indicate that it was often a more immediate source than the local press<sup>7</sup>:-

*“It’s certainly quicker on the street than waiting for the local papers.”*

*“The ‘jungle drums’ – it’s a good way of finding out what’s going on. Some people will go to the online newspapers and find out, but there will always be someone who was nearby when something happened and that’s quicker.”*

### **‘The Woman in White’**

During the week of the fieldwork, the research team encountered a chain of events which perhaps illustrates how information (not all of it strictly accurate) is exchanged and becomes widely known ‘on the street’ before reaching a wider audience via the local media.

Close to midnight on the Monday night, as the researchers made their way back to their accommodation through a near-deserted Broad Street, they noticed, and commented on, an almost ghost-like figure, dressed in a white hooded top, who walked quickly along Albert Street before disappearing up one of the small lanes leading from the street. The next morning, whilst walking along Albert Street on the way to take the first photographs of the day, the researchers encountered this individual again; it was a young woman.

On the Wednesday afternoon, during an impromptu discussion group with a group of four teenage boys in Kirkwall Library, one of the boys suddenly announced:-

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<sup>7</sup> Orkney currently has two weekly newspapers, *The Orcadian* and *Orkney Today*, both published on Thursdays. However, *Orkney Today* is to cease publication in December 2010.

*“There’s a homeless person going about just now. She goes about in a white hoodie. She got arrested, but she’s still going about. She’s the only homeless person in Orkney. She’s been sleeping in the police cells, but she’s getting a house.”*

The researchers were intrigued by this information, as this was clearly the woman seen on the previous two days.

On the Thursday morning, both local newspapers carried articles (entitled respectively ‘Hooded Woman Warning’ and ‘Lock Up Your Property’) warning the Orcadian public to “keep their homes and cars secure”, following reports of a woman attempting to gain access to properties across Orkney. Indeed, reports on the woman were being submitted by the police to the procurator fiscal, in connection with two thefts. The woman, “of no fixed abode”, was described as “approximately 30 years of age with blonde hair and wearing a white hooded top”, and had also been reported for “knocking on doors and asking for food and money, or even a bed for the night.”

#### **Death notices in main street shop windows**

One interesting and unusual aspect of information provision on the main street is the placing of death and funeral notices in the windows of three shops: Spence’s newsagent, Glue’s florist and, curiously, Donaldson’s butchers. These were regarded as crucial by many residents, particularly given the weekly publication patterns of the two local newspapers:-

*“The death notices in the windows are extremely important – they add to that sense of community.”*

*“We always go to Spence’s and read the window notices – some people go there every day. The local papers are only weekly, so you may miss something if you wait all week.”*

*“The notices in the windows are good. You always look because it might be someone you know and you might want to go the funeral, so you’ll take down the details. If you don’t look you might miss something.”*

*“I think it’s important here, in that it gets the friends o’ the deceased to the church service and to the funeral itself. Just an old, traditional way of doing it. It’s funny how they select the shops to put these funeral notices in.”*

## Traffic on the main street

The majority of participants expressed an opinion on the traffic situation on the main street, although these were decidedly mixed.

There were those who felt that at least part of the main street should be pedestrianised, highlighting the potential dangers of vehicles and pedestrians sharing the narrow thoroughfares of Bridge, Albert and Victoria Streets<sup>8</sup>:-

*“Years ago, when the traffic was slower, there was no problem. But nowadays, the cars go through faster and they pass within a foot of people. It must be terrible for mothers with push-chairs.”*

*“The traffic is a nuisance. You never know where they are going to come from. You have to keep an eye on the children at all times.”*

*“I wish there was some way they could pedestrianise. It’s so silly – there are children walking through. How can you stand and have a blether?”*

*“The streets were never meant for cars. That is the big problem. They were never designed for cars gan’ flyin’ up and doon. They go up here, some o’ the young ones... How somebody has no’ been really seriously injured...”*

Citing the main street shopkeepers’ opposition to pedestrianisation, on the grounds that it would affect their footfall, a number of respondents believed that prohibiting vehicles would, on the contrary, attract more shoppers to the main street businesses:-

*“I don’t think the trade is too delicate for it. It was there before the cars and would survive again. The trade would stay and maybe increase.”*

*“I’m sure the shops would discover that they were actually busier if it was pedestrianised. I might be wrong but I have the feeling that it would make the street far more attractive if you weren’t having to watch your back the whole time.”*

