

Roon' aboot the Vale

Rhymes and Recollections



Andrew Stewart



Andrew Stewart

Born: 3 June 1905
Left school: 1919
Married: 14 December 1940,
to 'Jessie' Campbell
Died: 29 December 1995

'Roon About The Vale'
Rhymes & Recollections

Revised version 4
24 November 2009

Contents

	Title - Rhymes	Page
1	The Jeely Eaters Quiz	1
2	Dyehouse Blues	3
3	Random Recollections	5
4	The Christie Park Burn	6
5	Yae-Time	8
6	A Son Of The Rock	10
7	On Seeing an Old Army Photo	12
8	The Haldane Serenade	13
9	The Pensioners' Song	14
10	Roon About The Vale - A Party Piece	15
11	Roon About The Vale - A Party piece (2)	16
12	He Pits Oot Fires	17
13	The Vale was never used to such a state of things before	18
14	Bonull Yesterday	19
15	The Booler	20
16	Caught (Turkey) Red Handed	22
17	Blue 20	24
18	A Renton Reminiscence	25
19	The Babcock's Folk	27
20	Dreaming of the Beautiful Vale	29
21	The Ghost o' Rabbie	30
22	Vive McGonagall	32
23	Sharing	33
24	From My Bedroom Window	34
25	Eyes That See Not	35
26	Parting Thoughts - A Tribute to Veronica	36
27	Thoughts in a Garden	37
28	Interlude	38
29	Oh Mona!	39

The Jeely Eaters Quiz

(For Vale Folk) (County Reporter, 1973)

Have you seen the CANNON RAW, have you passed by SUCHIEHA?
Have you listened to the words of GAVIE GRANGER?
Have you ever known the thrill of sledging fast doon RITCHIE'S HILL?
Have you seen the DUNNIES up at CASTLE DANGER?

Have you listened to the lark, singing up in BRAWLEYS PARK?
Did you take a Sunday stroll up to the TANK?
Have you climbed the DUMMIE'S BRAE, to the SLUNGER made your way?
Did you ever fish for troot at SHALLOWBANK?

Did you ken the IRISH LAWN? Have you heard the JIMSTON BAUN?
Have you often walked up to the PAPPERT WELL?
Before you were a swimmer, did you walk the PAN LADE skimmer?
Have you heard the peeling of the auld CRAFT BELL?

Have you wondered who could bide, in a place like SUNNYSIDE?
Did you play up in the TANK WOODS when a boy?
Did you ever go at all, to the PALACE or the HALL
Or the EMPIRE when JOCK MILLER played Rob Roy?

Have you joukit o'er the 'tin' at MILLBURN tae get in
When WULLIE ROBB was goalie fur the Vale?
Did you spend a summer day jist dookin 'up the BAY'
And come home late wi some unlikely tale?

Did you walk with expectation, up by the old 'Plantation'
And cross the fields towards M^cLELLAN'S BRAE?
Did you whisper there together, as you sat among the heather
Sweet nothings at the closing of the day?

Have you heard the ghostly moan, as you passed the TAURY LOAN
Or the spooks at SPARROW CASTLE up BRAEHEID?
Have you seen a tinker waddin, up fornenst the MULL O' HADDEN
Where the noise they made would nearly wake the deid?

Did you ever cross CARMAN, wae some pieces and a pan
Or walk ower STANEY MULLEN to Ardmore?
Yet never seemed to tire, as you kenneled up a fire
And sampled CAURDROSS TEA doon by the shore?

Did you ever make a stop, at LECKIE'S barber's shop
And found that auld BOAB SCOTT was in the chair?
And heard him pour derision, on a 'cooncil withoot vision'
As Tam the barber tried to cut his hair?

Did you hire a bike frae TAIG, or go to GRANNY CRAIG
To buy her candy cheuchers in a poke?
Did you ever go to meet, some frien's in WULSON STREET
Where the smell o' gas wid nearly make you choke?

Do you remember when, you could buy your eggs from GLEN
And BAUCHOP'S wis the shop to get your stew?
And away afore the war, when they made the ARGYLL CAUR
Wae a TEA-HOOSE doon the HEATHER AVENUE?

Have you seen the shining brass, as the BOWL CARTS used to pass
Wi' names like METHVEN, MATHIESON or LANG?
Dae ye mind o' PAW GARGARRO, as he pushed his ice-cream barrow?
And the songs the wee MELODIAN MAN sang?

Have you ever heard a turn, at a concert up the BURN
Or seen the WUMMIN HOOSE at DILLICHIP?
Did you march behind the baun', wae a wee flag in your haun'
Up BANK STREET wae the CO-OPERATIVE TRIP?

Ye'll hae mind o' LEES' BAR, and DOCTOR CULLEN'S CAR
That banged its way around the neighbourhood?
Was there magic in the air, when you went to BALLOCH FAIR
And walked the WATTERSIDE by FISHERWOOD?

Wae Balloch choc-a-bloc, did you walk the old SLIP-DOCK
And felt like Blondin walking o'er the falls?
Did you find it quite entrancing, to go to SANNY'S dancing
Doon BANK STREET in the CO-OPERATIVE HALLS?

You'll hae mind o' ALLAN BAYNE, who delighted every wean
By makin' up wee rhymes aroon their name?
And you'll ken fine who ah'm meanin', when I mention PADDY KEENAN
And wee JECK ROBB the warden o' LINBRANE.

Mind ye, a' Vale folk are fly and they will all deny
That they came up the Clyde upon a bike.
But did TARZAN roam the hull, up above BONULL
And who was it shoved the doo frae aff the dyke?

Now if you've answered a' this series, o' sentimental queries
And understood my reminiscing tale
You know your way about, and you can say without a doubt
YOU'RE A NATIVE JEELY EATER FRAE THE VALE!

Dyehouse Blues

Back again from another hard day's graft
Trying to wash the smell from off my skin.
The stinks of the steamy dyehouse in the 'Craft'
Fight the scented soap and always win.

Day after day the poisoned air I breathe.
The soul destroying labour I endure
Watching the fuming liquors boil and seethe
Hellish brews like chalk and cow manure.

The drinking water often have I savoured,
Just one tin pail for all the workers where
I find the lukewarm water strongly flavoured
With shreds of chewed tobacco floating there!

Sometimes it's to the closets for a smoke,
A wooden seat with six holes in a row
Where we sit and share a Woodbine and a joke
While the stench comes up from six feet down below.

Starting out each day with youthful optimism
Which, within the hour, gives way to fear.
The soakings bring the nemesis of rheumatism
And thoughts of utter hopelessness appear.

Any small ambitions, lurking hopes
Conceived whilst youthful blood is running strong
Are buried in the wet cloth's writhing ropes
And bound for far Bombay or Chittagong.

I see the miles of cloth in wooden cases
Black stencilled clearly CANTON or SHANGHAI
Demanded by the Oriental races.
Romantic East? I shake my head and sigh.

What kind of people are they then, the buyers?
From what strange racial tree does their branch stem?
I know that they will think about the dyers
No more than we give any thought of them.

And yet I think, had I been born in Fife
In Lanarkshire, or somewhere on the Tyne,
Would I not be spending half my life
Deep in the dust or darkness of a mine?

Ach to hell. Tomorrow's another day.
Let me forget my worries and my fears.
For tonight's the night the 'Duke' is due to play
And I'll hear the *Creole Love Call* in my ears.

Random Recollections

(1980's)

It's always difficult somehow
For us to equate then and now
The times and places that we knew
Are ever changing old to new
Yet in our mind's eye pictures cling
As the passing years take wing
Just images but we can be sure
These memories always will endure:
The horses on the cobbles clop
To Jock McGinn's old blacksmith's shop
The Argyll Works producing cars
Cronin's, Lees' and Thompson's bars
Tammy Trotter's, Granny Craig's
Bikes for hire from Kinnon's, Taig's
Workers come from near and far
Down Craft Street to the U.T.R.
Quacks at the Fountain sell their cure
Tram cars rumbling to Dalmuir
Ower Sturlin' Brig to Levenbank
Sweet nothings whispered 'up the tank'
Wingate's Palace or 'The Hall'
Fitba' wae a tanner ball
Sweet Macallums from Gallone
Here comes Dan McGreggor's pony!
Rolling eggs doon Ritchie's hill
By Jimston dam and Haldane's Mill
Flames from the 'Foundry' blaze in the dark
The 'shows' arrive in Millburn Park.

Those happy summer days of yore
O'er Carman to Caurdross shore.
See us rinnin' hell for leather
The 'gemmy's' chased us from the 'heather'.
The summer days our joys enhancing
Then happy nights at 'Sanny's' dancing.
Among the 'Tank Wid's' verdant shade
Then dookin' in the Ferry Lade.

Yes, I have thoughts that ne'er grow stale
Of the Old Days in the Vale.

The Christie Park Burn

Born in the wilds of high CARMAN
From boggy spring and heather dale
A trickle that a hand could span
Begins its journey down the Vale.

Now thrusting through a mossy deep
Among the bracken fern it flushes
Then loupin' o'er a rocky steep
Now all but lost among the rushes.

Fed by other springs, it swells
Through a shady glen it flows
By peaty heath and woodland dells
Moving faster as it grows.

Bright, the merry gurgling burn
Splashes on its mazy way
Wi' many a jinking twist and turn,
Spurting, dashing, down the brae.

Through a gorge of sandstone red
By the Tank Woods ferny bower
Slipping o'er its rocky bed
Ever dropping lower, lower.

Now here's the burn we loved so well!
Each twist and turn we came to know.
Ah yes, the stories it could tell
Of childhood days so long ago.

T'was here we came when free from school
Oh, how this place our hearts beguiled
To paddle barefoot in the pool
A burn holds magic for a child!

Tho' oft our youthful pride was humbled
Our barefoot climb sometimes in vain
When, on the slippery slope we tumbled
And we were baptised once again!

The years have passed and, far from home
The emigrant looks back once more.
He hears the waters rush and foam
And sees the barefoot pals of yore.

With boyish fun and joyous shout
There's Matha, Johnny, Tam and Ben
Chasing up a three inch trout
Wi' Jock, the Tarzan of the glen.

Yae-Time

(The story of Auld Boab)

"Ah mind yae-time ", Auld Boab wid say
 Startin' oot tae tell a story.
 He never said 'Ah mind one day'
 But aye 'Yae-time ... in auld Kilmory'.

My, Boab could spin some awfu yarns.
 His stock of stories wus immense
 Learned in bothys, byres and barns
 And fu' o' bauldy earthy sense.

