

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS . . .

Quite a few new playgrounds and local community centres are being built in Wester Hailes at the moment, at Hailes Quarry, Clovenstone, Calder, Murrayburn and Park and Drive. In the coming months the Sentinel will report on work in progress on each of these sites. This introductory article will be about where it all started, the place known to many people simply as "The Venchie".

A local resident, whose window overlooked a piece of waste ground which seemed to attract children, had the initial idea to create an adventure playground. He then encouraged the Murrayburn Tenants Association to apply for a lease from the Housing Department which was granted on condition that the site was suitably fenced off from surrounding roads. This resulted in the formation of the Wester Hailes Adventure Playground Group.

The first structure was an old car, which was wrecked within three hours. However, the local residents persevered, and began working on the site during their free time, but were unfortunately unable to cope with such a commitment. After applying for a Job Creation Project which comprised of 1 supervisor and 5 local teenagers, they found themselves with a messy building site, which inevitably resulted in total apathy and disbelief amongst the local residents. Several inadequate temporary structures were built, which were destroyed by the local children, who at this point were vandalising and knocking down anything in sight. Despite this the beginnings of the present playground eventually appeared.

The turning point was the replacement of labourers



The 'Venchie' by Night. Photo by Ron O'Donnell

by J.C.P. play leaders who established a working system which involved working 7 days a week and evenings. The battles, fires and destruction continued; what went up, got torn down again, but it continued to go up, and the site became more popular. More and more children were now using it, creating the need for bigger stronger structures. At this point the Community Workshop was established, which encouraged adults on to the site.

It was now obvious to adults and children alike that the playground was here to stay. Barbeques, dances and other events were now being organised by the Wester Hailes Adventure Playground Group, which helped to advertise the existence of the Community Workshop outside the existing area. Its purpose was now understood and appreciated. Everyone favoured it, apart from the few invariable sceptics ("It's dangerous! Children get hurt!" etc.). And so they did, thumps, bumps, scrapes, a small price to pay for the enjoyment the

playground was giving.

The winter of 1978 saw very little playground work, as Job Creation ended and its replacement by Special Temporary Employment provided only one worker, which meant minimal supervision. More emphasis was placed on encouraging new faces into the playground committee, and in the spring of 1979 the playground blossomed, with a new playleader and a revitalised old one, encouraged by the support of a new enthusiastic committee. A Scottish Development Agency grant was allocated to the community, which enabled the playworkers to obtain the necessary building materials which had previously been acquired by begging, borrowing and stealing (re-appropriation) ed.

With the new influx of money, the future of the playground was assured. Today it exists as a place of supervised, exciting adventure play, with minimal annoyance to local residents, a base for special community events,

festivals, barbecues, gardening projects, street theatre etc., a place of life and activity where before there was only waste ground.

Early 1981 will see another change in the playground, the end of STEP but the Manpower Services Commission will continue to support the Wester Hailes Adventure Playground Group financially. Hopefully this will mean new faces, with new ideas to develop. The playleaders and Wester Hailes Adventure Playground Group are always delighted to welcome anyone to join the group, possibly to suggest changes and to put forward their childrens ideas. The playground group may be financially secure but the continued support of the local citizens is still a very important factor for future development.

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