BEFORE COUPAR ANGUS HAD A TOWN COUNCIL…

Many towns and burghs had no form of town council until they established themselves as Police Burghs. These were created under the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1833, which was updated by the Police of Towns Act 1850. The term ‘police’ in this context meant municipal governance.

A Police Burgh had an elected Board of Commissioners which could adopt powers of paving, lighting, cleansing, watching, supplying with water and improving their communities. It could also set up a weigh house and could levy a property tax to pay for carrying out its duties.

Commissioners had a range of enforcement powers. For example if a chimney pot went on fire the occupier was fined (chimney pots had to be secured to protect ‘passengers’, or passers-by).

R. M. Urquart says Coupar Angus became a Police Burgh in 1853. The Board of Commissioners held its first meeting on 28th February. He adds that until then Coupar Angus only had a Town Committee, which kept streets clean with income from the sale of street manure and steelyard fees.

The Commissioners in Coupar Angus adopted the parts of the 1850 Act relating to police, lighting and improvement, but not water supply. This might seem strange given the severe cholera outbreak in Coupar Angus in 1850 (mentioned by Margaret Laing), but the connection with contaminated water was still a new idea. It was commonly thought to be an airborne disease.

In 1875 Coupar Angus elected its first Town Council with a Provost, presumably retaining its powers as a police burgh. Burgh councils, including Coupar Angus Town Council, were abolished in 1975 and replaced by toothless community councils. Many regard this as the end of local democracy in Scotland.

(also see interview with Garnet McFarlane at https://www.facebook.com/groups/201319096549823/1340062876008767/)

References

- Close-Up on Coupar Angus, by Margaret Laing

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* Police Burgh, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police\_burgh