

## Case information

<b>Case ID</b>	300017004		
<b>File Reference</b>	HGH/B/Z/27		
<b>Name of Site</b>	Lerwick Town hall, Hillhead and Charlotte Street, Including Lamp Standards, Gatepiers, Boundary Walls and Railings, Lerwick		
<b>Local Authority</b>	Shetland Islands Council		
<b>National Grid Reference</b>	HU 47488 41415		
<b>Designation No. (if any)</b>	LB37256		
<b>Designation Type</b>	Listed Building	<b>Current Category of Listing</b>	B
<b>Case Type</b>	Review of Category.		
<b>Received/Start Date</b>	05/06/2015		
<b>Decision Date</b>	16/12/2015		

## 1. Decision

In our current state of knowledge, Lerwick Town Hall continues to meet the criteria for listing. The listed building record has been updated and the category of listing changed from B to A.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

### 2.1 Designation Background

Lerwick Town Hall was listed at category B on 8 November 1974. Lerwick Burgh was resurveyed in 1996 when the building was reviewed and the list description updated. A change of listing category request was received in June 2014. Following this, the building was assessed and retained at category B. The listed building record was updated on 23/01/2015. A further request to consider a change of category with more supportive information was received on 10/06/2015.

Lerwick Town hall is located within Lerwick Central Area/Lanes Conservation Area

### 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

### 3. Assessment

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#### 3.1 Assessment information

The Lerwick Town Hall was visited on 27/08/2014. The interior and exterior were seen at this visit. This present assessment is desk-based, using information taken from this visit and further available information.

#### 3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Listing criteria was carried out. See **Annex A**.

*The designation criteria are found in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), pp. 71-85. <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/shep-dec2011.pdf>*

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## **ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Listing Criteria\***

Lerwick Town hall, Hillhead and Charlotte Street, Including Lamp Standards, Gatepiers, Boundary Walls and Railings, Lerwick

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### **1. Description**

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The building was designed by Alexander Ross and dates to 1881-3 with design alterations by John M. Aitken. It is a 2-storey, 5-bay symmetrical Gothic and Flemish Baronial style town hall, with crow-stepped gables, distinctive corner bartizans and a square-plan, battlemented clock tower to the rear (east) rising between a pair of 2-storey and attic wings. The building is set on an elevated site in Lerwick, facing west and is of stugged, squared and snecked sandstone with ashlar margins. There is a base course, moulded band courses and eaves course and finialled triangular roof vents. The entrance (west) elevation has an advanced central gabled entrance bay with a segmental-arched doorway and a 3-light corbelled oriel window above. Flanking this central bay is a pair of mullioned and transomed bi-partite windows at ground level and mullioned bi-partite windows with carved apron panels at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. There is a rose window to the north gable and pointed-arched tracery windows at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the south gable. A linking corridor to Lystina House (see separate listing) lies to the east.

There are grey slates to the roof with fishscale pattern to the bartizans and there are some apex stacks. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor has stained glass windows to the hall and other windows are set in timber sash and case frames. Those to the west elevation at the ground floor have stained glass over 4-pane sashes.

The interior was seen in 2014. The original room layout is relatively little altered and many original features survive. The main hall on the first floor has an open timber roof with corbels and curved trusses. There are a number of significant stained glass windows in the building by James Ballantine & Son, dating to 1883 and Cox and Sons, Buckley & Co of London, dating to 1882. These include an outstanding series of narrative windows in the main hall, depicting several important figures in the history of Shetland from around 870-1469 and a rose window to the north wall with several coats-of-arms. There are further stained glass windows in the Council Chamber. There is timber panelling with quatrefoil design to the dado rail in the hall and some rooms. The central dog-leg stair has extravagantly decorative metal balusters and a stained glass stair window depicting Lord Aberdour. There is some plain cornicing and large stone fire surrounds.

There is a low coped boundary wall with cast-iron railings and pyramidal-capped gatepiers to the west and north elevations. Cast iron lamp standards with entwined dolphins and finialled lanterns are situated to the west of the entrance.

### **2. Assessment Against the Listing Criteria (SHEP, 2011) pp74-75**

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Criteria for determining whether a building is of 'special architectural or historic interest' for listing under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents)]

*To be listed, a building need not meet all the listing criteria. The criteria provide a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions.*

## 2.1 Age and Rarity

The Lerwick Town Hall was built in 1881-3 by the Inverness based architect Alexander Ross. The local contractor John M Aitken suggested a few changes to the original design including adding some extra rooms and building a square-plan clock tower instead of the fleche that is illustrated Ross' drawings. These changes were approved and when it was completed the building contained the Council Chamber, the Burgh Courtroom with adjacent lock-up cells for males and females, a Magistrates' retiring room and an integral strong room. The Main Hall was situated on the first floor. The surrounding stone walls and gatepiers were completed in 1909.