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<sup>8</sup> There appears to have been a long-standing debate in Kirkwall over the proposed pedestrianisation of parts of the main street. The suggestion from many of the project participants was that shopkeepers on the main street have largely opposed the move, due to the perceived negative impact on their businesses (see also *Orkney Today* online for 5 October 2006). There are some current restrictions in place, with only permit holders, disabled persons’ vehicles and deliveries allowed during certain hours. However, during the week of the fieldwork, the council’s roads and transportation sub-committee made a recommendation that Albert Street become a pedestrianised zone between noon and 2.30 p.m. each day, meaning that *no* vehicles, including disabled persons’ vehicles and those of permit holders, would gain access to the street at that time. According to the *Orkney Today* of 15 July 2010, this was due to be discussed at the meeting of the council’s transportation and infrastructure committee meeting of 7 September 2010; however, the minutes of that meeting are not yet publicly available (at 7 October 2010) and there has been no additional local press coverage of the proposals since then.



*"I think if they just closed the streets they would find that more and more people were in the streets, and they had time to shop without watchin' their backs the whole time for cars."*

Some others felt that banning vehicles would make the main street more aesthetically pleasing, or would allow the street's food and drink businesses to adopt a more continental approach during the summer months, by providing seating outside the front of their premises:-

*"The cars ruin it when they come through. It spoils the romance of it – it's so historical."*

*"I think it would be better without cars. Most of them don't even need to be there. It would be better to have peace to see the shop windows and admire the Cathedral and trees."*

*"You have a place like this with interesting architecture, and if you want to take a photo it's spoilt by the cars. Particularly for the tourists who only have a small window of time for taking their photos."*

*"I remember thinking the one-way traffic was quaint when I was wee. But now it's outdated. Too many cars stops it being quaint anymore. I would say get rid of the cars and you'd see more of the historic architecture."*

*"It would be lovely to see more tables and seats out on the street. People could stop for a chat and watch the world going by."*

*"They should pedestrianise it all. Look how lovely it used to be with no traffic. They could turn Broad Street into a nice little square if it was pedestrianised. People could sit out more and it would be a real hubbub. It's just a real shame it's not like it used to be in the old photos."*

While a small number of participants expressed their concerns about the potential impact of the traffic on the buildings on the main street:-

*"They should pedestrianise it. What about the damage to the Cathedral, from the pollution of the traffic?"*

*"What about the impact of the traffic on buildings, structurally? The buildings are so old that it has to be harming them. No-one is thinking of the impacts long-term. There are signs all around Kirkwall to say only certain weights on a street, but no-one heeds the signs."*

In contrast, there were those who felt that there was no need to pedestrianise the main street. For some of these individuals, their main argument appeared to be based around the fact that there has always been traffic on the streets, and that residents have learned to live with the situation:-

*"It's just the way it is."*

*"It's not a problem because it's the way it's always been, as long as I can remember."*

*"It's fine. You get used to it and just step out of the way."*

*"If you're local it doesn't affect you so much, as you're used to it."*

*"You just accept it. Some days it's very annoying and busy. But you're used to it – it's always been like that."*

And while there was a general acceptance that tourists and other first-time visitors are often surprised to find vehicles on the main street, there was also a suggestion that it is an integral part of the "character", and indeed the "culture", of Kirkwall:-

*"You can see the looks of bemusement on the faces of the cruise liner passengers when they see cars coming towards them. But I think it's part of the character of the place."*

*"It can be a nuisance, but it really adds to the character of the street. We wouldn't want to change it. You notice it in the summer with the visitors, there are more people wandering aimlessly in the middle of the street, on the 'road', looking lost."*

*"You just get used to it. New visitors might think it's a pedestrianised area, but if they look down and around, and see the signs and the yellow lines, then they should realise it's not."*

*"If you are coming here for a holiday, that's the sort of thing you want to see. It's so different. To lose that would be sacrilege. People should respect our culture."*

*"Tourists have to learn to deal with the cars. Kirkwall is for Kirkwallians and they have to accept that."*

Several participants argued that there are few problems, or accidents, because the typical Kirkwallian driver is particularly patient and considerate<sup>9</sup>:-

*"Everyone is courteous and patient."*

*"The drivers are so careful and considerate, there's never any danger."*

*"Usually everyone is very patient with all pedestrians."*

*"And the cars don't toot you, they wait. Outside Lobban's the butcher, seven or eight cars build up behind the butcher's van and they all wait patiently. I think they're sensible though. They're usually pretty respectful of the elderly."*

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<sup>9</sup> Although, during the week of the fieldwork, two pedestrians were injured in separate accidents involving vehicles on the main street, one in Albert Street, the other in Broad Street. The researchers also witnessed one example of 'road rage' displayed by one car driver towards the rider of a mobility scooter, as well as an example of 'pedestrian rage' aimed at a car driver with questionable reversing skills.

