

# CHARTISM IN THE VALE OF LEVEN

## POLITICS

WHILE circling Politicians stand,  
And deal the snuff from hand to hand,  
The attentive audience stuff their noses,  
While Blab, each Emp'ror's views discloses;  
Sees thro' their complicated plans,  
And Europe's balance nicely scans;  
Shows where defective, what would mend it,  
And thro' all casualties defend it.  
Prognosticating politicians  
Are like foretelling, quack physicians;  
Their age-defying nostrums fail,  
Like wither'd reeds before the gale;  
Fate can the sharpest foresight mock,  
By strong, decisive, sudden stroke.  
Some, of their wisdom boldly vaunt;  
Whilst others will their knowledge taunt;  
And when they have no more to harp at,  
Bring Bonaparte on the carpet;  
Tho' fallen, of all men's wit, the butt still,  
Fortune's first fav'rite, now her footstool;  
His eagles o'er wide empires flew,  
But lost their wings at Waterloo;  
Assembled nations fled before them,  
Till there the British lions tore them.  
Ambition's pond'rous, tott'ring wall  
Crush'd mighty armies in its fall'  
And emp'rors taught, if aught can teach them,  
Where danger lies, if vict'ry fleech them.

William Harriston

Scotland, even long before the Union, had its fair share of indifferent government. However, as the country emerged from the Napoleonic campaigns and adapted to the needs of industrialization in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the pressures for change became acute. Radical populist movements, many with republican undertones, arose at various times to challenge the established order.

Corn-Laws, extended in 1815 to maintain the price of the most basic of agricultural products at a high level and prevent importation of cheap grain from abroad, had the effect of subsidizing Tory landowners. While these laws were generally supported by agricultural workers, factory operatives sought higher wages, frustrating the factory owners who were predominantly more Whiggish in their political leanings. The operatives and artizans who worked in the factory systems, common working folk, had no political voice and in the times of trade downturn, suffered greatly.

It was in this context towards the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century that rumors of a radical rebellion began to alarm those in government. The radicals had

begun to accumulate arms and hold secret meetings and at the beginning of April, 1820, the call to rise was made by bills posted in the streets of Glasgow and the surrounding neighborhood.

Over much of Glasgow and the surrounding districts, small bands of Radicals rallied but almost immediately the authorities responded with a strong show of force, putting down the rebellion and arresting many of the participants. There is no record of any role of the Vale of Leven in this activity. The nearest serious incident was in Duntocher where some arms were seized but it is likely that there was a nucleus of activists in the more isolated Vale.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the alarm was great enough that the Dumbartonshire Fencibles and Dumbartonshire Yeomanry<sup>2</sup> were called out as part of the militia to help quash the rebellion. One of the Duntocher radicals was eventually tried and acquitted and charges were dropped for the others, but the authorities imposed harsh penalties for participants elsewhere. Three radicals were tried for treason and executed and many others imprisoned or sentenced to transportation.<sup>3</sup> Peter Mackenzie and others later highlighted the contrivance of spies and *agents provocateur* in the uprising,<sup>4</sup> and a salutary lesson on the use of physical force and the uncompromising attitude of government was learned.

#### THE VALE OF LEVEN IN THE EARLY 1820S

The Vale of Leven in those days was an attractive and industrious place. It remained relatively isolated from Glasgow, but was experiencing the beginnings of industrial development in the textile finishing trade. The main village on the east bank of the Leven was Bonhill where the Parish Church was situated close to the foot of the Bonhill burn, where it joined the River Leven. Communication with the county town of Dumbarton was facilitated by the “Tylagraph”, a sociable that went by the main road along the hillside, circumventing the Levenside estate and connecting with the Dumbarton steamers at the quay. The Parish church was a Gothic structure on the west side of the road separated from the housing on the east side of the road that reached down to the ferry where Walter Bain was the ferryman. There were few prominent inhabitants in the village. The parish manse and school were located elsewhere, in Damhead near Balloch. Houses also extended south from the church, up Bonhill Brae and up the side of burn where there was a school of sorts and where, for a few years after 1825, John M’Ewan ran a distillery.

In addition to the ferry, there was a ford formed by the sand-bar at the mouth of the Bonhill burn. This was usable only when the river was low, and on the river side, next to the churchyard were the dripping grounds where the cattle from the west highlands that forded, dried off before heading up the side of the burn to Falkirk Market. Backing onto the church was the Commercial Bank, and at a latter date, after the ford was closed, a new church manse was added.

