

## Road: Earlsferry High Street

Number: 1?

Name: Ferry Corner



Notes: Vacant space

Notable history: Originally there were houses in this area. There were tenements and at least one shop. In 1947 the local authority were repairing the drains in the roadway in front of the block when there was a nocturnal rainstorm which resulted in flooding. The water undermined the sand upon which these houses were built and they had to be demolished Sydney Reekie owned a few of them and he sued successfully for compensation. The houses were actually fairly substandard accommodation and were in much need of repair. They included a shop for William Bromley a local photographer. Sydney Reekie reports it thus:

“For many years the two level building on the corner and the single level adjoining building in the High Street had stood empty. The two storied house right on the corner was several hundred years old and was maybe the oldest house in Earlsferry. It was the only house in Earlsferry that had an inside solid stone winding stairway. The walls were made of good stone and were more than two feet in width at the base. The last person to occupy the property on the Ferry corner was William Bromley who used the lower floor as a camera and film shop and the upper floor as his photographic portrait taking studio.

I became the owner of the properties at the corner in quite a strange way.

Two elderly spinster sisters, by the name of the Misses Waddell lived together in a house on the beachfront in Earlsferry. From time to time, as a teenager, I did odd jobs for them like doing minor repairs and gardening, that sort of thing. One day, in making conversation, I made mention to the two ladies as to my admiration for and interest in the two old vacant houses at the Earlsferry Corner. They astonished me by telling me that they were the owners. And so I became the owner of all three properties at the Earlsferry corner. It was a tender moment when the two dear ladies handed me the keys.

In due time I had in my mind all the non-structural and minor changes that I'd do to make " home". My start was to clean from end to end and from top to bottom.

At this time the Earlsferry and Elie local authority decided to resurface the roadway of the Earlsferry High Street. Before doing so they contacted all the underground utility people to first carry out any repairs or the laying of new pipes etc. to prevent at a later date having to dig up the new road surface. It was decided that a new gas main pipe would be laid along the entire length of the Earlsferry High Street.

A trench was dug the length of the High Street about five feet deep and the pipe was laid starting from the west end. At the east end, the Earlsferry corner, the roadway was so narrow the pavement sidewalks on either side of the street were less than three feet wide and the roadway was not much more than the width of one vehicle.

The trench had been dug hard against the pavement on the north, my, side of the road. To still allow vehicles to enter the village, the sand that was dug up out of the trench was piled upon the pavement. Before the pipe was laid in the trench it started to rain in a heavy downpour. It rained heavy and incessantly for a whole week. All work stopped. The almost six feet deep trench had not one stick of shoring. During the fateful night the weight of the sodden sand that was all piled up on the sidewalk caused the concrete sidewalk to shear off and slide down into the trench. Right behind it the entire foundations of my two buildings slid sideways into the trench and the walls collapsed. The roof exploded into splinters as the entire structure of the two buildings broke up. When daylight came it was like the two buildings had taken a direct hit from a high explosive bomb.

The buildings were a total loss Authorities came to inspect the site and the buildings were declared a danger and a hazard to the public at large. As the owner I was served with a demolition order to completely clear the site. A contractor was engaged to do the work. It took heavy equipment to get the large stones hoisted out of the trench and all the materials that had comprised the two buildings loaded on to trucks. Clearing the site took the labours of several men about a month. The sea had been eroding the land adjacent to the twelfth tee of the golf course. All the materials were hauled there by way of the West Sea road and used to riprap the shoreline.

After the site was cleared the now exposed gables of the properties on each side of the break had to be strengthened and repaired.

No single entity would admit responsibility for the damage. The town authority claimed that they only ordered the work to be carried out in a workmanlike manner. The National Gas Board said they had engaged a responsible Edinburgh contracting firm to dig the trench and lay the pipe. The contractor claimed that the incessant rain that stopped the work and so caused the disaster was an act of God.

The controversy as to the liability for damages made newspaper copy. I was contacted by a lawyer who contended that all concerned with the pipe laying project were liable and named the joint towns of Earlsferry and Elie, the National Gas Board and the contractor as parties jointly accountable for the incurred expenses of the loss.

When at last the dust settled it was established that there had been gross negligence as to the carrying out of the work and that all of the named parties were jointly accountable. I was awarded an amount of money sufficient to pay for all the costs of demolition and the repair of the gables and an amount sufficient to pay for all of the lawyer charges and legal costs. It was determined that since I had just recently become the owner of the properties and had paid nothing for them that I wasn't out of pocket. True to an extent. I wasn't into it for money.

The real losers were the long-time residents of Earlsferry and the public at large.

The gateway to the village had consisted of ancient, unique and attractive old dwellings, heritage properties. The very essence of the village became a gaping void.