*“It seems to work very well, but mainly because of the tolerance of the drivers. If there was a huge increase in the car population I think there could be problems. Any other town in Northern Europe and every second driver would be tooting their horn. It just doesn’t seem to happen here.”*

There were also participants who saw both sides of the argument. While they perhaps felt that the current volume of traffic on the main street was excessive, they also highlighted the need to cater for deliveries to businesses and for drivers with disabilities:-

*“I can understand why people want it pedestrianised, but what about access for elderly folk?”*

*“My husband has mobility problems, so I think you need to maintain disabled access, whatever happens to vehicle access.”*

*“It would be fine if there were no cars, but you can’t deny the shops access. Also, some of the more infirm folk might not go if they can’t drive right up to the street.”*

*“It would be nice if it was pedestrianised, but you have to think about older people and deliveries.”*

*“Maybe in the summer they should close it to cars. Then again, if it’s going to stop the older people from shopping, I don’t know.”*

On the subject of disabled drivers, however, a number of participants chose to highlight perceived abuse of the disabled badge scheme:-

*“A lot of the disabled badges shouldna be. It’s definitely abused.”*

*“I don’t mind the disabled drivers using it, but a lot abuse it. They just stop for a chat and a lot of them seem perfectly fine when they jump out and run into Boots.”*

*“And some abuse it. They come in with their big 4x4s with their disabled badges. And you see them jumping out and running into the shops – they’re not disabled.”*

There were also participants who chose to criticise drivers who flaunt the current access restrictions on the main street and park directly outside the business premises they are visiting. There were even accounts of transactions taking place from inside the car:-

*“People like to take their cars, and like to get as close to the shops as they can. Folk don’t like to walk.”*

*“There’s some that do need it for access, but I think, by and large, it’s the old laziness thing. As you said before, folk like to get in their car right to the shop door, when perhaps they don’t really need it.”*

*“People here don’t realise how lucky they are. In any big city, if you could park in a place two minutes away from where you wanted to go, you’d think it was great. Here, they get angry if they can’t just stop outside.”*

*“I wis doon the street the ither day, at Donaldson’s, where they hiv their death notices. And this wife drove up – she was comin’ through the street slowly – she just drove into the corner of the shop and wis reading the notices through the cer window. I’m a night watchman, and doon the street late at night, you see them come up in their cer to the Alliance and Leicester. He pits the lassie oot the window, pits the card in, ting, ting, ting, cash oot, and away up the street.”*

Indeed, a small number of participants readily admitted that they themselves are prone to park as close to shop entrances as possible:-

*“I like that you can drive right up to the shops. It’s so convenient. You can almost just shop outside, shout what you want, and he’ll bring it out to you.”*

The subject of Kirkwall’s ‘boy racers’ or ‘cruisers’ was raised by several residents. Many noted that they tend to meet at the Shapinsay Slip, then embark on a circular route which incorporates Bridge Street and Albert Street. While some highlighted the safety and anti-social implications of the boy racers’ activities, others were, perhaps surprisingly, sympathetic towards these young men, arguing that there is little else in Kirkwall with which they can occupy their time, and that it has been an activity undertaken by successive generations of Kirkwallians:-

*“The young idiots who go fleeing up the street – they need to stop it.”*

*“The boy racers are always flying about – it’s dangerous. Day and night.”*

*“Boy racers are a problem. They drive past you so many times, not going anywhere or doing anything.”*

*“The youngsters just park on the Shapinsay Slip and just go round and round. There’s more money coming in from offshore work, so they’ve got fancier cars and more personalised number plates. About 8 to 9pm they park at the Shapinsay Slip. They go down Albert Street and out at the Clydesdale Bank and down Junction Road. And Bridge Street is so narrow it makes their big exhausts sound even louder.”*

*“With the boy racers, they just go round and round, and that will never change. It’s been the same since I was a young lad. That’s just young lads.”*

