

## First-Hand Account of Carman Fair

In the Renton page of the website we give an account of the annual cattle fair which was held on Carman Hill every August from the 1820's until about 1896. Now thanks to Catherine Cameron we have a first-hand account of the activities at Carman Fair and in the village of Renton itself while it was going on. This is provided in hand-written form by Christine's aunt Teen, Christina McLean, who was born in the cottage on the site of the Fair and who lived there until her marriage. The McLean family lived in the cottage from 1877 until 1901 and were at the very heart of the Fair in its hey-day. Teen was therefore in an ideal position to watch the proceedings and probably participate in some of them as well. They certainly made a great impression on the young girl and she loved to tell stories about the Fair for the rest of her life – she died in 1966.



The house itself is long gone but we are fortunate to have three photographs of it, two taken by that doyen of Vale photographers from the 1920s to the 1960s, Willie McKim, who with his brother David had shops in Renton and Alexandria. Catherine has also given us an older black and white photo, perhaps taken when the McLean family still lived in the cottage.



*The house is sitting in front of the clump of trees on the skyline, with the road over Carman to Cardross to the right*



There are five hand-written pages and there is a transcription of them between pages four and five.

Carman Fair (Contd) page 2.

ne / storey structure with whitewashed walls and chimneys, and grey whinstone outbuildings.

Set in a clearing of more or less grassland broken by clumps of heather bracken & whin bushes and intersected with small burns lined with rushes, the house was the Centre of the life of the Fair.

Granted a special licence as an Inn during the period of the fair here the dealers congregated and here the bargains were sealed with the customary dram.

In the immediate foreground looking towards Renton the ground sloped to Carman Dam about 100 yards from the house, a gem of a little hill loch; fed by springs and the draining of the neighbouring hill and burns into it this forms the natural reservoir which now supplies an excellent water system to the village.



Barman Fair (contd) page 3.

All else is moorland - the heather clad hill of <sup>CARMAN</sup> ~~Barman~~ forming the back ground.

The grassland surrounding the house was usually on fair day occupied by the few score horses + Ayrshire or other milk cattle brought here for disposal usually by local farmers, dairy men, or small dealers and here also were to be found the primitive stalls set up by "wee" shopkeepers from the neighbourhood for the sale of Cinger Beer, Lemonade, sweets + candies mostly home made, with an occasional "Hokey-Pokey" man's barrow, the day of the motor Ice-cream Saloon being yet undreamt of.

The Real business of the Fair was the disposal of the droves of "Hielan' Flets" covering the moorland in dense masses in every direction.

By many hill roads they had come ~~with~~ wild and shaggy - their drovers in many cases nearly as wild

When the Fair was on, all of the ground on which the sheep are grazing in the photo below would be covered with cattle and people having a dram around the house, designated an Inn for the duration of the Fair.





*Carman Cottage in the 1920's*

#### **Transcription of the hand-written letter:**

"Carman Cottage was a one storey structure with whitewashed walls and chimneys and grey whinstone outbuildings.

Set in a clearing of more or less grassland broken by clumps of heather, bracken and whin bushes and all intersected with small burns lined with rushes, the house was the centre of the life of the fair. Granted a special licence as an Inn during the period of the Fair, here the dealers congregated and here the bargains were sealed with the customary dram.

In the immediate foreground looking towards Renton the ground sloped to Carman Dam about 100 yards from the house, a gem of a little hill loch; fed by springs and the draining of the neighbouring hill into it, this forms the natural reservoir which now supplies an excellent water system to the village.

All else is moorland – the heather-clad hill of Carman forming the background.

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*Carman Cottage c 1900. Although it looks an isolated location, there were in fact two houses just a few hundred yards to the south of the cottage – Nether Dalquhurn Farm, which in 1900 was farmed by the McLachlan family who still farm Dalquhurn Farm to-day, and a house called South Carman. Both of these buildings are long gone, demolished probably in the 1940s. The ground on which the Fair was held and the houses were at that time owned by the Smolletts of Cameron House*



“The Real business of the Fair was the disposal of the droves of “Hielan Stots”, covering the moorland in dense masses in every direction.

By many hill roads they had come, wild and shaggy – their drovers in many cases nearly as wild and shaggy as their charges, herding them with wild cries and much waving of arms.

In this business they were nobly and quite disinterestedly assisted by the village youth. Armed with a particularly nippy and supple cane about a yard long with a red knob, which was sold in the village shops at this time only, no boy was really and entirely happy until he had heard it whack along the flank or buttocks of a stot. His supreme excuse for this came when a drove was sold and moved down off the hill through the main street of the village to the goods yard of the station, there to be entrained.

So many side streets and entries had to be guarded from strays and bolting cattle and it really was a job getting the beasts into the vans at the yard that a boy could enjoy himself and feel as virtuous over it as a modern Boy Scout doing his daily good turn, though I fear that the goodness or otherwise did not enter his thoughts.

Carman Hill the night before Carman Fair was a sight to remember, the mobs of cattle, red, yellow and black in every direction, the sombre hill above, and a glimpse of sleeping water below made an unforgettable picture.

Carman Fair like many a more important market has gone, but the hills, the moorland and the natural beauty of the days when it was in its prime are there and very little altered.

Carman House still stands. Carman Dam, it is true, has something of a concrete embankment on the side overhanging the road but is otherwise the same.”

Carman Fair (Contd) page 4

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Carman Fair (Contd) page 5  
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*Renton Main Street c 1900. It would have looked like this as cattle were driven along it*

Christina McLean was obviously a very good story-teller. Her description of the cattle being driven from the Fair to the Station Goods Yard along Main Street conjures up a wonderful picture of the action, with men and boys at shop doors, closes and side streets shouting and waving sticks to keep the cattle on course for the station. Fortunately this was all in the days before the trams ran along Main Street, because the cattle could have caused a lot of damage to a tram.

It's also something of a revelation because most of us never knew that Renton Goods Yard handled cattle on this scale. The Yard was just to the south of the main entrance to Renton Station, some may remember when it was used by coalmen, and is now mainly occupied by Hutton Engineering. The pleasure the young boys would have had in helping to drive the cattle is timeless

Timeless, too, is how the farming community and the public at large congregate at the beer tents at Cattle Shows and the proliferation of stalls at these shows.

Although the cattle were driven down Cardross Road and along the Main Street, people going to the Fair from the Station – and there were enough of them to run special trains for the Fair – and most people going to the Fair from Renton would have crossed the railway by the Carman Road bridge at the station and walked up through the Glen. That was a much shorter path and probably used the McLean family coming and going to Renton for their everyday business, such as going to school or for the messages, but it was unsuitable for herds of cattle.

As we've said Carman Cottage is long gone but photos of its ruins can be found at:

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1220786>