Whaur he cam frae, guidness kens.
 Ahint the ploo he spent his days
 Working hillside fermes and glens
 Content wi country life and ways.

Weel thocht o' at the fermes he wrocht.
 New claes he seldom ever bocht
 Never feenished – always 'lowsed'
 Always 'waulkened' never roused.

He talked about his cousins whiles
 "A' Boab Wulson's like masel"
 There was Boab o' Islay, Boab o' Kyles
 And baker Boab frae Motherwell.

He wore a black patch o'er one eye.
 If asked aboot it, he would sigh
 "Ah loast the sicht o't when a lad.
 Jist an accident ah had."

He made it plain (wha'er wid moot it)
 He didna want tae talk aboot it!
 At Balloch fair (the story goes)
 When Boab wis walkin' roon the 'shows',

An airgun pellet flying free
 Struck poor Boab in his left 'ee.
 Now, be this story truth or rumour
 It never spiled auld Boab's good humour.

And in the fields behin' the ploo
 He turned each furrow stracht and true.
 At plooin' matches he won prizes
 Cups and shields a' shapes and sizes.

A dab haun at the turnip thinin'
At cattle shows he aye kept winnin'
And wae his fermin' cronies later
He'd hae a wee drap o' 'the cratur'.

Noo, Boab's stravaigin' days are done
An' a' the ither Boabs are gone.
He stayed in his wee 'but and ben'
Fornest the auld mill up the glen.

But Boab's contentment was disturbed
His sense o' humour sorely curbed.
He viewed the rumours wae suspicion
That his hoose wis due for demolition.

T'was said the Coouncil wants it doon
Their agents would be calling soon
His fears, alas, proved all too true
They could not wait a year or two

An' maybe saved in other ways
This precious link with other days.
He lay beside his faithful setter
In his hand they found a letter.

Death pronounced – no questions posed
Natural causes diagnosed.

Now, if I pass those heavenly portals
To join the feather-winged immortals
In halls sublime.
Just let me sit where auld Boab chortles,
"Ah mind yae-time".

A Son Of The Rock

(A nostalgic tale)

On a bright summer day in Dumbarton
As the sun was going down,
On top of the Rock
An old man took stock
Of the changing face of the town.

He looked at the spread of the houses
As Bellsmyre came into his view,
And saw with surprise
The high flats' rise
O'er the town that he once knew.

Slowly his thoughts turned backwards
As he gazed on the scene below
To many a ploy
When he was a boy
In those days of long ago.

Ah, there was the school he attended
The Park where he used to play
The old Third Hole
Where he often stole
For a dook on a summer's day.

And, when the snow came in the Winter,
How he sledged down 'Binnies Brae'.
The walks he would take
To the mill up Garshake
And the fun with his pals on the way.

Then doon the East Shore at the 'Dooky'
Where they kenneled a fire on the saun'.
Or with tinny at hip
To the Penny Bank Trip
They went marching behind the baun'.

How they studied the sweetie shop windows
At Mary Baker's shop.
Or toffee wheels
At Minnie Steele's
And 'Candy' Stewart's rock.

Of fitba games doon at the Phoenix
Alongside the auld foundry wa'
Where a net-boy afloat
In an auld rowing boat
Was ready to rescue the ba'.

In his mind's eye he pictured a sign board,
Through misty memories hazy,
On a gable end
In West Bridgend
'A corner for the lazy'.

There were the boys of 'Wee Dublin'
Who met at that hallowed spot.
Wae wee Tam an' Ben
Frae Ship Terrace Pen
And Paddy frae Henryshott.

Oh, many the names he remembered
From Spion Kop oot tae Burnside
But best known of all
Was Mick McFall
Whose name spread far and wide.

Up the Bumble Stairs to the Havoc
To the games played doon at the shore
Or that fairyland
Called Maryland
Exciting to explore.

The days he spectated at 'Boagheid'
Supporting the Son's with a will.
It was worth the expense
To see the defence
Of Miller, McGrory and Till.

When the rowing club held their regatta
And a' the toon made it their day
Or the evening's entrancing
At Sam Morgan's dancing
As the twenties roared away!

The old man's eyes grew misty
As he looked down at Denny's old dock.
And they filled with tears
Remembering the years
He spent as a Son of the Rock.

On Seeing an Old Army Photo

(Of Jim Lindop)

Ah, Lindop, when the sun at dawn
Burned down upon the bloody saun'
And signs appeared on every haun'
Of Rommel, rolling rapidly.

Pitched into this bloody squalor
His face scarred lost it's 'silkworks' pallor
Proclaims to all unconscious valour
From Vale to Northern Africa.

Tho' now he's far 'beyond the pale'
The desert life has told its tale
His thoughts drift homewards to the Vale
And minstrels, making merriment.

There's thoughts of that unhappy queue
He stood in at the Vale 'Burroo'
And then: "vun viskey glass red two"
And days with Emile Zollinger.

Though now his shadow grows not less
These photographs in battledress
Remind him of a time – ah yes,
A time of camaraderie.

The Haldane Serenade

(for the Balloch Pensioners)

There used to be a place ca'd Mull o' Hadden.
 A quiet wee spot it was in days of yore.
 Then the 'Cooncil' had a dream
 And they built a housing scheme
 But the Haldane's no the 'Hadden' anymore.

*When the moon is shining bright along the 'Bywash',
 In the 'Dooky' you can hear the weans at play
 While the ice-cream vans ring out their jingle jangle
 As they circle roon the Haldane every day.*

Now the Haldane folk are really very friendly.
 You will see them any day doon in the 'Store'.
 They will always make a stop at Biglies paper shop
 But the Haldane's no the 'Hadden' any more.

When the moon is ...

The Haldane O.A.P.s meet in the 'Centre'.
 On concert days they turn oot by the score.
 They enjoy themselves a treat, an' a' their friens they meet
 But the Haldane's no' the 'Hadden' any more.

When the moon is ...

Down Talbot Road the veterans are boolin'
 Every day frae two tae hauf past four.
 There's dominoes and crib and bags o' womens' 'lib'
 But the Haldane's no' the 'Hadden' any more.

When the moon is ...

At the bus stops there the Haldane folk are waiting.
 They've stood so long they're frozen to the core
 A' staunin' in the rain fur the bus is late again
 But the Haldane's no' the 'Hadden' any more.

When the moon is ...

Aye there used to be a place c'ad Mull o' Hadden
 A peaceful spot it wis in days of yore
 But the council had a dream and built a housing scheme
 And the Haldane it will be for evermore!

The Pensioners' Song

(For the Balloch O.A.P.s)

We're a' just O.A.P.s
 Frae the Haldane if you please
 Enjoying our retirement, one and all.
 We're as cheery as can be
 From the rat race we are free
 And that is why we meet in this wee hall.
 We like to hear a singer
 Then we can go our `dinger'
 By joining in the choruses we know
 An' when we get a `scaldy'
 We gie the Scots tunes laldy,
 For that's the kind that gies oor herts a glow.

We are the Pensioners frae Haldane.

We are the Balloch busy bees.

*Wi' a biscuit and a cup, we keep our spirits up,
 For we are the Haldane O.A.P.s.*

We never mind the weather
 As we enjoy a blether
 And find each other pleasant company.
 We discuss the latest news
 And chase away the `blues'
 As we enjoy our welcome cups of tea.
 We try, on this occasion,
 To forget about inflation
 And the prices that keep rising every day
 But we have no objection
 to put in a wee `collection'
 For every little helps to pay our way.

We are the Pensioners frae Haldane ...

And, efter a' the waffle,
 We haud oor monthly raffle
 And listen for our number comin' oot.
 You'll hear somebody sayin'
 "Oh Goad no HUR again
 She's very lucky that yin, there's nae doot."
 And when oor haun's we jine
 To sing oor Auld Lang Syne.
 We all say cheerio an' see you soon.
 And be it sun or rain
 We'll a' be back again
 When the Pensioners' next meeting day comes roon.

We are the Pensioners frae Haldane ...

Roon Aboot The Vale - A Party Piece

(fill in as suitable) (1931)

In Hollywood the other day, the town was filled with joy
 They started out to make a film, about the bold Rob Roy
 The chief director shouted out, "can anybody guess
 Where this old guy McGregor lived" and someone shouted, "Yes!"

*"I think he came frae roon aboot the Vale.
 "I'm sure he came frae roon aboot the Vale.
 "I was at his waddin,
 "When he stayed in Mull o' Hadden.
 "He was one of the boys frae roon aboot the Vale."*

Now [*name*] as a scholar at the school was never bright.
 The teacher said [*he*] never seemed to answer questions right.
 And when one day, at history, the angry teacher said,
 "From where did Julius Caesar come?"
 Poor [*name*] shook [*his*] head,

*"Oh, ah think he came from roon aboot the Vale.
 "Oh, ah'm sure he came frae roon aboot the Vale.
 "He came a' the way frae Rome to paint the Argyll dome.
 "He was one of the boys frae roon aboot the Vale."*

Roon About The Vale - A Party piece (2)

[name] got his holiday and went to Aberdeen.
 He'd heard so much about the place but there he'd never been.
 He clicked a nice young lady there as soon as he went out
 But then a crowd o' weans went by and they began to shout,
 "He's a merrit man frae roon about theVale!
 "He's a merrit man frae roon about the Vale!
 "Aye and we know whit he's wantin,
 "We knew him in the Rantin.
 "He's one of the boys frae roon about the Vale."

In Glesca there last Hogmanay I met [two lads] I knew,
 Staunin' at the Central Station very nearly fu'.
 Says I, "Where are ye gaun ma [lads]? It's time that you were hame."
 "Oh that's all right, old pal, thank ye jist the same.
 "We're [two] of the [lads] frae roon about the Vale
 "We're [two] of the [lads] frae roon about the Vale
 "If I'm drunk ma wife gets crabbit.
 "Oh, she'll skin me like a rabbit.
 "I'm one of the lads frae roon about the Vale."

Noo Bella wis the dochter o' a fermer oot in Fife
 But nae young men about the place wid hae her for a wife.
 But very soon the news went roon that Bella was tae wed
 And, when they asked her whaur he cam' frae, Bella shyly said,
 "Oh he's one of the lads frae roon about the Vale.
 "[name] frae roon about the Vale.
 "Some folk think it's tragic
 "But ah jist think he's magic.
 "He's one of the boys frae roon about the Vale."

He Pits Oot Fires

(an adaptation)

A great wee lad wis Jock McDade
The pride o' the local fire brigade
Armed wae a hose an axe and a spade
He pits oot fires!