*“The young racers in their cars are a problem. It starts around 4.15pm. They’re not going anywhere, just speeding around. But we can’t really complain, as we did it when we were younger, though we didn’t go as fast.”*

*“It’s a circuit, so you can’t expect them not to. Also, it’s something everyone does. It’s not just one group – generation after generation do it. It doesn’t do any harm really. Also, they have nothing else to do and nowhere else to go.”*

## The main street at night

The researchers explored the residents' perceptions as to whether the main street was a 'different' kind of place in the evening and late at night. However, only a minority of the participants had any recent experience of frequenting the main street at that time of day, largely because there was little reason to do so:-

*"You might visit the cashline for money, but none of the cafés or anything's open. There's nothing open at night, so there's no reason to go."*

Those participants who did have experience of the main street at night included individuals, such as taxi drivers and bar workers, whose jobs required them to be in or near the street in the late hours. They were largely in agreement that the street is simply quieter in the evenings, particularly during the winter months:-

*"The street is a lot quieter at night. There's less people."*

*"The street is almost dead at night, there's no-one around."*

*"It's very different at night. It's much quieter. People are just passing through then, not stopping."*

*"In summer there are a lot of tourists. In winter it's pretty bleak and quiet."*

And while there were some accounts of drunken behaviour, it was also suggested that, in the close-knit community of Kirkwall, those most likely to create trouble were widely known, and thus readily avoided:-

*"You sometimes see the drunks come out of the pub and it's a bit scary. They're often falling over. You stay out of their way – it can be intimidating."*

*"I've occasionally seen some unseemly behaviour. I used to pick up my daughter when she worked in one of the town centre bars. Some people were unable to stand."*

*"There's maybe the odd drunk, but never any problems. The odd occasion of people smashing windows, but that really is a one-off."*

*"You know who the troublemakers are, and you avoid them."*

*"Everybody kens them, the ones that might be liable to be difficult. There's nothing that would be serious."*

While the main street was regarded as being relatively peaceful at night, a number of participants suggested that a greater level of anti-social behaviour occurs in the Junction Road area, where a number of fast food outlets are located:-

*"You do hear about trouble – 2 a.m. at the kebab shop might be trouble."*

*“Not much goes on of an evening. About 2 a.m. on a Saturday night it all happens at the kebab shop in Junction road, when everyone comes out the pub.”*

*“There are more problems in the Junction Road area, where all the take-aways are, where people gather after the pubs shut and leave a mess.”*

### **‘Youth culture’ on the main street**

During a pre-fieldwork visit by the researchers to Kirkwall, in June 2010, staff from the Orkney Library & Archive indicated that the youth of Kirkwall tend to congregate at particular locations on the main street, including outside the Ivy House on Albert Street. During the course of the fieldwork week, a number of the adult participants suggested other spots, on or adjacent to the main street, which are favoured by local youths. These included: outside the Cathedral, on Kirk Green; in the gardens of Tankerness House; and outside Bruce’s store in Victoria Street. There were mixed opinions on whether or not the Kirkwall populace felt intimidated by these gatherings:-

*“If you get a nice summer night it’s busy with young folk. The thing about Kirkwall streets is that they are so safe. I wouldn’t dare approach a group of lads where I come from” [i.e. the North East of England].*

*“And I will say that Broad Street doesn’t seem to be quite as friendly an atmosphere as it was in my younger days. If I’m obliged to walk up through Broad Street on my way home, there’s a lot o’ youngsters that are causing a wee bit of trouble.”*

As Table 2 indicated, the researchers spoke to twelve teenagers during the course of the fieldwork week. Indeed, one impromptu discussion took place at one of the locations identified above – on the benches outside the Cathedral on Kirk Green – where two male youths explained:-

*“There’s nothing to do and nowhere to hang around. So we just meet up on the benches for a yarn.”*

Indeed, a number of the younger participants bemoaned the lack of suitable social and leisure facilities, with the relatively recent loss of a ten-pin bowling alley<sup>10</sup> being particularly lamented:-

*“They should have kept something open for us – young folk need something too. The bowling alley should have been kept open.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Powerbowl, Orkney’s only bowling alley, on Great Western Road in Kirkwall, opened in February 2003, with financial backing from Orkney Enterprise and Orkney Islands Council. This opening came seven years after the raising of a 5,500-signature public petition calling for an alley to be established on the Islands. However, the alley closed because of financial difficulties in April 2007 (see *Orkney Today* online, 13 April 2007).