Employment was provided on the river side where the works of Kirkland, owned by Brock and Carswell, and David Arthur’s “Wee Field” were to be found. The works were engaged in printing cloth, mainly by the block method that was in the process of being displaced by cylinder printing. Beyond the ferry was Dalmonach Works on the riverside

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Insurrection of 1820, P Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A’Ghobhainn, Gollancz, London, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Largely ignored from the end of the Napoleonic Campaign in 1816, many of these local militias were brought out for exercise in 1819 and 1820.

<sup>3</sup> The Rising of 1820, F. A. Sherry, William Maclellan, Glasgow.

<sup>4</sup> Reminiscences of Glasgow and the West of Scotland” P. Mackenzie, J. Tweed, Glasgow, 1876.

and more housing on the east side of the road. The works had been burnt down in 1812 and rebuilt with the addition of steam power. Mechanized cylinder printing for two colours was introduced in 1814, and Dalmonach, under the ownership of Kibble, Roxburgh and Co., maintained a prominent position among the works on the Leven for a further decade. The Kibble family lived in Dalmonach House, north of the works and on the river side of the road that continued to Damhead where it divided, with one branch going to Drymen while the other led to Balloch Ferry.

Some of the local traders in Bonhill are worth recording.<sup>5</sup> James Anderson was a cloth merchant as were David Maxwell and John Barr while Dan Ferguson was a tailor. Shoes could be got from John McLean, William Smith or William McKean. Grocers are listed James McLea, Archibald Murray, John Moodie, and Archibald Houston, John Macfarlane was the baker, while John Bryson, Mrs. Archibald Campbell, William Cumming, William Hudson, Peter Macfarlane, J. McAlpine, James McIntyre, John McNie, and James Wilson are all listed as spirit dealers. The locals could have a house built by James Bryson or William McKinlay, buy their china from George Howie, have barrels made by Malcolm Macfarlane and have their horse shod by Robert Walker. The surgeons were Alexander and Thomas Leckie.

Much of the traffic in the Vale came from tourists and visitors to Loch Lomond.<sup>6</sup> The works of Sir Walter Scott, including "Rob Roy" had been recently published and attracted a great following to view the romantic scenery associated with the outlaw. The tourist path took them along the west bank of the river, crossing at the only bridge at Dumbarton. At this time, the tourists would embark in the early Dumbarton steamer from the Broomielaw and arrive in time for breakfast at the Elephant Inn before taking the "Dumbarton Pilot" coach to Balloch. The aspect presented by the Vale to a visitor traveling from Dumbarton in the summer along the Luss road on the west bank of the river was one of large tasteful country houses and their associated estates, small villages housing the majority of the population, and the bleachfields and printfields where they toiled.

The southern part of the valley included much of the Levenside estate, purchased and laid out by John Campbell of Stonefield in 1732. The mansion itself was on the east side of the river and was surrounded by parkland, sheltered by woods. The bleachfields and printfields were confined to the west bank. The important bleachfield of Dalquhurn is the first encountered in a meandering loop of the river. It was formed around 1715 by Andrew Johnston and purchased by a group of Glasgow businessmen, headed by surgeon William Stirling in 1728 to take advantage of a government grant of £600 designed to stimulate a permanent domestic industry for the bleaching of fine linen by the superior "Dutch" method.<sup>7</sup> The 12 acre site was improved with water channels and sheltering hedges for the complex and lengthy outdoor bleaching process and for houses, boilers and other equipment. In the early years, much of the work was seasonal and relied on an influx of labour from the highlands but towards the end of the century when better chemical methods became available to reduce the time to process cloth, year-round work became possible. The company moved into the business of thread-making in 1763 and in

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<sup>5</sup> Pigot & Co's Directory for Dumbaronshire, 1825.

<sup>6</sup> "Rob Roy" was published in 1817, and "Lady of the Lake" in 1810.

<sup>7</sup> "The Turkey Red Dyeing Industry in the Vale of Leven," Naomi Tarrant, in *Scottish Textile History*, John Butt and Kenneth Ponting, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> "The Industries of Scotland," David Bremner, Adam & Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1869.

1791 was taken over by Messrs Stirling & Sons to bleach cloth printed at Cordale. In 1828, Dalquhurn was expanded for Turkey-red dyeing.

