

## PHANTASSIE FANTASY

The Society was fortunate in being able to hear from Patricia Stephen and Vivian Linacre about the proposals for Phantassie Steading. The planning and listed building applications are led by Derek Scott Planning. A subsequent visit to the site by the writer, accompanied by the architectural historian Ian Parsons, threw light on the historical context. The Society thanks them all and wishes them well in their endeavours.

In spite of the decline in agricultural use, damage by fire, loss of machinery and subsequent alterations and additions, this historically important and substantial farm steading at Phantassie still retains the aura of a once huge industrial farming operation. It must have been very impressive in its heyday with the hiss of steam intermingled with the lowing of cattle, the neighing of horses and the cries of so many workers. It was in the mainstream, if not the vanguard, of the nineteenth century agricultural revolution in which East Lothian played such a large part.

The application for shopping and leisure use is certainly the most appropriate one for this complex of buildings which is close to the successful and expanding town of East Linton. It should complement the existing shops and businesses in the town and seems to be well supported by local people. The application is backed by extensive surveys and research. The plans and drawings show a measure of detail, empathy with, and understanding of the steadings that is unusual for such schemes in the county.

Historically, some notable people are associated with the enterprise. The land was bought by George Rennie in 1785. His father had been the tenant. These were bad times for agriculture owing to the many years of depression, crop failures and a poor climate. The 1780s were the worst but his entrepreneurial skills and shrewd investment made him prosper. Not least, his brother John Rennie was the notable bridge builder. The family and Phantassie are also associated with Andrew Meikle, another bright mind developing the mechanical threshing machine and maintaining both Houston and Preston Mills.

The mid-nineteenth century brought more prosperity with the farm being taken over by the Mitchell Innes family. The economy was boosted by the coming of the railway and a station at East Linton, completing the route between Edinburgh and London. Innovations such as steam powered threshing mill and a belt driven feed system were installed. Unfortunately the engine house and threshing mill were badly damaged in a fire in 1867. Luckily, the remainder of the steading was saved.

The detailed Ordnance Survey maps of the period show the building much as it stands today with a quadrangular plan containing cattle courts. Perimeter buildings are mainly one storey with lofts over, all slate roofed. The steading had a formal layout with a fine architectural frontage to the south, containing stables, and the sides and rear being impressively functional. Of classic pattern book form, the courtyard was huge with 10 open cattle courts each with associated covered shelters and centralised feeding areas entered by grand gate piers. Its size was determined by the needs of a farm of some 700 acres. There was a separate granary and stackyard to the west. Cottages were built for the workers. The operation was managed from the nearby Phantassie House with its Doocot.

The 20th century saw the well known Hamilton family taking over. They continued to improve the grain processing and feed storage areas while retaining the basic layout. A second fire damaged the north-west part around 1950. This resulted in some rebuilding in a different two storey form, but the integrity of the whole has survived. The 60s and 70s saw the construction of modern steel framed sheds of various shapes and sizes within the courtyard. Most of the cattle enclosure walls have now been lost although the line of them may survive below ground. Sadly, the delightful surviving arcaded feed store for neeps will be lost in these proposals. The eastern range has an interesting mixture of structures and offices with an entrance across the track to Phantassie House.

The finest frontage is to the south facing the road with its fine cut ashlar, elegant windows, pediment and archway. Only a shadow of the stables remains inside with ghosts of hay lofts. The working horses were, of course, eventually replaced by tractors. A large concrete loading platform has been inserted inside. Ventilating windows survive with pigeon-proof bars, all to be maintained in the new scheme. Nothing remains of the chimney, boiler and steam engine to the west apart, perhaps, from foundations. However, the slate roofs, structure and fine architectural details survive. The west range is the most damaged but the vaulted underground water tank is there and it could be that original stone paving generally exists below later concrete.

Following the fire and subsequent changes, the western range is probably the most damaged. New openings for combine harvesters and lorries have been burst through and roofs raised accordingly. The opportunity is taken in this proposal to make this the main entrance to the mall from the western car park replacing them with a bold modern frontage complementing the old whinstone walls. However, the north range, apart from some raising of wall heights and roofs, is very much intact and will be retained to provide a splendid backdrop to the shopping complex.

The result should be a most exciting contrast between the impressive strength of the historic stone structures of the steading and the entirely modern glass roofed mall leading to the spacious shop units within. The mall roof would be at or below ridge level maintaining the traditional scale of the steading. Facilities such as bar, restaurant and catering court together with historical explanations and exhibits would provide a public amenity to support the shops in a way that would be a great asset to the town and to the county. Unlike so many large scale speculative proposals recently, there seems to be a real possibility that this one will go ahead if planning permission and listed building consent is granted. *BY*