And while some of the younger participants make use of the Youth Café in St Magnus Lane, just off Broad Street, others described it as being “full of tw\*ts” and, perhaps surprisingly, cast envious glances in the direction of the Owld Men’s Hut:

*“Wish we had a free hut we could go to.”*

The teenage respondents indicated a number of other meeting places, including: “the lane and garden at the back of Donaldson’s butchers”; “the lane at the back of the bank”; and, away from the main street, “the back of the old bowling alley” and “around the new bus station”, which is “where the chavs hang out.” It became clear during these discussions that underage drinking takes place at a number of these locations. Indeed, their respective merits in escaping the attention of the local police were described:-

*“If the cops check out the back of Donaldson’s, there’s no escape route.”*

*“The back of the old bowling alley is good – the police don’t always come there.”*

And while recent underage alcohol sales tests, carried out by the police under the Licensing (Scotland) Act (see *Orkney Today* online, 21 May 2010), revealed that Orcadian retailers were particularly vigilant in terms of not selling alcohol to under-18s, the participants revealed that it is still relatively easy for under-age teenagers to obtain alcohol:

*“My 15 year old sister can get alcohol pretty easily in Kirkwall. Everyone knows older people who can get it for them.”*

Indeed, one participant, aged 18, readily admitted that he often buys alcohol on behalf of younger acquaintances in exchange “for a drink or two.”

In terms of information exchange on the main street, only two of the teenage participants discussed the impact of new media. One young female noted that, while she usually meets people she knows on the main street — “everybody knows everybody in Orkney” — she does not really use the street as a source of information; she instead uses text messaging to share news. In contrast, one young male will only use social media, such as Facebook and Bebo, to exchange information when there is no one around on the main street to physically “have a yarn with.” Taking advantage of the free Internet access provided by the Orkney Library & Archive, much of his information exchange revolves around the latest exploits of Kirkwall’s boy racers.

### **The main street as a venue for social and cultural events**

Many of the participants discussed the main street as a venue for various social and cultural events.

Prominent here was discussion of the ‘Ba’ Game, a traditional street rugby match played on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day each year. Traditionally, the game has been played between the ‘Uppies’ (those born ‘Up-the-Gates’, i.e. south of the Cathedral) and the

'Doonies' (those born 'Doon-the-Gates', north of the Cathedral). However, recent housing developments, and the location of the maternity unit of the Balfour Hospital, has resulted in the sides now largely being decided by family loyalties rather than birthplace. The side adopted by 'ferry loupers' and by those from the islands and rural areas of Orkney is generally determined by the route taken on their first arrival in Kirkwall, or by the influence of family and friends.

The importance of the Ba' in the cultural identity of Kirkwallians was emphasised by several residents:-

*"The Ba' is jist Kirkwall. It typifies Kirkwall."*

*"It's an important part of life. Some people will talk about it throughout the year, if they get a chance."*

*"They just seem to get totally infatuated with it. Above everything else, it's the Ba'."*

*"The Ba' is so important to Kirkwall and people who live here. It's who they are. Also, it's a real social event. You'll see everyone if you go to the Ba'."*

*"There's no Christmas dinner in my house – it's all about the Ba'. I have two teenage boys who play in it. Christmas is all about the Ba' for us. It's so important to being from Kirkwall."*

*"It's like a drug. It's a very important part of Kirkwall."*

Indeed, some told of the steps taken to ensure that family members belonged to the 'right side':-

*"My cousin's daughter, when her son was born in Aberdeen, didn't come home the normal way from the airport, she went away around the back so that he would be a Doonie."*

*"I did that with me son and daughter as well. We lived in Cromwell Road at the time. I took them in from the airport, and went along Berstane Road, round Annfield Crescent, just to make sure they would never be an Uppie."*

While some older residents told of the enduring attraction of participating in the game:-

*"You go down to watch and you find yourself taking part. A lot of the older boys with health problems avoid watching it, because the temptation to join in is too much."*

However, a number of the participants noted (some with disappointment) the changing nature of the game, particularly concerning the involvement of incomers:-

*"When I was a kid, unless you were from Kirkwall, you weren't allowed to participate in it. Over time, it's got bigger and bigger – people come from all over now."*



*“It’s changed a lot. In that days it would’ve been Kirkwall folk that was in it. Nowadays, it’s sort of whoever’s willing – they come from all over.”*