Dalquhurn house was still extant and much renovated from Smollett's day.<sup>9</sup> It was occupied by the family of William Stirling's daughter by the name of Scott and stood well off the road, close to the works in the neck of the meander. Between the house and the road was Dalquhurn cottage. The monument to Smollett, erected in 1774, stood by the side of the road and marked the south end of the village of Renton.

Renton had been founded by Mrs. Smollett around 1762 to provide housing for Cordale works when it began to expand and involve year-round labour. It was named after her daughter-in-law. The workers houses clustered along the main Dumbarton to Luss road with two side streets, roughly where Burns Street and Thimble Street were located, leading down towards the river and was almost midway between Dalquhurn and Cordale the next major estate and works, just before the parish boundary.<sup>10</sup> Renton was part of Cardross Parish and attendance at the parish church involved a long walk over the hill of Carman. However, Renton did have a thriving "Old Licht" Burger Church that dated from 1786 and had Rev. John M'Kinlay as minister.<sup>11</sup> It was the first of many churches deriving from secession movements in the Vale.

Like Bonhill, Renton was a thriving village with a strong commercial center. The grocers were John Bain, Andrew Johnston, James McAdam, Margaret McCartney, John McGregor, James McKechnie, Janet McKechnie and Setton & Co. while Robert Gow ran the Leven Victualling Society that was presumably an early cooperative enterprise. Sellers of alcohol were also prevalent. Listed as vintners were William Bain, Archibald Kilmichael, Adam Lennox, Walter McAlester, Duncan McIntyre and John Murdoch, while the local exciseman was Robert Cassie. Robert Lindsay was a tailor and Enoch Buchanan a shoemaker.

The Stirlings were the main employers in Renton and lived in Cordale house that was well set back from the road with surrounding woods and well kept gardens that featured hot-houses that even allowed grapes to thrive. William Stirling was at one time a merchant in Glasgow buying Indian cottons in London and printing them for the Glasgow market. He was a nephew of the owner of Dalquhurn and moved to Cordale where he set up a printfield about 1770 just before the ban on printing domestic cotton goods was lifted in 1774. Although he died in 1777, the business of William Stirling & Sons continued to be run by his son John and acquired Dalquhurn in 1791. After John's death in 1811, the business passed to his sons William and George. The former would eventually move to Dalquhurn while the latter stayed in Cordale. The family were distinctly Liberal in their politics.

Both Dalquhurn and Cordale were originally part of the Levenside Estate. Levenside was then occupied by at this time by Mr. James Murdoch.

Moving over the Millburn burn into Bonhill Parish, Place of Bonhill, the old Smollett mansion, was the residence of Mr. Joseph Turnbull. The grounds were now laid out as bleachfields sheltered by hedges while at Millburn, there was a works, begun in 1806, for the manufacture of pyroligneous acid, distilled from oak bark, and an important ingredient in the manufacture of dyes. The works also produced tar, pyroxilic spirit,

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<sup>9</sup> Tobias Smollet, M. D., was born at Dalquhurn in 1721.

<sup>10</sup> "The Growth of the Vale of Leven 1841-1891," Charles Docherty, M. Lett. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> "Levenside Church," John Riddell, Alexander Gardner, Paisley, 1911.

kreosote, and a fine Prussian blue. Both Millburn enterprises were owned by Turnbull and Ramsay.

The road continued through the policies of the Smollett Estate looking over the river to the east bank where the Kirk and village of Bonhill lay until it met with the ferry loan leading down to the ferryhouse where Andrew Bain lived and kept his licensed premises. Just north of the ferry was Mr. McKinlay's bleachfield at Ferryfield. In 1831 when the tax on printing calico was finally removed this was taken over by Messrs Guthrie & Kinloch and converted to block printing. Close to where the ferry loan joined the main Luss road, there were some buildings including a Grocery. There was also a large oak tree that formed a natural rallying point for meetings in the district. Two lanes led off towards a cluster of workers houses near the river known as Alexandria. These streets were roughly where Alexander Street and Susanna Street were located and were crossed by James Street and another street close to the location of India Street.<sup>12</sup> Lumbrane House was a little to the South and was the home of Archibald Lindsay who was engaged in a number of enterprises that for a while included a distillery.

Alexandria was still relatively undeveloped. There were two grocers. The grocery at the old oak tree that gave its name to that part of the village was occupied by Archibald Campbell. The other grocer was James McKinlay. In addition to Walter Bain, there were a number of other vintners including Thomas Cranner, John Creighton and Mungo Kelloch. William Gardner was a smith, while John Gardner was a Cartwright and Hugh Weir built houses. Apart from the Leven Clothing Company, the inhabitants would have to travel to Bonhill for tailoring although the only watch maker in the Vale, Alex Roy, was in the village.