The Gothic-Flemish style, adopted by Lerwick Town Hall had been popular for town halls and civic buildings since the 1860s and was used for a number of other important commissions, including Aberdeen (1868-74) by Peddie and Kinnear, Inverness (1878-82) by Matthews and Lawrie, and The Albert Institute in Dundee (begun 1865-7) (by Sir George Gilbert Scott and others), all listed at category A. By the 1880s this particular style and design in public building was not new, however the architectural detailing at Lerwick Town Hall gives it a distinctive character, appropriate for an important civic building in the only town in the Shetland Islands.

The building officially opened in 1883. As the building was considered to be a showpiece for the burgh, a decorators' committee was formed as soon as the architect's plans had been approved to ensure the resultant decorative scheme was of a high standard. The main person responsible was a local merchant, Arthur Laurensen, who was a keen student of Shetland history. He raised money from a number of civic governments and prominent citizens and stained glass of a high quality was commissioned to give a narrative of Shetland's history. The series of windows commissioned form an outstanding sequence in the main hall of the building. The windows are discussed in more detail below (see Architectural and Historic Interest section). The stained glass windows were restored in the 1980s and '90s.

The hall was used as a dance hall during the Second World War. The building remains the headquarters of the Shetland Islands Council. The former Burgh Courtroom is now the Council Chamber. Whilst the cells and the strong room no longer exist, the majority of the original room layout remains.

Externally, the building has altered very little since its construction, with the addition only of a linking passage to the neighbouring Lystina House, which was bought by the Council in 1994 (see separate listing).

Town halls are common building types in towns throughout Scotland and a significant number of these were built following local government reform in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building in Lerwick is not rare in terms of its date or architectural style and is a later yet competent example of the Flemish hall design.

Its listing at category A recognises its exceptional series of secular stained glass windows which were conceived as an integral part of the building.

## **2.2 Architectural or Historic Interest**

### ***Interior***

It is typical for civic buildings of this date to include a high degree of interior decoration. At Lerwick, the importance of a fine internal decorative scheme was established at an early stage with the formation of a Decoration Committee. Initially, their first plan was to paint the ceiling of the main hall with scenes from Shetland's history, but this was superseded by a plan to concentrate on stained glass. The result of this is an exceptional series of secular high quality stained glass windows in the main hall, paid for by subscription and which refer to significant episodes in the town's history from around 870 to 1469.

Outside the main hall, the interior has some well-detailed spaces with good decorative details appropriate for the building type. This includes the highly decorated cast iron balusters to the main stairs and the timber panelling to the stairs. The exterior Gothic treatment is continued in the interior, such as in the recurring quatrefoil pattern in the timber dado rails in the rooms and on the panelling on the stairs, which adds to the character of the building.

Of particular interest internally are the series of stained glass windows in the main hall by James Ballantine & Son, Edinburgh 1883 and Cox and Sons, Buckley & Co of London, 1882. Martin Harrison, the author of *Victorian Stained Glass* (1980) described them as being of outstanding importance and a remarkable and interesting set. In 15 separate window panels, they depict figures from the period of Shetland's history from around 870, when the Norwegian King Harald Harfagri conquered Shetland, to 1469, when the Shetland Islands were given to Scotland as part of the dowry for Princess Margaret of Norway in her marriage to James III of Scotland. The windows are important as a set of secular stained glass which remain highly relevant to their locality and are rare both in the quality of workmanship and also in the subject matter. Whilst high quality stained glass is not uncommon for an important civic buildings, the windows at Lerwick are exceptional in their extent. The few other schemes in Scotland which are comparable are: the windows by Donald Strachan (1927) at the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh, the stained glass panels at Maryhill Burgh Halls in Glasgow by Stephen Adam, (1878), and the 11 windows by James Ballantine at the National Wallace Monument at Stirling (1885). The windows were conceived as part of the design of the building from the beginning in contrast to many other stained glass panels which were often added later as funds or donations allowed. They remain in situ as constructed, which is also unusual, and in contrast to the windows at Maryhill Burgh Halls, which are not in their original positions, having been removed and some reinstated.

