Thurso Brewery

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A large brewery (MHG1445) was built at the end of the 18th century in Thurso as part of Sir John Sinclair’s plan for the new town at Thurso. Breweries were encouraged in the late 19th century, as the Old Statistical Account for Thurso recorded in 1798: ‘There is every reason to expect that the brewery will prove a profitable concern to the proprietor, and an useful work to the public; that it will lessen the consumption of spirits, and supersede the importation of London porter, which has of late years been growing to an extensive height.’

The enterprise however, did not prove a success. In 1812 it was reported that there was insufficient demand, especially in light of a number of shops and small brewers who also operated and could undersell the brewery. In 1839 the enterprise was put up for sale, and included at that time a number of buildings around a square: a malt barn, two granaries occupying one side of a square, an iron kiln, a malt deposit house, a coal shed, a spirit shelter, a byre with granary above, a dwelling house for servants, a stable, a bonded cellar and a counting room. The advertisement highlighted the possibility of conversion to a woollen mill, but in fact the property ironically became a distillery instead.

The buildings declined in the 20th century. New uses were proposed and a feasibility undertaken by the Highland Historic Buildings Trust. Despite funding efforts, the attempts were unsuccessful, and the building was demolished in 2007.

This site is a good example of large scale development by the local landowner at the end of the 19th century, with good documentary and physical remains (until 2007). It also highlights the difficulties in providing ways to conserve and safeguard important elements of our heritage, in this case unsuccessfully.

Further information:

Documents attached to MHG1445; Canmore 8461.
https://highlandhbt.org.uk/projects/old-brewery-thurso