Every call wee Jock obeyed
Did his duty unafraid
As on the flames his hose he sprayed
He pits oot fires!

He went to a fire at a pub quite near
And staggered hame when all was clear
Wae awfa hot whisky and very warm beer
He pits oot fires!

His wife's as bad as you'll agree
She'll no let him smoke in the hoose ye see
She makes it plain it's no just he
Can pit oot fires!

Some nights he'd stay in the pub quite late
And wander home in quite a state
Then throw pails o' watter into the grate
He pits oot fires!

He struck a match in the dark one night
It landed in a barrel of dynamite
He's no here noo but it's quite a' right
He pits oot fires!

The Vale was never used to such a state of things before

The Vale is no the place it used to be in days of yore.
There's lots of empty spaces where the hooses were before.
Nae Co-operative grocers noo. its goodbye to the Store.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

It used to be a busy place. They came frae near and far
To work doon in Dalmonach there, or in the U.T.R.
The shops and pubs were busy. They were crowded to the door.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

The Vale had many fitba' players, famous in their day
Bob McDermid, Wullie Mills, and Riddy Broonan tae
And many a smashing goal ah've seen Big Angie Urquhart score.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

We've got a new toon centre noo. Yet some folk start tae moan.
They think that Mitchell Street wis better wae the Taury Loan
Where you wid fin' big Jock McGinn at his smiddy door.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

They've built fly-over bridges noo. Jist why, ah canny tell.
Where they go, it's hard to know. The brigs don't know thersel!
If you fancy mountain climbing tho', ye couldn'y ask for more.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

Bonhill's braes are different noo, wae hooses everywhere
There's Ladyton and Nobleston, Pappert and O'Hare
The cuckoo disnae cry nae mer; the bull it disnae roar.
Oh the Vale was never used to such a state of things before!

Bonull Yesterday

Bonhill noo is no the place it wis in days of yore
 There's lots o' empty spaces noo, where hooses were before.
 Near a' the shops are missin' noo. They've boarded up the 'store'.
 Bonull was never used to such a thing before.

Ah can mind it used tae be a busy place indeed
 Where Richardson and Shearer tae, used to bake their breid
 Their roll boys used to sell their wares right frae door to door
 Oh Bonull wis never used tae such a thing before.

There wis lots o' life about the place and plenty folks about
 It wis quite a sight to see Dalmonach coming oot
 The shops and pubs were busy then, a' crowded to the door
 Bonull wis never used to such a state of things before.

Bonhill had many fitba' players famous in their day
 Georde, Bunty, Wullie Mills and Riddy Broonin tae
 And mony a smashing goal I've seen big Angie Urquart score
 Oh Bonull wis never used to such a state of things before.

Tarzan wis the gemmy then, a strong man frae the 'hull'
 He frightened a' the hard men when he visited the 'Bull'
 An' a mighty man wis Arthur Miller at his smiddy door
 Oh Bonull wis never used tae such a thing before.

There used to be excitement frae Sandbank tae Dillichip
 Wae everybody wantin' tickets fur Dalmonach Trip
 Up the hall or in the Bull they're sellin' by the score
 Bonull wis never used tae such a thing before.

At the Ferr they used to hae a concert up the burn
 An' a' the local singers there hud tae dae a 'turn'
 As the night wore on there used tae be a great uproar
 Oh Bonull wis never used tae such a thing before.

Ah heard a man recitin' there – fu' as ony wulk
 Whatever he'd been drinkin' wisnae Wattie McCaskell's milk
 He finished his turn – fell in the burn and shouted out Encore!
 Oh Bonull wis never used tae such a thing before.

The Booler

(no reference intended)

(recited at a Bowling club 1986/7)

I'm one o' the boolers frae Balloch
A veteran booler am I
I play very keen
When I'm on the green
Especially if it's a TIE!

Oot there on the green I'm a terror
On the forehaun or the back
Just gie me a sight,
Of that jiggy so white
And into the ditch goes the jack!

When my skip issues instructions
To obey them, I always contrive
I'll draw a nice chalker
and then lay down a blocker
But I love when he asks me to drive!

Some say I am just a pot hunter
As I win cups and trophies galore
I've won lots of prizes
Of all shapes and sizes
But I'm always looking for more.

I've piles o' these trophies collected
I've got them all over the place
In gilt coloured plastic -
Some o' them drastic
Wi' a wee dod o' marble at the base.

When playing I dress very smartly
For I know that quality tells
I'm as sharp as a razor
Jist look at ma blazer
And the medals upon my lapels!

These badges make me feel important
When I take my place on the rink
Some call me a chancer -
A wee Heilan dancer -
But I don't care what ither folk think.

They might guess I've won them at boolin
They might even think I'm a pro
If you've got any sperr
I could do wi some mer
For I love to put on a show!

When I enter some big competition
I endeavour to conquer the heights
I know my bool should
Be called a 'nice wood'
When I'm a' dressed up in my 'whites'.

Sometimes I dream I am booling
When lying in bed in the dark
I play like a giant
And bate David Bryant
And Wullie Wood tae, in Queens Park.

But ach, ye a' know I'm just kidding
And fine ah know you're nae fools.
So it's "good game ma frien"
When leavin' the green
Efter a grand game of bools.

So here's to the boolin' and boolers
And, whether you're winning or not,
There's nae ither game
That's just quite the same
Fur, boolin's the best o' the lot!

Caught (Turkey) Red Handed

(Based on an incident which happened in the British Silk Dyeworks, Balloch in February 1937)

T'was just six o'clock in the morning
As dawn was beginning to peep
In the dyehouse the wheels started turning
When most other folks were asleep.

Tim Greig had come in very early
And his dye-box was nearing the boil
As the rest of the place seemed deserted
Tim thought he would snaffle some 'oil'.

So, grabbing a pail which lay handy
He stole down to Bob Sharp's domain.
Thought he, 'this is like stealing candy
Off some poor wee innocent wean'.

So, filling the pail, he absconded.
There was no one around there to see
And he smiled to himself as he muttered
"Harry Ball has got nothing on me!"

An hour or two later that morning
When Bob Sharp arrived to his toil
He glanced at his oil tub and shouted
"Some bugger's been stealing my oil!" *

He noticed some oil drips around him
(There had been quite a leak in that pail)
His eagle eye traced the drops futher
He was hot on the T.R.O. trail.

The trail led him right through the 'star-room'
And straight to the 'jigs' there it led
Right up to Tim's feet then he traced it
"Aha, you're the culprit" Bob said!

"I charge you with stealing my oil, sir
"There's no one else here it could be
"I've traced it right back from my tub there
"There's the marks, as you plainly can see."

* Turkey Red Oil: an expensive item used in the dyeing trade

"Oh no" said Tim Greig very boldly
"That charge, Bob, I stoutly deny
"You really must have been mistaken
"For I have a good alibi"

"You're a liar" cried Bob, "You're a falsehood
"But for this you clearly shall pay
"And be served out short measure for life now
"For you're on the black books from today"

That is the end of the tale, friends
The moral is for you to choose
But, should you think of doing the same, then
Be careful to hide all the clues!

Blue 20

(Another dyehouse day) (May 1927)

Sometimes I wonder why I stand this dyehouse racket
Day after day.
And never think of putting on my jacket
And going away.

Hour after hour mid steamy heat I breathe
The poisoned air.
Watching the fuming liquors boil and seethe
I sweat and swear.

Starting out each morning with sincere
And youthful optimism.
Soon giving way to hopelessness and fear,
Nemesis rheumatism.

And yet, had I been born somewhere in Fife
Or on the Tyne,
Might I not now be spending half my life
Deep down a mine?

Low in some dark and murky corner curled
In filthy squalor
Proclaiming to a careless and so selfish world
Unconscious valour.

And yet, methinks, were I not so employed
I would not treasure
Half so much those golden hours enjoyed
Pursuing pleasure?

Those sunny days among the glens and hills
Of Mona's Isle
Those nights of stars and music, joys and thrills
Make all worth while!

A Renton Reminiscence

(Verses written by request for Rev James Currie of Millburn church as a Renton Quiz for a fund raising campaign)

T'was a warm summer evening in Renton
At the close of a bright sunny day
As an old man went with his grandson
For a walk up McLellan's Brae.

Up at Black Castle they rested
And gazed on the valley below
While the old man spoke of his boyhood
In the Renton of long, long ago.

Of the days when he lived in the Back Street
And the wonderful sights that he saw
Of the Whirly Close and the School Green
And the smiddy up by the 'Rid Raw'.

Of how the 'Big Wids' was his playground
When from the school he was free
With a knife in his pocket for cutting
His name on the big 'Lady Tree'.

Of how, with his 'Setturday Penny',
He'd spend it on candy or cheughs
And how, in the hot days of summer
He'd go for a 'dook' at the 'Bucks'.

Along Leven's banks he would wander
With his pals or just on his own
And he knew every bit of the river
From the Howgate to 'Trummel's Loan'.

When the school was closed for the summer,
He would play from morning to dark
Sometimes it was up at the 'Summer Seat'
Or doon at the 'Penny Park'.

He spoke of the picnics at Cardross
And the walk o'er Carman coming back,
With his tea-pan hung from his shoulder
And a big bag o' wulks on his back.

Sometimes it was up by the Cisker Road
Past the old quarry and then
They'd make a wee stop at the 'Froggy Burn'
By the top of the 'Poachy Glen'.

Of the fitba' games down at the Tontine
And how the old Renton could play.
He'd say, "Oh fur a Dunky Ritchie noo
Or a Johnny Atherlay!"

At last the old man was silent.
Said the boy, " Oh, you must have had fun"
And the grandfather smiled as he answered,
"Aye. That was my Renton, son."

The Babcock's Folk

(a fun ode - recited at a Babcock's dinner 1948)

Oh Babcock's is a famous place
It's known far and wide
A holiday camp for Vale men
On the bonny banks o' Clyde
Wher' jeely eaters always find
An ever open door.
Oh the Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Now in this famous factory
In case you do not know
They turn oot miles and miles of tubes
Goad knows where they go!
Hoarded up there in Dalmuir
They've thousand in the store.
Oh the Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Babcock's too have mighty men
And some are quite well paid
If Tubal Cain was a man of might
Whit about Joe McQuade?
I've heard it said he's 'swung the lead'
For 30 years or more.
Oh Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Among the ranks there's Alec Banks,
What a man Ha Ha!
When he was oot in Persia
He used to know the Shah.
The Shah gave him a bottle of gin
And the sash his father wore.
The Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Under a spreading chestnut tree
The smith he plied his trade
There's nothing so green about Gordon McKeen
The man o' the 'Mutual Aid'.
And you can go to Wullie Robertson
If your back gets sore.
Oh the Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Cameron and Shaw the furnaces blaw
There's sweat upon their cuffs
There's nae mair slacking wae Sanny McCracken
Shouting, "Come on the Buffs"
And poor Nat Paton thinks that makin
Money is just a bore.
Oh the Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

In Mosey Mitchell's garden
There's a great array of plants
He's now in bed 'cos somebody said
He couldn'y grow chrysants!
Even Jack Hosie's are bigger than Mosey's
His are six feet four.
Oh the Babcock's folk were never used to such a thing before!

