



Hector McCrae, edited the paper from issue 1 - 11

# FATHERING FIGURE

*We speak to the man who started the Sentinel.*

1976 was an unusual and important year. Unusual because during the summer it was so hot that Cramond could have been confused with **Costa Brava**, and important because it was this year that saw **Hector Macrae** make two influential decisions.

After thirty years of working as a printer he had eventually decided that it was no longer what he wanted to do. So he gave it up.

The period of unemployment that followed gave him the chance, the time and the energy to put into practice another idea that he held.

At that time six tenants' associations in Wester Hailes worked as they still do, as basically independent groups. Consequently each produced its own newsletter which was edited, printed and distributed individually. Hector worked as a neighbourhood worker with **FISH** and he recognised that there were a lot of good things happening in Wester Hailes. And he also thought that, although the newsletters were obviously important, a common notice board should exist to serve the whole community.

Equally important to his concept of this community newspaper was its free distribution. This would mean a guaranteed circulation and readership which would naturally be attractive to advertisers. In turn the space that they took out would pay for the paper's costs.

The problem then was to get people interested and to get the paper launched.

When he mentioned his ideas to some people he thought should hear them he received a mixed reception. There were those who wondered what his angle was and others who laughed and thought that it was a daft idea.

This worried Hector because he knew that to allay any suspicions of self interest it was very important to get others involved.

Therefore he was glad when he approached **FISH** and they gave their enthusiastic backing. As **Hilda Stevenson** of the group says: "We knew Hector wanted a chance, we knew it was a good idea and so we gave him that chance."

Individuals remembered as appreciating the potential value of the newspaper include **Andy McGovern**, **Jim Taylor** and **Willie Millar**.

Given this support Hector was able to start voluntary work on issue number one.

It proved to be a harder task than he had probably first imagined. As he wryly recalls, "I was on the dole and I was only working a sixteen hour day."

However he continued to work hard because he knew he had to produce a paper which would confound the doubting Thomases and prove to advertisers that here was a publication worth paying for space in.

Eventually though, after a lot of effort and a trip to a friendly contact from his printing days issue number one of the *Sentinel*, the voice of the people of Wester Hailes, appeared in **October 1976**.

This first issue contained basic material which would have gone into the newsletters as well as copy from **John Mackay**, then the city councillor for the area, **Stephen Maxwell**, the regional councillor and **Malcolm Rifkind MP**.

One of the early problems that was encountered, over and above the workload involved, was some people in the area's misconception of the organisation of the *Sentinel*.

Often people would contact Hector, tell him that there was a meeting about such and such, and ask him to send along a reporter. Invariably his reaction to this situation was to tell the person concerned that if they felt strongly that the *Sentinel* should feature their meeting then they should write about it themselves and send their article along to be published.

It would be both unhealthy and unwise if all the paper's editorial were to be processed through one person.

Once the paper's feasibility had been established it was seen as important to set up a board of people responsible for its organisation and administration.

The support from **FISH** was

essential. They gave financial backing up to the third issue. After Hector had shown the disbelievers that the *Sentinel* was possible and viable, **FISH** opened the ownership of the paper to the whole community and a group was formed involving representatives from all the tenants' groups in Wester Hailes.

To this end Hector and one representative of each of the six tenants' associations, (the **Calders** was excluded because it was not recognised by the others to be part of Wester Hailes) joined together to make the *Sentinel* group.

Of course while the *Sentinel* was very important to Hector there was another little matter that he had to attend to. This was to get himself a job.

Eventually after a lot of thought and no little effort he did get what he realised was an important and satisfying position, working in **Pilton** with youngsters who had been expelled from school.

Unfortunately the consequences of this was that he was unable to devote as much time as before to the paper.

However this did not cause concern because he recognised that **Jim Taylor**, who had come to work with him on the *Sentinel*, was every bit as competent as himself.

In the late summer of 1977 Hector Macrae gave up his position with the paper and **Jim Taylor** became the official editor.

Asked to reflect on his role and his enjoyment of it he replies that it was one of two things in his life that he was proud of and very glad that he did. (The other was to guide a juvenile football team to victory in their Scottish Cup).

And probed for points of criticism of the present day *Sentinel* he feels that sometimes it is not political enough and that its content for young people is "the teenage crap that they are fed anyway, that people make money out of."

But thankfully he adds that he looks forward to seeing the paper and he very much enjoys reading it.

*Stewart McRobert*



If it's in the news, it's in the News.

## W.H.A.T.'s NEWS

The *Sentinel* is 100 issues old this month, but how many people remember its precursor **W.H.A.T.'s** (Wester Hailes Association of Tenants) **NEWS**? A Gestetner produced news-sheet that used to be sold round the scheme for 2p a time. The paper was edited and produced by **Sandy Milne** and **Hector Campbell**, and the present **Kaleidoscope** editor used to write for it and sell it round Westburn. Do you remember its cartoon character **Hester Wailes**? I wonder what he's doing now?

### BIKE STAMP

A special "postcode your cycle" day will be held between 10am and 4pm on 8th April at **Dumbryden Police Station**.