*“It has changed a lot over the years. Before, it would always be won by a Kirkwallian, but not so now. People come from outside and just pick a side. It’s no longer to do with where they are born. It’s a lot more aggressive now.”*

While, interestingly, a number of the incomers noted a relative lack of personal interest in the Ba’, or a perception that they would not be accepted as players by Orcadians:-

*“I occasionally go to the Ba’, although not being a native, it maybe doesn’t have the same draw.”*

*“I don’t really attend the Ba’. As my father is English and my mother Scots-Irish, I felt as I didn’t have a proper Orcadian accent I wouldn’t be fully accepted, so I never participated.”*

There were, of course, also residents with little or no interest in the Ba’. Many regarded it as a particularly violent pastime:-

*“The Ba’ is very violent. I’ve watched it once. All of the windows are boarded up, with huge planks of wood. Steam and sweat rise above in a fog.”*

*“It’s quite a rough game. There’s no rules, and they just carry on until it’s finished. Sometimes a few personal scores are settled.”*

*“It can still be pretty brutal at times. There’s quite a lot of injuries.”*

*“I played a little bit. But the first time me wife saw it, that was the end o’ it! No more Ba’ for me!”*

*“It’s nothing but a legalised fight. A few old scores get settled at The Ba’. I sometimes use it as an excuse to get out for a drink on Christmas Day. I say I’m going to watch The Ba’, but I’m just going for a drink.”*

On the evening of the research team’s arrival in Kirkwall, Broad Street was temporarily closed to traffic, to allow for a display by the Kirkwall City Pipe Band, who regularly perform there on Saturday evenings during the summer months. That particular performance drew a healthy attendance, and indeed several of the participants commented on the social importance of these pipe band displays:-

*“If it’s a bonny night, we’ll go down and watch them. It’s fine.”*

*“It’s good how many people turn out for the pipe band. It’s not just tourists or visitors, a lot are locals. All the peedie children are just running around – it’s lovely.”*

*“There’s the pipe band parade through the summer months, on a few Saturday nights. They’re an exceptionally good pipe band, and they do draw good crowds.”*

*“It’s nice to see so many people turning up. People like to support the bands, especially if it’s the local pipe band.”*

*“The pipe band also makes the street a social place for people. You’ll hear about the pipe band performing in the paper. Often they’ll close the street, and that’s why it’s in the paper. People don’t mind as that’s a Kirkwall event.”*

With regard to other cultural events, several respondents mentioned the importance of the midsummer arts event, the St. Magnus Festival, to the town, although there appeared to be a perception amongst some that festival events were more likely to be attended by visitors than residents:-

*“All the festivals are important to Kirkwall – it’s what keeps the community together. They’re well attended.”*

*“I used to go to the St Magnus Festival, but not now. It’s nice to see the town come together. There’s such a buzz to the town. People flock here. It brings people together.”*

*“There’s the St Magnus Festival, which is very good, but it takes a lot o’ visitors in to Kirkwall.”*

*“I never attend the St Magnus Festival, and I’m not sure that many Orcadians do. I don’t know why. Visitors pay hundreds of pounds to visit.”*

While some others mentioned the importance of Orkney’s agricultural shows, particularly Kirkwall’s County Show, although this takes place some distance from the main street, at Bignold Park:-

*“The agricultural shows are a good time to meet up with people.”*

*“I come in for the St Magnus Festival, and for the County Show. They’re an important part of Orkney social life.”*

A recent report prepared by Land Use Consultants (2009) on behalf of Orkney Islands Council noted that “there are no formally defined civic spaces (e.g. town square)” in Kirkwall, “necessitating the temporary use of the carriageway at Broad Street.” The report goes on to suggest that “Kirkwall has unrealised opportunities to create and enhance civic spaces — particularly at Broad Street, the Harbour and adjacent to the Peedie Sea.” A number of our research participants certainly believed that the Kirk Green area was an ideal public space:-

*“The Kirk Green there is just an ideal place for gathering.”*

*“The Kirk Green is ideal as a public space. It was covered in granite chips when we first arrived in Orkney. The grass there now is much better, but it can turn sticky and slimy in wet weather.”*

Indeed, some residents bemoaned the fact that an international market, which coincides with the St. Magnus Festival, had been moved from this “ideal” location to the Great Western Road car park, next to the town’s supermarkets. They provided conflicting reasons for this move:-