Now if you try the Football pools
And never win a thing
Get on to Alister Nisbet
He's the permutation king
He'll write you out a nine-by-nine
That's guaranteed to score.
Oh the Babcock folk were never used to such a thing before!

Dreaming of the Beautiful Vale

(1933) (Tune - Down and Out Blues)

Now after all, you know the world is small
And no matter where you travel, fly or sail
Anywhere you go,
You'll find someone you know
Dreaming of the beautiful Vale.

If you go north, if you go east or south
Or follow the lonely Western trail
You can travel anywhere,
You'll find somebody there
Dreaming of the Beautiful Vale.

Now there's some who may have reached success
In some land so far away across the foam
And there's some who are feeling lonely
Thinking of their old home.
They bring to mind
All they have left behind
The ones they love - a mother old and frail
The things they used to do
It all comes back anew.
Dreaming of the Beautiful Vale
(The Vale of Leven)
Dreaming of the Beautiful Vale!

The Ghost o' Rabbie

Yae nicht, while walking up the glen
 It wisna' late, just efter ten
 Of Burns Night I was thinking when –
 It's hard to tell
 A ghostly figure I saw then
 T'was Rab himsel!

His shadowy arms he held outspread
 Whilst I stood shakin' – feet like lead
 Then trying to be brave I said
 "Is this a joke?"
 The ghostly figure shook his head
 And then – he spoke

Each Janwar' when the year is wee
 It's unco pleasant I'll agree
 Tae think ye still remember me
 As 'Bard Immortal'
 But – whiles – sae serious can ye be
 It gars me chortle.

Then folk o' high and low degree
 Forgaither aye wi' muckle glee
 When verse of mine is quoted free
 And speeches wrocht on
 And notions ye ascribe tae me
 I never thocht on!

Noo, could I jine ye on the nicht
 I'd gie ye sangs and stories bricht
 And hae a wee dram if I micht
 When fu' your glasses
 Then syne ye'd find me – aye you're richt –
 Among the lasses!

Could I but span twa hunner year
 An dress up in the latest gear
 In stone washed jeans I wid appear
 An' go romancin'
 Wi a' the bonny lassies here
 At disco dancin'.

There's just one thing that I maun say,
 Tak' heed afore I fade away,
 Aye, talk aboot me if you may
 Be't truth or rumour
 As lang as it is leavened wae
 A sense of humour.

Then all was silent as before
 The ghostly figure was no more
 I turned and doon the glen I tore
 Een starin' wide
 Until I reached my ain front door
 And dashed inside.

Wi' that dear friens, I'll tak my leave,
 My story you may disbelieve
 I hav'na meant you tae deceive
 I widna' dare
 But gang ye up the glen at eve
 BEWARE – BEWARE!

(Short version – winner of Daily Record Burns contest)

When folk o' high and low degree
 Foregether aye wi muckle glee
 And fervent toasts are raised to he
 The BARD IMMORTAL.
 Och whiles, sae serious can ye be
 It gars me chortle.
 Wi' weel wrocht speeches I'll agree
 E'en verses when misquoted free
 Mix Burns the man wi barley bree
 Be't truth or rumour
 If, Burns like they are leavened wi'
 A SENSE o' HUMOUR.

Vive McGonagall

(The following verses were entered and was the winner in a 'M^cGonagall' contest in the Daily Record. The contest was inspired by the news that business man William Smith, whose Dundee firm publishes M^cGonagall's work, is flying to Peking to see about having M^cGonagall's poems translated into Chinese!)

Oh hail the that great country known
 as China
Where the inhabitants eat rice but do
 not care for semolina
Where winter snow lies on every
 temple
Likewise every pagoda
All glistening like the finest washing
 soda
And, though it is some distance from
 Dundee
My fame has reached there – as you
 no doubt will very soon see
For my publisher is going to a place
 called Peking
Where my works will be translated
 into Chinese – a most unusual thing
And I myself will go there when I
 receive the call
To deliver an ode on China's great
 wall
While the populace on their knees
 most respectfully will fall
To praise the name of the great
 William M^cGonagall!

Sharing

By the fireside we sit
From our evening walk
Warmth and contentment
Glow:- we rest and talk
Sharing our thoughts
Often at variance
Sharing our life
And the common experience.

From My Bedroom Window

Grey day
Dreich, grey day
Through the window
Grey hills merge with grey sky ...

Grey gulls wail despairingly
On the wet rooftops
Grey clothes dying on a line
Limp and motionless
Off white, empty coverings
Ghosts in a grey mirk ...

Smirring rain falls softly
Through the grey haze
Suddenly voices break the silence
"A good day fur Glesca" someone says!

Eyes That See Not

(Published in Millgate July 1938)

Eyes that see not, why should they see?
While women flee, and children die
With eyes of terror turned above
Where men have copied birds, and fly.

Ears that hear not, why should they hear?
While men talk peace, yet start to fight
And ether waves, vibrating,
Tell us daily, "Might is Right."

Lips that speak not, why should they speak?
While men are deaf and give no heed
To those who teach humanity
And silent are while others bleed.

Minds that think not – could they but think
And know they have a choice at least
Through sense and mind to raise their lives
A little higher than the beast.

Parting Thoughts - A Tribute to Veronica

Spawned from 'Quality of Life' and then
 A group foregatherers – nine or ten
 All doughty wielders of the pen
 And tutored by VERONICA.

Every fortnight they compose
 Epic poems and deathless prose
 And criticise in terms verbose
 Assisted by VERONICA.

The shafts oftimes are sharp and biting
 The cut and thrust their minds delighting
 United in 'CREATIVE WRITING'
 And led by our VERONICA.

No subject here, a 'hot potato'
 Signs or sex or line from CATO
 Acknowledging EUTERPE and ERATO
 Encouraged by VERONICA.

John is forthright to the core
 Bill is high on ancient lore
 The velvet voice of Liz Gartshore
 Intrigues us all, VERONICA.

From doubtful straw you've made some bricks
 Firm guided your unruly chicks
 In accents 'jolly hockey sticks'
 And flashing smile, VERONICA!

Now news has come – a dismal story
 Our happy band has lost its glory
 Enticed away by 'Terpsicore'
 Is our dear VERONICA!

Gone to Hyndlands closes 'wally'
 Gone to join the Scottish Ballet
 No more to meet down in the 'Galley'
 Farewell to you, VERONICA!

Oh MILTON, thou hast lost a treasure!
 Who spread such happiness and pleasure
 And taught us metre, rhyme and measure
Ave et Vale, VERONICA.

Thoughts in a Garden

Today I stood in a cottage garden
At the very spot where I once laid
My boyish head upon the grass
And looked through a mass of orange flowers
To where the branches of an apple tree
Seemed fixed against a bright blue sky
Ah, the feeling of peace I knew
And the beauty I could not understand!
The warmth of a June sun on my face
The lazy buzz of insects heard
The heavy scent of flowers inhaled
All remembered now in hazy thoughts
Impossible to repeat.

The grass still grows so green up there
But the apple tree has long since fallen
And the brilliant orange flowers are gone
The blueness of the sky remains
The summer sun is welcomed now
By cold old bones and thinning blood
But that peace I cannot find again
My thoughts are on a downward flow
As a landing aeroplane
Leaves the higher brighter sky
And plunges through the wreathing cloud
Into the rain of reality below.

Now I feel that rain – and sigh
The grass is just a drying green
As it was in that days fleeting time
When I felt such peace and beauty there
That only comes when we are young

Interlude

(Sept 1936)

I was sitting one day by the window
Gazing out on the busy street
And feeling quite sorry for all those folk
Who were out in the cold wet sleet.

And then I saw her passing by
A girl with the sun in her face
To look so cheerful on such a day
Somehow seemed out of place.

Just then an angry gust of wind
Rose with a howling din
Below the girl's umbrella swirled
And blew it outside-in.

I watched her pretty rain washed face
To see if she felt riled
But she only looked at the broken gamp
Then shook her curls and smiled.

Then suddenly glancing straight at me
She caught me by surprise
And I was gazing straight into
A pair of laughing eyes.

Today as I sit by the window
A little girl passes by
She waves her hand as she sees me
And I see the shine in her eye.

Her eyes are just like those others
As I wave back it makes me feel glad
For her mother is the girl with the sunny smile
And the little girl calls me her Dad..

Oh Mona!

(1936)

There's a spot where girls go gay
In a free and easy way
You ought to go there someday if you can.
When they've left their work behind them
In their thousands there you'll find them.
And they call this little spot the Isle of Man!

There are girls both shy and coy
But there're out to get a boy
As they lie out in the sun to get a tan.
In the evening they go dancing
You'll find them all romancing.
Yet they call this little place the 'Isle of Man'.

See those Burnley girls in shorts
With their saucy quick retorts
To get a boy from Scotland is their plan.
Aye, they come here every year
From the whole of 'Lancasheer'.
Yet they call this heavenly place the Isle of Man.

Should the morning turn oot damp
Then you'll find them at the 'camp'
Looking for a Tommy, Dick or Dan.
Watch them 'Getting on their skates'
As they look around for dates .
Oh they call this lovely place the Isle of Man.

Oh you've got to come down here
To see the girls go 'On the beer'
At the Derby Castle bars they find no ban.
Do not wonder what they mean
Why Florrie Forde's their queen.
And they call this little place the Isle of MAN!

Helensburgh Holiday 1916 Style

ANDREW STEWART

The train roared and panted its way through the tunnel at Dalreoch, the sulphurous smoke wreathing past the closed windows. Silent, and not a little apprehensive, I sat in the corner gazing out into the void.

“Will this never end?” I thought as a feeling of claustrophobia made me close my eyes. At last the engine noise changed perceptibly and opening my eyes again I saw a flicker of daylight.

