

# Historic connections can benefit Comiston

**D**ELIGHTED to read about the planning appeal knock-back for the over-dense development proposed for the site of Comiston Farmhouse (News, October 12).

This handsome 150-year-old stone house is said to be the work of William Notman, once assistant to the great Scottish 19th century architect William Playfair. Set within walled grounds and among mature trees it is the focal point of the local streets and residents and well-wishers have fought long and hard to save from demolition this perfectly sound building with beautiful cornice-work. It is, furthermore, an important link in a chain of historic Comiston structures - and the last symbol of agricultural Comiston.

The council, which still owns building and grounds, in considering a new use for them, should bear in mind possible visitor interest in its connections with Scottish literary giants Stevenson, Conan Doyle, and the eminent Blackwood publishing house. A display earlier this year in the NLS marked the founding 200 years ago of the influential literary-political Blackwood's Magazine.

Treasure Island author Robert Louis Stevenson, heading for the family summer home at Swanston, made frequent use of Comiston Farm Path and mentions Comiston (and its spectral white lady) in his writing.

In 1897 the forensic expertise of Edinburgh experts Drs Joseph Bell and Henry Littlejohn - upon whose observational methods Arthur Conan Doyle based his fictional detective Sherlock Holmes - was employed in the real life Comiston Farm homicide case concerning the death of a tod-

dlar and the concealment of his body in the plantation of trees beside Comiston Farmhouse. A young Comiston dairy maid was jailed for the crime.

As aspiring writers, both Stevenson and Doyle had had dealings with Blackwoods; and Blackwood had dealings with Comiston tenant farmer John Currer, from whom a horse was purchased. "I am pleased to hear a good account of the filly. I trust she will produce something better than common. I think she should do from her breeding," Currer wrote to Blackwood.

In Doyle's stories *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* we find Blackwood and Currer connections.

There's much more of interest to do with Comiston Farmhouse and the area's history. The council should surely divide the site, offering the house for sale as a family home or homes - banking the sizeable area at the rear for the future use of Pentland Primary School when - as will surely happen - greater capacity is required

**Mrs CS Lincoln, Pentland Drive, Edinburgh**





**LOCAL ACTION:** Campaigners Simon Newton, Cllr Jason Rust and Liz Smith are delighted that the appeal was overturned