*“Last summer, the international market was on the grass in front of the Cathedral. This year it was in the car park next to Tesco. It meant you had to go out of your way to visit it. Last year it was lovely and colourful to see. You hear different stories about why it moved. It depends who you talk to. Some say it was because they left too much rubbish, others say it took trade away from the local shopkeepers.”*

*“The Kirk Green is a focal point. With the international market, it was the St Magnus Festival Committee who requested it be moved this year. They don’t like things in front of the Cathedral, but I think it added to the atmosphere.”*

#### **Iconic aspects of the main street**

In terms of specific iconic aspects of the main street, two main themes emerged from the discussions:-

Firstly, several residents highlighted St. Magnus Cathedral, founded originally in 1137. Some mentioned, with considerable pride, that the Cathedral remains the property of the people of Orkney, as opposed to the Church of Scotland; some concentrated on its architectural beauty; while others discussed more spiritual aspects:-

*“We all own it. It’s owned by the people, not by the church.”*

*“The Cathedral belongs to the people of Kirkwall. Even though I belong to another church, I still admire the Cathedral. It’s a big part of Kirkwall. It’s a status symbol now.”*

*“Every time you go in it you feel something. I sometimes think, I was supposed to have been a builder, but when you look at what that people did 800 years before...”*

*“I’m not a particularly religious person, but I’ve found that my prayers have been answered there. I’ve been to many other cathedrals – Durham, York, Salisbury – but there’s just something about St Magnus.”*

Secondly, many participants spoke about the Big Tree. Once in a private garden surrounded by a wall, this solitary sycamore is located on the street, in Albert Street. Thought to be about 200 years old, the Forestry Commission Scotland has classed it as one of the Heritage Trees of Scotland, although it is now in poor condition with its hollow trunk being

supported by a metal beam. While many participants acknowledged that the tree had seen better days, they argued that is now an integral part of Kirkwall's heritage:-

*"The Big Tree is a huge part of Kirkwall."*

*"I think it's part of the heritage here – it's been here so long."*

*"It's important to the people of Kirkwall – we all have memories of it."*

*"The tree is part of the scenery now. It would be sad if it disappeared."*

*"The Big Tree is a big part of the street, although it's a bit sorry-looking now. I can remember it in full bloom."*

*"The tree is part of the street. It just is. That metal rod going through it is just silly. Why don't they try and cover it up with other tree bark or something."*

While there were those who suggested that it be replaced with a younger specimen:-

*"It would be missed if it was gone. But it's a shame – the poor thing's almost dead. Why don't they plant a new one?"*

*"The tree never bothers anybody, it's the traffic. If the tree has to come down I hope they plant another one."*

One resident feared that the influence of incomers, unfamiliar with the history of the tree, would lead to its removal:-

*"The Big Tree is important, but I think that will stop with my generation. I'm not being rude but there are so many outsiders coming in and they can't understand the significance. So I imagine it will disappear in a few years."*

There were some residents, however, who believed that the presence of the tree no longer serves any useful purpose and that it should be removed:-

*"I think it's had its role and it has fulfilled that now. It's just being kept for the sake of it."*

*"The people who had the garden agreed that the town could take it over, provided the tree was preserved. But I think it's seen better days. Now that it's got this steel shaft inside it, it looks completely out of place. We've honoured our commitment to the person that we took over the property from. I think we've done very best by that tree, so perhaps we should just let it disappear now."*

#### 4. Summary and Future Research

A number of themes emerged from this research, most notably that the 'character' of the main street is perceived to have 'changed' in recent years. Suggested reasons for this change include the influence of incomers, an increased tourist trade, the opening of edge-of-town supermarkets, and the closure of the local Woolworths store.

Despite these changes, the main street is still regarded as an important place for serendipitous meetings with acquaintances and for the exchange of information and news; as well as an important civic space and venue for local cultural and social events, such as the Ba' street rugby game. Participants also highlighted iconic features of the Kirkwall main street, including St. Magnus Cathedral and the Big Tree.

Opinions on the traffic situation on the Kirkwall main street, where people and vehicles share narrow spaces, were decidedly mixed: while many residents feel that the street should be pedestrianised, others believe that the close proximity of car and pedestrian is itself an integral part of the 'character' and 'culture' of Kirkwall.

Following this successful pilot, the researchers now aim to attract funding which will allow more extensive, comparative studies to take place in other small Scottish towns.

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