I could make out the sheer walls of a cutting through the smoke then, quite suddenly, we were in daylight again with green fields, blue skies and sun sparking across the water. It reminded me of one of those transformation scenes I had seen in a pantomime. Someone opened a window and, immediately, fresh air with a slight salt-water tang filled the carriage. It seemed to act like a tonic to the passengers who smiled and began to talk to each other.

The year was 1916. I had just passed my eleventh birthday and was on my way to spend a holiday with an aunt in Helensburgh. A virulent type of scarlet fever had left me not a little ‘wabbit’ so it was decided that a week or two in Helensburgh would be just what the doctor ordered.

The train stopped at Cardross and I could see groups of people picnicking on the shore. The pungent smell of seaweed mingled with the wood smoke from their fires came drifting into the carriage.

On again, past Ardmore, looking dark and mysterious on its wooded peninsula, to Craigendoran where all was bustle as passengers alighted for the steamers.

I could see two steamers at the pier. Their funnels were red with a white band and a black top. Someone said that one was the ‘Talisman’ and the other the ‘Lucy Ashton’.

At last the train drew into Helensburgh and I was met at the station by my aunt and my two cousins. Mary was a year or two younger than I and David was still in his pram. Soon we were at the house in James Street where my aunt lived.

ADULT AFFAIR

My uncle, like most of the men at that time, was in the army. Although we knew all about the war – the newspapers’ placards informed us daily of “Heavy losses on the Somme” or “Bloody fighting near Soissons” – it didn’t affect us too deeply or perhaps we just did not allow it to. After all the war was an adult affair.

I soon found pals in Helensburgh. That very day I was playing on the swings on James Street with them as if I had known them all my life. I can still remember their names.

There was Ada and Tom Sinclair, Bella Rennie, Alec Murray, and Cathie McKenzie. We had a great time together.

The swings were suspended not on chains, but on steel rods, which made standing on the seats an easy ploy. I spent a lot of time on these swings, so much that I eventually made myself violently sick and gave myself a life-long allergy to swings of any sort.

I remember the girls being very fond of 'Pot'. I hasten to add that 'Pot' was a ball game played on chalked out 'beds' on the pavement.

Peever too was popular along with the other perennial favourites like Tig, Hi-spy, Release, and Kick the can.

We spent hours on the beach of course. The girls made little shops in the sands while we paddled about and pretended not to be interested. Eventually however, we were scouring the sands looking for 'money' at the girls' request. This currency consisted of small sea-washed pieces of china or crockery, blue pieces being coppers and the white bits became silver.

The boys also procured, under protest, goods to stock the shops. Dried seaweed became vegetables, while stones of suitable shape and colour appeared as potatoes, tomatoes, apples, oranges, sweets and almost anything imaginable. The law of supply and demand was very much in operation here! To the childhood imagination anything is possible!

SHORE PICNICS

If the weather was suitable, we made an expedition to Craigendoran where we donned bathing gear and swam at the old jetty. Afterwards, we kindled a fire and picnicked on the shore.

We went out to see the steamers of course, The Marmion, Waverley, and Kenilworth were away on war service, but the Talisman and Dandie Dinmont were there along with the Lucy Ashton.

One day we were taken for a sail on the Talisman to Dunoon. Another trip we had was to Garelochhead on the 'Lucy'. As the steamer called at Rhu, Rosneath, Clynder, Shandon, Rahane Ferry and Mambeg the return trip to Garelochhead was a long drawn out affair.

I bought hooks and line and tried fishing at the end of the pier but all I caught was a crab now and then. The fishing nets which festooned the railings along the pier seemed to give the place a touch of atmosphere I thought, although I never saw any catch being landed. Maybe I was never there early enough.

I soon learned that West Clyde Street was always referred to as the 'Front' and I wondered why most of the shops were painted black with gold sign writing.

Another thing I learned was that the dogs' water bowls placed strategically outside the shop were not there primarily to assuage the doggy thirst.

We played football in the public park and quenched our thirst with lemonade from Reid's 'Lily Springs' in James Street.

ROMANTIC STUFF

Often we listened to the Pierrots at the bandstand opposite the Imperial Hotel. I can almost hear them singing the chorus of "Calais, Calais, where I would like to be, just across the sea from Do-ver".

Two other favourites we heard there were "Moonlight Bay" and "Who were you with last night?" All good romantic stuff!

On Saturdays we all went to the Cine House in John Street. The admission was one penny and we were armed with bags of sweets. Sweets were a problem with the scarcity of sugar and we bought toffee at Eman's which wasn't the famous Helensburgh variety by any means! However, we found one wee shop where home made milk chocolate could be got. As the chocolate had evidently been poured into cocoa tin lids as moulds, it bore the name Cadbury or Fry and it tasted marvellous. Pure ambrosia, in fact!

EXPLORING

On Sunday afternoons we went for walks. We walked along to Kidston Park and looked across at the training ship 'Empress'. She had a rather sombre appearance as she lay at anchor there with her black and white hull, bare rigging and no sign of life aboard except maybe a whiff of smoke from the galley chimney.

Perhaps it was the stories we heard about bad boys being sent to the ship which caused us to look on it with some uneasiness!

Sometimes we walked up the hill, and along the Highland Railway to Rhu - or Row as it was spelled in those days.

We discovered the Highlandman's Road and the Old Luss Road.

We explored Hermitage Park, drank at the Hermit's Well and examined the flywheel of the Comet. We listened to the bands playing in the old rustic bandstand in the park. During this time Hermitage House in the park was fence off and was used as a military hospital.

We often visited the station. What a wonderful place it was for us! Apart from the engines, there were a variety of amusements there.

There was the cricket machine, where you put in a penny and automated the batsman by means of two levers. There was also a football game on the same lines.

There was a rather mysterious machine called the Gypsy but the favourite was the name plate machine where, for a penny, you could stamp out your name in raised letters on an aluminium strip. Great fun!

And it was at the station that, bronzed and fit again, I bade goodbye to my young friends when the time came for me to go home again. We had had a wonderful time together, and it had been a holiday to remember. When the train drew out and I was well on my way, I could still hear their cries of farewell ringing in my ears.

As published in: COUNTY REPORTER

With the Waverley to Rothesay

By ANDREW STEWART

THE announcement that there may be no more steamer sailings from Craighendran made me very sad. It may be, as they say, a sign of the times, something which was inevitable, yet, when I think of the pleasure and excitement once engendered by the prospect of a sail on what has been described as 'one of the most beautiful inland seas in the world' I realise that one more of life's pleasures has disappeared for me at least.

For Vale and Dumbarton folks a sail on the Clyde was once a must. Note, they did not go 'doon the watter', that pleasure was for Glasgow folks sailing from the Broomielaw. No, they 'went for a sail' to Dunoon, Rothesay or further down the Firth.

As a boy I can remember the train journey from Dumbarton, the sudden transformation from the dark smokey Dalreoch tunnel to the sight of green fields, blue skies and sunlit water. Train windows would be lowered and the pungent smell of sea-weed — we called it the salt water smell — would enter the carriage.

As Craighendran drew near I would peer out the windows to see if I could recognise any of the steamers at the pier. Would our steamer be the Waverley? I hoped it would. Wasn't she the fastest paddle steamer of the lot, able to do 19½ knots, even beating the new Jeanie Deans for speed?

Then it was out of the train and a dash down to the pier. Ah, there was the Talisman, Marmion, Kenilworth and yes, it WAS the Waverley and it was OUR steamer!

On board and the adults looked for a suitable seat — that was the least of my worries — to sit down was the last thing I wanted to do. Soon the gangways were lifted and the Waverley slowly paddled out stern first in a wide arc. A pause, then it was full ahead with the paddles churning the water into a creamy foam.

Hardly had we got under way when the bell would ring from the galley signifying that the dining room was open for business.

As the red, white and black funneled Waverley ploughed through the water with her own peculiar leaping motion, the aroma of food cooking in the galley mingled with the smell of hot oil from the engines was wafted from below. Once experienced, who can forget that smell of North British promise?

For a boy there was so much to see on a steamer trip. The pounding engines fascinated, and if the engineer so much as nodded to me my day was made. Then I would make my way forward to watch the sharp bow cleaving through the water.

Another N.B. steamer appears. It is the Lucy Ashton coming from Princes Pier, Greenock with a plume of black smoke pouring from her funnel.

The Lucy was the first steamer I had sailed in and I still remembered that leisurely trip up the Gareloch calling at Helensburgh, Rhu (or Row as it then was), Rosneath, Clynder, Shandon, Rahane and Mambeg to Garelochhead.

Soon we are approaching Gourock pier where all is hustle and bustle and crowds of passengers come aboard. Then we are off again for Kirn and Dunoon with the galley bell ringing merrily once more.

At Dunoon a turbine steamer the Duchess of Hamilton made a lovely picture as she glided effortlessly from the pier.

I liked the turbines, and once a year my pal and I saved up and did the Campbeltown trip with the Queen Alexandra. With our lunch 'piece' in our pockets and a whole day's sailing in front of us we felt quite adventurous. At Campbeltown we would take the small gauge railway to Machrihanish where we picnicked and watched the Atlantic rollers breaking on the shore.

But it was Rothesay we were bound for as the Waverley left Innellan and sailed past Toward Point with the white lighthouse shining in the sunlight.

At last into Rothesay Bay and soon we are crowding down the gangways with the busy crowds.

There was another steamer in, a G & SW boat called Jupiter but as I looked at the two vessels I felt quite proud of my Waverley and wondered if we would be lucky enough to get her on the return journey.

However, when we returned to the pier after our sojourn in Rothesay it was the Talisman that was waiting for us. On board I noticed a brass plate which stated: "Talisman, built by A & J Inglis, Pointhouse 1896". I also found that the Talisman was no slouch and was informed by one of the crew that she could still do 18 knots.

Coming home there was not the fresh excitement of the outward journey nor was there any ringing of galley bells. Just a steady thump thump from the paddles as the Talisman sailed home to Craigendoran while the crew tidied up ropes and the sun sank towards the Cowal hills.

Another wonderful day on the Clyde is nearly over and as the reports on children's picnics used to say, 'the children arrived home tired but happy.' Didn't we all? And, of course there would always be another time but . . . not now, alas, not now.

Memories of the Cinema

(written to help my niece with her college project, 1992)

The first cinema film I ever saw would be about the year 1911 or so and the cinema consisted of a canvas and wooden building forming part of the 'shows' at Balloch Fair. The films were of course silent and they sometimes were rather hard to understand, as the photography was poor and the reproduction even worse. I remember the film was about Cowboys and Indians milling around and threatening one another without any significant result.