James Ballantine established his own firm of stained glass makers in 1837 and wrote the first Scottish booklet on the subject, "*A Treatise on Painted Glass*", (1845). He was interested in history and was highly regarded by contemporaries and the firm won a competition to design some windows for the House of Lords in 1844. (These were subsequently modified by Pugin). The windows at Lerwick date to the time when his son, Alexander, was in charge of the firm. The firm is known primarily for its

religious work, and it installed a scheme of windows in St Giles' Cathedral from 1881, so these are also a rare example of Ballantine's secular work.

Cox and Son were initially ecclesiastical furnishers. They made windows from around 1860. In 1881 they merged with the firm of Buckley and Co and became Cox & Son, Buckley and Co. They were a popular and prolific London studio and their work can be found most usually in churches around Britain. The windows in Lerwick are the only known secular works by the firm in Scotland.

### ***Plan form***

The building is largely as originally planned with rooms arranged around a central staircase and the main hall on the first floor. This plan form is not exceptional in town hall design.

### ***Technological excellence or innovation, material or design quality***

As prime civic buildings, town halls usually had a significant amount of decorative work on the exterior and Lerwick Town Hall is no exception. The Flemish Gothic style of the building with its Scottish overtones is of interest and there is some high-quality detailing, including contrasting margins, the crow steps, the corner bartizans and the prominent and distinctive oriel window.

The square clock tower to the rear gives the building a more Scottish character, rather than the original more Flemish fleche.

Alexander Ross (1834-1925) was based in Inverness and built extensively throughout the Highlands and Islands. He was particularly noted for his school buildings, and is thought to have designed around 450 of these. He also did much work for the Scottish Episcopal Church.

### ***Setting***

The Town Hall sits in a prominent position on raised ground above the historic town centre of Lerwick and the building is a landmark which is clearly visible particularly when approaching from the sea. It sits across the road from the sheriff court (see separate listing) and forms part of a civic area of the town. The Town Hall was designed to face away from the sea and the old section of Lerwick, and towards the area of the town which was developed in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This area is characterised by wide streets and larger villas, and the Town Hall therefore focusses on the developing prosperity of the town. The Town Hall is situated within a conservation area.

### ***Regional variations***

The Town Hall is constructed of local sandstone. The exterior has no regional variations, however, the stained glass windows were specifically made for the building and are unique and pertinent to Shetland.

## **2.3 Close Historical Associations**

None known at present.

## **3. Working with the Principles of Listing (SHEP 2011, p76)**

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In choosing buildings within the above broad headings particular attention is paid to:

- a. *special value within building types*
- b. *contribution to an architecturally or historically interesting group*
- c. *the impact of vernacular buildings*
- d. *authenticity*

When working with the principles of listing Lerwick Town Hall has particular interest under a and d.

a. Lerwick Town Hall is an important example of a town hall built in the Gothic Flemish style with Scottish features and an exceptional series of stained glass windows.

d. Externally the building is little altered and retains much of its original character. Internally, there has been some minor alteration to the smaller rooms, but the majority of the larger public rooms are intact, including the main hall to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.

#### **4. Summary of Assessment Against the Listing Criteria\*\***

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Lerwick Town Hall was built in 1881-3 and is by the Inverness architect Alexander Ross, with a clock tower designed by the local builder John M. Aitken. Built in the Gothic Flemish style, it is a landmark and distinctive civic building in Lerwick and contains an exceptional series of secular stained glass windows by leading studios of the period which were conceived as integral to the interior design of the building. The building is little altered to the exterior and the amount of high-quality decorative detailing shows a desire to make this a building of quality in the expanding and increasingly prosperous Lerwick of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In our current state of knowledge it continues to meet the criteria for listing.

#### **5. Category of Listing**

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**Categories of listing are non-statutory and buildings are assigned a category (A, B or C) according** to their relative importance following the assessment against the criteria for listing.

Category definitions are found at: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/heritage/historicandlistedbuildings/listing](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/heritage/historicandlistedbuildings/listing)

Lerwick Town Hall is by a prolific local architect and has high-quality architectural detailing. The series of stained glass windows in the main hall by two important stained glass makers of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century is significant and one of only a few such series of secular stained glass in Scotland. The series relates directly to the place it is situated in and has a continuing relevance to the history of the Shetland Islands. Whilst the design of Lerwick Town Hall may not in itself merit listing at category A, the remarkable series of secular stained glass windows depicting the history of the islands is exceptional and of national significance. We consider that the quality of the stained glass windows, their extent and their rarity as a series of secular stained glass windows in their original setting and designed at the same time as the building, make category A the most appropriate category for this building.

## 6. Other Information

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N/A

## 7. References

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Other information courtesy of local residents and proposer (2014 and 2015).