The main employment in Alexandria was provided by Mr. John Todd's important printworks of Levenfield which also extended over to the East bank of the river, and the bleachfield of Turnbull, Arthur & Co., where Turkey-red dyeing was first introduced in the area in 1827. These works could be reached along the Leven towpath or from Heather Avenue that was the first turn off the Luss road towards the river, beyond the town, and marked the edge of Mr. Horrock's Tyllichewan estate, leading to a ford at Dalvait. On the hillside overlooking the Vale were the houses of Broomley where the Misses Alston, relations of the Smolletts, resided, and Tullichewan Castle itself. The road to Balloch Ferry was the second turn off the Luss road that made its way down towards the Leven, completing the tour of the western side of the valley.

The ferry at Balloch was a larger affair than the ferry at Bonhill and could more readily accommodate livestock. Balloch was dominated by the Adam Walker's Inn on the east bank of the ferry and a few dwellings stretching along the roads to Drymen and Dalvait. In Dalvait, Balloch Mill was to be found along with the parish school and the manse of Rev. Gregor the parish minister. Levenbank printworks owned by the Stewart Family who built Lennoxbank House was the main employer. There was also a cluster of houses around the mill dam at Damheid that even at this time was called Jameston. Set back from the Drymen road in its own woods and parkland was Balloch Castle, the home of the Hon. John Buchanan, M.P.. On the road leading to the Mill of Haldane, there was also for a short time in the late 1820s, the Balloch Distillery run by Mr. William Moody.

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<sup>12</sup> These streets retained local names for many years but it seems likely that they were named by Admiral Smollett in honor of his brother Alexander, killed at the battle of Alkmaar in 1799, and Alexander's mother-in-law, Susanna Renton. Another brother, accidentally killed at sea, was named James and James Street may have been named after him.

In 1825, the population of the Vale was in excess of 2000.<sup>13</sup>

#### TEXTILE WORKERS IN THE VALE

In the early years, the bleaching process was prolonged and as a consequence, it was capital intensive, holding much valuable cloth for long periods of time. To process them, the linen pieces were stitched together and laid out on the ground or on low beech hedges that acted as wind-breaks. Bleaching was accomplished by the action of sunlight on the wet fabric that needed constant watering, and so it was mainly a summer task. The temptation for theft of the valuable linens exposed for the whole summer was another drawback so that by 1800, and the invention of bleaching powder by Charles Tennant, chemical processing was rapidly adopted.

The bleaching ground was known as a *croft* and this was adapted for the name of the bleach house. In one instance, the name persisted locally as Croftengea.

Much of the work was heavy and wet. The processes required frequent washing to remove the chemicals added to the cloth. In the early years women were employed to unfurl the cloth in the Leven, allowing the stream to aid the rinsing process. Gradually, however, mechanical methods of washing were introduced. Various methods were used, generally employing rollers to twist and squeeze the cloth between successive immersions. The mechanization allowed more pieces of "grey" to be joined together to speed up the process. The cloth was dried by pressing, early on through a large mangle, but later by a mechanical press till it was almost dry.

By the 1830s, the different processes were well established. First the "grey" cotton cloth from the looms was bleached. The standard "piece" was 28 inches breadth and 28 yards long and these would be sewn into lengths of 10 pieces, 280 yards long, by women. The cloth was then "singed" over a hot copper roller to remove hairy filaments then over a wet roller to cool. When gas was introduced into the works in the early 1830s, this was simplified by singeing with an open flame. To facilitate the next process, 50 of these long lengths of cloth would be joined together and washed to remove the paste residue from weaving. The cloth was then "limed" in a kier or boiler for about 8-10 hours, washed again and "soured" with dilute sulfuric acid, and washed again. In the next step, the cloth was "ashed" with a boiling soda solution for 16 hours, washed again and subjected to the "chemicking" of bleaching powder where it was passed through a solution and allowed to stand for 6-8 hours, after which it was again soured, washed and the process from ashing to washing repeated. Finally, after a "hot-watering" and squeezing, the cloth was separated into pieces, a job carried out by children mainly, and dried in a drying-room.