Later on there was the *Public Hall* cinema to which we sojourned on a Saturday afternoon (not being allowed to the pictures in the evenings!). There were three picture houses in the Alexandria area, the *Public Hall*, along with the *Empire* in Steven Street, and Wingate's *Palace* in Bank Street. The *Empire* and the *Public Hall* were adaptations but the *Palace* was built as a cinema. The seating in the *Palace* gradually rose from the cheap wooden seats to the more comfortable and expensive rear tip-ups.

In those early years, as well as the big feature film, we were kept on tenterhooks with 'continued' films, which were usually two-reelers with an exciting conclusion which we just had to see the following week. The Hall cinema usually featured the *Adventures of Pearl White*, while the Palace showed *The Broken Coin*. Lucille Love and Eddie Polo kept us excited with their adventures and led to us schoolboys playing our own *Broken Coin*. We were invited to 'Sit back and enjoy an IDEAL COMEDY'.

The first 'big' film I remember was *Civilisation* [1916] in the Hall cinema followed shortly afterwards by *Birth of a Nation* [1915], a DW Griffith effort if I remember correctly. If I was asked what was the film I liked best I would probably vote for a silent film called *The Last Command* [1926], featuring Emil Jannings.

In the early cinema shows the audience enjoyed a break from film for a 'turn' to appear. These 'turns' could be singers, dancers, comedians, even jugglers and if the 'turn' displeased the audience, they soon knew about it. These picture house entertainers were seen around the area's cinemas for a number of years round the beginning of the 1914 war. The *Palace* cinema belonged to this period and was normally crowded out nightly. The prices for admission at this time were 3^d, 6^d, 9^d and 1/-.

As published in: COUNTY REPORTER, WEDNESDAY, 13th JANUARY, 1971

The Dancing Years

By ANDREW STEWART

NEWS of the last dance in the Vale Co-op lesser hall and its imminent closure must have evoked many nostalgic memories amongst the hundreds of folks who danced there in their younger days.

It was there that I took my first faltering steps on the dance floor.

It was there that Sandy Henderson's dance classes were held and his weekly dances were a feature in the "lesser" for many years.

The floor, though small, was always kept in first class condition, due to the insistence of the hall-keepers, Messrs Miller and Robertson, on the wearing of slippers while dancing.

Woe betide anyone foolish enough to disobey this rule; they were quickly told off and were outside before they could say Davie Robertson!

Sandy had his own dance band called the Oregons, with the maestro himself at the drums. I can see him sitting there, megaphone in hand, singing the chorus of "Home in Pasadena." Yes, it was just like the Temperance Seven's version!

ROARING TWENTIES

I can also picture John Stewart, the "strolling violinist," walking around among the dancers as he played an Irving Berlin waltz.

About the middle twenties Sandy's classes became so popular that he had to stop enrolling pupils. There just wasn't room enough for all the would-be dancers who wanted to learn the slow, slow, quick-quick, slow routines.

This, of course, was the Roaring Twenties, that fabulous era we often see depicted on stage and film. What was it really like?

Well, the style of dress as usually portrayed in the "twenties" film does not present a very accurate picture. Mind you, the girls did wear those short dresses with the waistline somewhere around the hips, but they did not have those masses of fringes hanging down everywhere. The long strings of beads, too, were seldom worn, and as for cloche hats while dancing, NEVER!

OXFORD BAGS

The boy's gear was either a double-breasted suit and pointed-toed shoes or a sports jacket with wide, fawn-coloured flannels. If the trousers were extra wide and had a dark stripe down the seams, they became Oxford Bags. The weird striped blazers and straw bashers of the films may have been the fashion elsewhere but were certainly not worn in Scotland.

This was the time when everyone wanted to dance. All available halls were pressed into service and dance bands were in great demand.

The modern non-sequence style of dancing with the Foxtrot, Quick-step and Modern Waltz had superseded the old favourites such as the Valeta, Boston Two-step and the St. Bernards. The Blues and the Tango were also becoming popular.

Around 1926-27 the dancing craze reached its peak with the advent of the Charleston. It is almost impossible to describe the impact the Charleston had. Its wild and uninhibited twisting steps hit the ballroom world like a bomb! Nothing like this had ever happened before.

It was short-lived, however, mainly because the dance promoters didn't like it, and to curb its exuberance, the leading dance teachers quickly brought out a tamed-down version called the Flat Charleston. This was never very popular but it helped to quell the exhilarating chaos of the original version.

In the Vale at this time, apart from the Co-op halls, there was dancing in the Dyers hall and the Masonic Temple, while in Renton the Masonic and Drill Halls had regular sessions.

In Dumbarton it was the same. The well-known dance teacher, Sam Morgan, had his headquarters in the U.F. halls and his family were usually there to assist him.

Many will remember McDougall's "Palais" in the Parish Church halls in Church Street. Open six days a week, the band there included the three McDougall brothers, Peter, Jack and Charlie.

Over the bridge, at the Welfare, there was dancing Monday and Saturday to Jock Hosie's band. The old YMCA halls were open twice a week, as was the Burgh Hall. Charlie Williamson's band in the U.F. on Tuesdays was always popular and James O'Brien's band drew crowds to the "Hibs."

The occasional visits to the local "jigging" by world champion ballroom dancers Robert Philp and Ella Scutts were eagerly looked forward to by the local youngsters who gave them an enthusiastic welcome.

Yes, these were the dancing years all right.

It was also a vintage time for good dance tunes. Melodies like "Always," "Blue Skies," "What'll I do," and "Remember" are still played today.

There were also numbers like "Happy days are here again," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Tea for Two" and "I Want to be Happy." The bouncy "Aint She Sweet" and "Dinah." The Blues rhythm of "Some of These Days", "Birth of the Blues" — oh, the list is endless. As the Thirties drew near the dance craze abated a little and the keen devotees tended to congregate at certain venues such as the Dumbarton Masonic Hall where Bob Mackison and his Bohemians had commenced their long run.

And so the Roaring Twenties passed into history. A never to be forgotten time to those who were there and experienced the excitement of these now legendary years.

And for many of us it all started in that wee hall in Bank Street.

We will be sorry in a way to see it go; we had so many good times there and it holds so many pleasant memories.

As published in: COUNTY REPORTER. Wednesday, 27th November 1968

The 'Craft' Was Busy In Those Days

AN INFINITE VARIETY OF SMELLS!

We are delighted to place before our readers this evocative article by Mr A. Stewart, 16 Ashton View, Dumbarton. If ever the very spirit of 'the Vale has been captured, it is in those memories of things past—not so long ago!

Tom Gallacher's recent article on the old U.T.R. must have surely evoked many memories to those who worked in the "fields".

If, as Tom says, the past is a place it is, to anyone who worked in the "Craft", also a smell - in fact an infinite variety of smells! I still recall the sweat acrid smell of the printing shop as I passed on my way to the cloth dyehouse where I worked as a boy.

The strange effluvia from the soap-work (yes the Craft had its own soap works), the pungent odour from the bleach and tramping houses and the familiar, unmistakable smell of the dyehouse itself all come back to me.

In those days the "Craft" was still a busy place - the Turkey Red boom had not yet started to decline - and about seventy people worked in the cloth dyehouse. The elite of the place, the dyers, numbering about a dozen, were not paid by the hour, but by a form of piece-work related to the number of 'dyes' produced per week. Each 'dye' took 2 or three hours to complete and the dyers usually started earlier than the rest of us and finishing in mid-afternoon.

In the dyehouse, the cloth was processed in a wet, rope state and as it came from the various machines, was "strapped" or built up into "hurleys" by strapping boys who wore overshoes made of a heavy blanket material. These "HURLEYS" familiar to all "field" workers, were large heavily built, wooden trucks of yellow pine with three iron wheels and were used to transport the cloth all over the extensive "field". When filled, and they could hold thousands of yards of cloth, they were horse drawn, led by Jock McCallum and, when empty, were usually pulled by the dyehouse boys.

Jock was a character. Once I saw him with two buckets of soapy water, energetically washing his horse's leg when suddenly Mr Harry Christie, the then managing director of the U.T.R. appeared and gave him a rocket for making a mess. For once, Jock was speechless. The irate "heid yin" glared at him then bawled "What's the matter with you today? Can you not swear back at me, man?" Later the hurleys were drawn by Allan Methven's battery driven truck and Jock, with his horse, disappeared from the scene.

The past is also people. I recall the laughing lines of girls "cleeking" arms as they came down "Craft" Street to work and the clatter of the men's clogs as they hurried to get inside the gate before the auld Craft bell stopped ringing. There was John Bauchop, the cloth section manager with the inevitable bowler hat and his counterpart in the yarn section Donald McGregor. The wheels were kept turning under the supervision of Master of Works Farquhar with Messrs Nelson and Cameron supervising the engineers & joiners respectively.

Many of the foremen lived near the Craft gate — Allan Jardine, John Cassidy, Jimmy McDermid and Tom McNicol to name a few. 'Tammy' Nicol as he was called, was for many years dyehouse foreman and most of his family also worked there. In the dyehouse too, were big Malky Forsyth of the Boilers, Bob Murray, Charlie McGregor, Eddie Coyle, Donnie McMillan, Pat Cannon and Jock Callaghan.

The girls of the dyehouse had their own domain. This was a large, four storey building called, for some strange reason, the Bohemian Shed, but known in the Craft as the 'BOHAMEY'. This place, with slatted floors, was kept warm with hot pipes below so that the cloth stored there could be kept perfectly dry before being processed. Though ostensibly out of bounds to the dyehouse boys, it was a warm, inviting haven on a cold winter evening when the dyehouse became a veritable greenland and, despite continual 'raids' by the foreman, the boys somehow contrived to appear there when they had a minute or two to spare. Our 'Bohemia' indeed!

Many will remember the advent of Captain Lewis as Welfare Officer. In his comparatively short reign, he managed to start up several football teams, organised a summer camp, formed a U.T.R. concert party and also produced a works magazine. He was instrumental too, in holding the first open examination for an engineering apprenticeship which met with considerable opposition from the father-speaking-for-son protagonists at that time.

Another job which fell to the dyehouse boys was the carrying of drinking water from the only drinking water supply available — this about a quarter of a mile away — to the dyehouse where it was deposited on a staging beside the boilers! Anyone who desired a drink had to take it straight from the galvanised pails before it became luke warm and, as most of the older men chewed tobacco, before it became liberally laced with thick black.

Hygienic conditions and factory inspections were conspicuous by their absence and the men's toilets, if they could be termed that, simply consisted of a long broad plank with eight holes! It couldn't be called a lavatory as there was no water near it! Can the worker of today begin to imagine such a place, I wonder? Remember this was not 60 or 70 years ago; this abomination was still in use in the year 1930!

Two departments of the dyehouse were called "MAGGIES", the old Maggie and the new Maggie, where the cloth from the Bohamey was processed prior to dyeing. In the 'new Maggie' the cloth was treated with a mixture of powdered chalk and cow manure! This brew, when heated to near boiling point, produced the 'SMELL MAGNIFICENT' — no other 'pong' in the Craft could compete !

Just about a year ago I walked round what remains of the old 'Craft'. After all these years, I found great difficulty in recognising any of the buildings I had known. I had almost given up when suddenly, on turning a corner, I saw a familiar sight — yes it was — the old 'Bohamey'! I felt pleased, somehow, that it was still standing although roofless and overgrown with weeds. It, at least, seemed worth remembering.

As published in: COUNTY REPORTER, WEDNESDAY, 23rd MAY, 1973

SALT AND VINEGAR, PLEASE!

ANDREW STEWART *takes a light-hearted look at our most famous dish*

WHAT is our most famous dish? Roast beef? Steak pie? Eggs and bacon?

No, Britain's favourite by far is the humble fish and chips.

No one seems to know who invented the delectable dish but it seems to have made its appearance in Lancashire around 1865.

I wonder if you can remember the very first time you tasted a fish supper? If you lived in the Vale it could have come from that wee shop called the Green Oak in Main Street or perhaps from Funai's in John Street or maybe from Biagi's in Alexander Street.

If you were a Dumbartonian it could have come from Kelso and Millers or Porciani's or Biagi's up-the-close place in High Street.

I well remember my first taste of the succulent delicacy. It was in Biagi's cafe in the Vale at the Main Street-Overtown Street corner, known then to all the children around as 'Joe the Tallies.' I thought it was simply delicious!

When later a neighbour sent me with a basket to Naden's Restaurant at the foot of Gilmour Street for a 'fish supper' I was disappointed when I was handed a plate containing a portion of fried cod with mashed potatoes and peas.

I remember informing the lady who had sent me that it was "not a true fish supper." However she seemed satisfied with this poor substitute for the genuine article and gave me a penny for my trouble. Later, the penny was spent in Granny Craig's wee shop on Main Street.

For a penny one could get some of Granny's home-made candy wrapped in a bit of newspaper or a 'pea-brae' which was simply a mugful of the water in which her hot peas were boiled! Usually, one or two stray peas could be found in the hot liquid and, seasoned with salt and pepper, 'pea-brae' was a popular winter attraction for the kids.

Later on, when I was older and could afford it, it was fish and chips that I aspired to, and many a fish supper my pals and I enjoyed from Melli Biagi's fish restaurant in Alexander Street.

The place became a sort of rendezvous for us where we foregathered after our evening pursuits. For four-pence we could order a 'single fish' which was, in fact, one fried fish with a handful of chips thrown in — a mini fish supper so to speak.

As a proper fish supper cost sixpence, the two pence saved usually went to buy a bottle of lemonade, so I suppose it showed good business acumen on the proprietor's part.

In Dumbarton our favourite 'chippie' was Kelso and Millers in the Newtown where one always seemed, to meet a 'kent face' in the queue waiting for service.

After visits to the 'pictures' in the Vennel, there was the choice of Molloy's or Porciani's establishments and in the narrow confines of the Vennel the aroma of frying fish and chips seemed all pervading.

In those days, one's order was placed in a thin piece of white paper and then wrapped in newspaper and there are many who will swear that fish suppers never tasted so good as when eaten from a newspaper wrapping.

It is a fact that for years the National Federation of Fish Fryers sent a telegram from their annual conference to the National Union of Journalists exchanging greetings because "our trade is wrapped up in yours!"

Mind you, it had certain advantages. It helped to soak up surplus vinegar; it was handy for wiping one's greasy fingers on, and, no doubt, supplied the fryers with occasional reading matter; but alas, in the interests of hygiene, it is now forbidden by law.

The old style chip shop as we knew it has changed considerably. Nowadays, as well as the traditional fare, they sell pies, puddings, chicken and sometimes scampi.

The shops tend to be larger but I've yet to see one in Scotland anything like some of the huge 'palaces' in the North of England which can seat up to 300 customers. They have fitted carpets, glass chandeliers and with Rolls and Bentley cars in their huge car parks. There is one establishment in Guiseley, Yorkshire, which sells £3000 worth of fish and chips WEEKLY!

On holiday in Florida last year an American lady joined my wife and I on a seat at the seaside. Although a complete stranger, she insisted on sharing with us her 'fish supper' which she produced from a cardboard box. The fish were smallish, about three inches long and she informed us they were called snapper. Apparently a local delicacy, we found them very tasty indeed but when she asked if we would like a 'hush puppy' we could only smile and say "well what is that?"

The only hush puppy I had ever heard of was a type of shoe, but the lady handed us what looked like a round potato fried in batter but alas, inside it resembled a semi solid lump of tapioca!

We noticed that she didn't have chips with her fish either so like the dish I got from Naden's restaurant long ago, it was definitely not a 'true fish supper.'

Nowadays, it is fashionable to denigrate the humble fish and chips but should you be expecting a visit from overseas friends this year, and the lady of the house is wondering what sort of meal to prepare she needn't worry.

They will probably ask for fish suppers anyway.

Fish and Chips Encore

Last week's dissertation on our fish and chips appears to have 'gone down' well and tickled the fancy of some Reporter readers. It has often been said that food which stimulates the appetite is, in most cases, beneficial for the body generally and nutrition experts have stated categorically that fish and chips constitutes a well balanced meal containing protein and carbohydrates with smaller amounts of calcium and vitamins.

There are now some 15,000 fish and chip shops in the U.K. and, although the trend is towards larger restaurant type establishments, the backbone of the fish frying industry (if one may use such an unfileted expression) is still the small chip shop with its carry-out trade. Carry-out must not be confused with 'Kerry-oots' (or liquid assets) which are another kettle of fish altogether!

Now a word about ordering your fish and chips. If you ask for 'two fish suppers' in any of our local establishments then two fish suppers you will get, but down south things may just be a bit different. Once, in a crowded fish restaurant in Accrington, Lancs, I inadvertently caused quite a 'carfuffle' by ordering two fish suppers!

The proprietor, appearing to be rather puzzled, asked if I wanted haddock or plaice and how many did I want. When I answered two plaice and chips please, he put on a rather pained expression and informed me that plaice should have been ordered at another queue pointing to a large sign, which I hadn't noticed, saying 'Order plaice here'. When I realised I was in the wrong place for plaice and apologised, he sternly informed me that I should have ordered "Fish and chips twice". Any other way of ordering could lead to all manner of misunderstandings, cause hold ups, bottlenecks and could lead to loss of business.

So be warned, should you order two fish suppers in an English chip shop, ask for fish and chips twice.

As published in: COUNTY REPORTER, WEDNESDAY, 21st FEBRUARY, 1973

'BEAUTIFUL VALE' IN FLORIDA

By Andrew Stewart

I HAVE HEARD THE SONG "BEAUTIFUL VALE OF LEVEN" SUNG MANY TIMES AND IN MANY DIFFERENT PLACES, BUT PERHAPS MY STRANGEST EXPERIENCE WAS TO HEAR THE FAMILIAR STRAINS OF THE LOCAL "ANTHEM" RINGING OUT UNDER THE PALMS OF SUNNY FLORIDA.

On a recent visit to the USA my wife and I had the opportunity of meeting Scots folk who came from all parts of the country, from the Orkneys to Dumfries, and in particular, quite a few from Dumbarton and the Vale.

We found these local "exiles" ever ready to talk about their home town.

Most of them keep up to date with our local news via the County Reporter, which they receive from friends at home, but we found them thirsting for more intimate details about their relatives and acquaintances from someone "just over from home."

In the town of Linden, New Jersey, we met Jimmy and Bessie Hamilton, and their three daughters, Betty, Eleanor and Penny.

Before emigrating from Dumbarton, Jimmy worked with Dougall the joiner and the family lived in Bellsmyre.

Bessie's mother and Jimmy's mother and sister still live in Dumbarton. Jimmy faithfully follows the fortunes of the Boghead team and gets the results in a New York paper on the Sunday. Quite a character is Jimmy.

Also in Linden, we met another ex-Dumbarton couple, Mr and Mrs Walter Anderson, who hailed from the Newtown area.

We found Walter to be a rabid baseball and American football fan, although when in Dumbarton he was "fitba' daft" as he put it.

Further south, in Newark, Delaware, we visited the home of Bill and Joan Bell, formerly of Dillichip Terrace, Bonhill. The Bell family have just returned to the USA after 13 years in Geneva, Switzerland, where Bill held an executive position with the American firm, Dupont.

The main Dupont headquarters are near Newark, Delaware, where they now live. Bill was employed in the BSD factory at Balloch before going to America about 25 years ago.

The Bells have three sons in the USA and one in Geneva.

In semi-tropical Fort Myers, Florida, our hosts were Hugh and Isabel Campbell, formerly of Westcliff, Dumbarton.

Fort Myers, known as the "City of Palms" - there are 50,000 of them in the town - is on the Gulf of Mexico and we found the sea temperature there reaching 87 degrees.

Hugh used to work in Burroughs factory in Strathleven, while Isabel was employed in Westclox.

In was in Fort Myers that we heard the "Vale" songs. We had been at a party and someone informed us that the lady accordionist in the band came from "Balloch, Scotland."

On investigating, we discovered the lady to be Mrs Smith, better known to Vale folks as Mamie Fanning, from Bonhill and Haldane, and a daughter of the late John Fanning, who was himself a well-known local accordionist. Mamie was employed as an assistant to Peter Leddy, the local photographer.

Mamie has been 15 years in the USA and was delighted to meet someone from home.

"Vale folk are kinda scarce on the ground down here," she remarked.

Afterwards, Mamie and her husband Bert came back with us to the Campbell home and soon the rafters were ringing to "Beautiful Vale", "The Valley where the Leven Flows", "Loch Lomond", and "The Braes of Bonull", with Mamie's accordion working overtime.

Overhead, the waving palms seemed to be keeping time. A very heart-warming occasion.

Yes, even the wonders of the famous Everglades, Cypress Gardens and the fantastic Disneyworld were forgotten for a time as we enjoyed our nostalgic "Vale re-union."

All our exiled friends in the USA were anxious that we should remember them to their friends at home.

We are pleased to do so and it has given us much pleasure to be able to return their hospitality in some small measure.

Perhaps the best impression we found of the love of their homeland feeling among the emigrant Scots came from Alex Colman of Hockessin, Delaware.

Alex has been in America close on 50 years, having left Dumbarton when he was nine-years-old.

"Most of Dumbarton town is now a bit hazy in my thoughts," Alex told us when we met him. "But I can still picture vividly Knoxland Square with the church, and particularly the school.

"I attended Knoxland School for about four years, y'know." Alex mused. "Is it still there?"

When he was informed that a new Knoxland School was being built, he thought for a moment. "Look," he said. "If they knock down the old school, do you think you could get me a wee bit of it as a souvenir? A bit of stone, or wood, or even a knob off the roof — anything. I'd love to have something."

As they say: "Once a Dumbartonian . . ."

As Published in: COUNTY REPORTER, WEDNESDAY, 23rd JULY, 1969

It was 'all go' at The Fountain!

by andrew stewart

ALEXANDRIA Fountain. What does it mean to you ? A well known Vale landmark or a rather ornate traffic island? A handy thing to hang Christmas lights from, or a rather ugly monument which has no place in the modern Vale? Whatever you may think about it the Fountain to me, and to thousands of others both here and abroad, means much more. It was once THE focal point of the town. It was the Vale's meeting place, market and Hyde Park corner. It was the traditional place where generations of Vale folk brought in the New Year. On almost any Friday, Saturday or Sunday evening one could find something going on at the Fountain. There were auctioneers, medicine pedlars, musicians, political speakers, fruit vendors, escapologists, street bands with dancers, religious meetings and various fugitives from the Glasgow Barrows selling all sorts of gimmicks. Never a dull moment.

Viewing the busy Fountain area today, it is difficult to imagine these scenes from the past, but then, of course, the area between the Fountain southwards to what is now the Co-operative shop, was seldom used by traffic and was often packed with people right to the pavement opposite.

On the north side, the available space was limited but was usually taken up by one or other of the aforementioned "attractions". Despite the heavy competition for a stance, surprisingly few, arguments developed and the regulars usually had tacit agreements with one another regarding time and duration of occupancy.

AFTER YOU . . .

On a busy night one might see a pedlar covering up his wares and postponing business for half an hour, so that the "Mathieson Mission" or "Ebenezer" Gospel meeting could be held. Often too, one would observe political groups patiently standing by with their portable platform until the Salvation Army band had, finished their usual weekly stint. For we schoolboys of those days the goings on at the Fountain were a never-ending source of attraction, and sometimes we would be bribed with pencils or some other cheap article by the pedlars to make ourselves scarce.

One of the first auctioneers I remember often did this. We never knew his name but, to us he was "Solly the Jew" and for years he stood at the north side of the Fountain with his collection of watches, bracelets, fountain pens and all sorts of cheap wares. He was a tall, saturnine type with a black moustache and always wore a rather faded bowler hat.

TIME TO LEAVE

When selling his watches he always insisted that the jewelled lever movement is as good as an Elgin or Waltham. So we were educated too. We learned that these were among the worlds best makes. One night a gentleman came forward to return a watch he had purchased the previous week, complaining that it had stopped. "Solly" diplomatically tried to avoid an incident and, as he was in the middle of his spiel, asked the complainer to wait until he had finished. The angry gent, however, demanded his money back forthwith. Solly then offered to give him another watch, but the irate customer stated that if he did not get his money returned in three minutes he would wreck the stand. Solly, deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, closed up his cases with remarkable speed and offered the man his name and address. We did not overhear the name, but when the gent heard that the address was in Cowcaddens, Glasgow, he remarked pointedly, "If that's where you live I want my money back right now". Whether in fact he did receive his money we never knew, but it was noticed that Solly and his stand did not appear again at the Fountain for some time after this incident. He did return though, and on Saturday night his familiar face could be seen glinting under the flickering naphtha flames he used to illuminate his stand. Another character at the Fountain was an Indian gentleman who styled himself Dr. Khrishna. His speciality was medicines, corn cures, etc., but before selling his goods he would volunteer to pull a tooth for anyone who so desired. Not only did he extract the offending molar, but he did, in his own words, "do it all with only my finger and thumb".

This performance always attracted a crowd and although it was usually a schoolboy who offered his services as a patient, I never saw him fail to accomplish his teeth pulling act. When he came to selling his medicines — which apparently cured everything from housemaids knee to dandruff — he would dramatically announce that "this bottle contains the secret of the Brahma — the Brahma of the Bramaphutra" (whatever that meant!).

However, it sounded good, and he usually did quite well with his strange mixtures. We did notice, though, that when the bold Dr. Khrishna had closed up his stand for the night, he could be seen entering Stevensons Bar, obviously preferring another medicine to his own elixir! He may have been a fraud and a rascal but he entertained us, and, as they say, "his patter was good".

Another "medicine man" was a character who wore his hair half-way down his back — much longer than any of the present-day examples of male hirsute prolificacy. He had not the charm, however, of Khrishna, and was rather an irascible fellow altogether. One chap who thrilled us now and then was the escapologist. Producing lengths of rope and chain with handcuffs he would ask any person in his audience to come forward and tie him up as securely as they possibly could. Then, writhing on the ground, he would miraculously divest himself of his bonds and take a bow.

STONED

His piece de resistance was, however, when he lay on the ground and got two or three men to lay a slab of sandstone on his body. Then, arching himself on arms and legs, he allowed a local blacksmith to smash the stone with a sledgehammer. This was earning money the hard way, although he usually received quite a fair collection from the crowd for his efforts.

One evening a large caravan arrived at the Fountain and we boys wondered what it contained. Eventually we saw a side being lowered to form a platform on to which trooped a group of boys and girls dressed in what appeared to be some sort of school uniform. There would be about 20 of them, and accompanied by an organ, they proceeded to sing a selection of popular hymns.

The gentleman in charge then spoke to the large audience which had gathered, explaining that these were orphaned children who were travelling round the country to raise funds for their orphanage. Maybe these children were being exploited, I don't know. Certainly this sort of thing would not be allowed nowadays, but to hear these children singing so sweetly was an unforgettable experience. I can remember seeing many of the audience openly weeping, and when the man in charge asked if anyone would be prepared to take one or two of the children home for the night, there was no shortage of volunteers. Where their caravan came from I never knew and I never heard of it again, but I shall always remember it.

A regular at the Fountain for many years was Mr Gavin Grainger, the local evangelist. On a Sunday evening, when the young people returned from their parade to Balloch or the loch shore road, their rendezvous was at the Fountain where "Guvie" as he was generally known would be speaking. On occasions some of the youngsters would try to heckle or argue with him, but "Guvie", an experienced outdoor speaker, usually managed to turn the tables on them and the young people grew to respect him.

One of the regular vendors was the "razor blade man" with his cry, "Any more for the Wannie blades". Judging by the amount he sold it seemed as if about half of the male population of the town shaved with "Wannies" at that time!

SQUEEZE SIMPSON

Many will remember the "wee melodeon man" who often played and sang at the Fountain. The possessor of a pleasant voice, his "turn" was always accomplished with dignity and good taste. I think his name was Simpson and he latterly appeared at the Salvation Army outdoor meetings.

Another street "turn" which could often be heard was that of Barclay and Martin, the Dumbarton duettists. Big Tam Barclay had a grand voice and could put over his songs with a professional approach; indeed, he and his partner did fulfil quite a number of professional engagements in their heyday. "Please don't talk about me when I'm gone," sang Tam. Well, I won't, except to record that you purveyed entertainment at a time when it was badly needed and when a little humour was a godsend.

FEW LEFT

Today we often read about and even sing about the "Wheel of Fortune" but comparatively few of these machines are seen in this country nowadays. One of the original types of "Wheel of Fortune" could often be seen in action at the Fountain. Owned by a character called William Fox, the wheel was not unlike a large clock face between two and three feet in diameter, with brass handles round the perimeter as on a ship's steering wheel. The dial was of ornate brass, with glass windows through which could be seen a circle of numbered slots, inside the wheel was an ivory ball. The wheel was fastened to a tall, upright batten, and as it was on a centre pivot, revolved rapidly when spun by the handles. The white ball bounced around inside until the wheel stopped; when it fell into one or other of the slots, that particular number being declared the winner. Before spinning the wheel Fox and his assistants would go around selling numbered tickets at 6d or 1s each.

As this was quite a sum in those days, the prizes handed over were usually canteens of cutlery, dinner and tea sets, gold watches or other goods of commensurate value.

DANDY FOX

A showman of the old school, Fox was always immaculately dressed in a black suit with homburg hat and sported flashing diamond rings. He usually had a flower in his buttonhole and wore an enormous diamond tie pin. Later he took a stance at the vacant ground near the top of Alexander Street where the big brass wheel dealt out its fortunes for a long time thereafter. As far back as I can remember, political meetings were a regular feature at the Fountain. As the Vale was always traditionally radical in its politics the majority of the speakers represented parties of the left, such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the Independent Labour Party, and the Communist Party.

Views of the right were usually presented by paid speakers of the Economic League and so on, and when they appeared a lively heckling session resulted. The Scottish Nationalists, in their pioneering days, also made their voices heard with speakers like Wendy Wood, Dr Macintyre and Robert Gray. Among local speakers were Hugh McIntyre, Dan O'Hare, George Halkett and Hector McCulloch. Willie Lamont, the present Renton councillor, often acted as chairman at these meetings as did Hugh Craig and Davie McKim.

VALE'S HYDE PARK

Politics apart, the speaker whom I considered the best orator at the Fountain was Arthur McManus. At election times, the police had quite a job controlling the crowds which gathered to hear the big guns of the political world expound their views at the Vale's "Hyde Park".

Of course, not all the local people went to the Fountain just to see what went on. Some, perhaps, would stop for a while on their way to the "Palace" or the "Hall"; others might pause before going to see "Falka" or "Pepita" performed by the Vale Operatic Society in the Vale Empire. The young men and girls, with brown paper wrapped parcels under their arms, could only be bound for one place: "Sandy" Henderson's dancing in the Co-op Hall (slippers essential!).

These were just some of the happenings around the Fountain in days gone by. The old monument, although never aesthetically beautiful, has many nostalgic memories for Vale folks, and will always have a special place in their hearts. A sociologist or historian of those days, studying the life and times of the Vale, need have looked no further than the Vale Fountain. There he would have found the epitome of it all.