The bleached cloth was then ready for dyeing or printing or a combination of both. The chemist who prepared the dye was one of the more important positions in the works and required both skill and knowledge. It comes as no surprise that the father of the British organic chemistry industry, W. H. Perkin, worked with Matthew Grey, the chemist at Dalmonach works, in the 1860s. The dye-house itself was a fairly unhealthy place to work, with a dense steamy atmosphere. The cloth was prepared with a suitable mordant and then steeped in hot dye liquor in the dye-tank where each part of the cloth is exposed for the appropriate time and then the cloth washed and pressed dry.

Printing either bleached or dyed cloth was one of the most important skilled jobs in the works, and the block-printers and cylinder-printers were among the working-class

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<sup>13</sup> Pigot & Co. *Guide to Dumbartonshire*, 1825.

aristocracy. The engravers and block or print cutters who put the patterns onto the blocks or cylinders were also highly skilled and well respected.

Block-printing was carried out with engraved wooden blocks on which the pattern was raised. The cloth on a roller, was placed section by section on the printing table and by the use of brass guidemarks, the printer lined up the block to complete the pattern. Multiple colours could be superimposed, each with its own different block. In the printing process, a “tearer”, generally a child, brushed dye from the dye-pot and applied it to a flexible woollen fabric in the dye-trough. The block printer pressed the block into the trough to pick up colour and then placed it carefully on the cloth using the brass guidemarks. After a tap on the block with a hammer, the colour was transferred and the block was moved to the next section of cloth. If a second colour was required, the guidemarks gave the correct location for the new block.

Block-printing was relatively slow although a skilled artisan could produce a remarkable amount of finished cloth in a day. Cylinder-printing had been introduced at Dalmonach early in the century and was now beginning to displace block-printing in the Vale. In cylinder printing, the metal cylinder was engraved with a depressed image. Colour was picked up from a trough and removed from the surface by doctor blade so that it remained only in the depressed image and was applied to cloth. The advantage is obvious as the process can run continuously and, with properly aligned cylinders can be used for multiple colours and complex patterns.

#### THE TURKEY-RED PROCESS.

The turkey-red process was introduced into the Vale during this time. Originally the process was used for colouring yarn but by 1830, it was applied to cloth. The colour was fast, could withstand bleach, and was more brilliant than ordinary madder red. However, it was produced by a lengthy and complex process.

Cloth “in the grey” was first put into a “rot steep” of hot soda (alkaline) liquor to remove the residual dressing from weaving. The cloth was then washed and pressed to remove the water and put into a “vomiting boiler” with soap and soda to prepare the cloth fibres. It was then washed and squeezed again and dried in drying shed at 140°.

The cloth was then treated with a mixture of Gallipoli oil (course olive oil) soda (akalai) and cow dung to animalize the fibres—make them seem like animal fibres that take on dyes more readily than vegetable fibres. The yellow-tinged cloth was then grassed (laid on grass by women) for 2-3 hours of air oxidation. This needed fair weather and there was much to-ing and fro-ing when the weather was showery. The process was repeated and then the cloth was treated with oil and alkalai 3-4 times with grassing in between. In 1841, Steiner’s process that avoided the grassing was introduced into the Vale works, greatly simplifying the treatment.

To prepare the cloth for the dye, it was then steeped in soda for several hours, washed and squeezed dry. It was then passed through a solution of tanner’s sumach made from the crushed leaves of an elm variant, dried and treated with the mordant alum.

The cloth was hung on frames that rotate into the vat of the dye that was a heated solution of madder and bull’s blood. Once the desired colour was obtained, it was washed then boiled for 8-10 hours in alkaline liquor to “clear” it. The washing and boiling was repeated and the cloth was finally cleared in a dilute chlorine solution.

Patterns were created by dischargers and resists and by the application of different chemical agents. For example, a mixture of oxalic acid and tartaric acid and lemon juice

when applied in a pattern made that part susceptible to bleaching whereas the remainder was unaffected.

#### POLITICS IN THE VALE OF LEVEN

Politically, the area was represented by the Member for the County of Dumbarton who was elected on a franchise of seventy-one individuals. Between 1810 and 1821 the sitting Member was Archibald Colquhoun of Killermont. He was replaced in February 1821 by John Buchanan of Ardoch who garnered twenty votes to eleven for his opponent, Sir James Colquhoun of Luss. John Campbell, younger, of Succoth was elected in 1826 and as pressure for reform mounted, the Tory, Lord William Graham, was returned in 1830 in a contentious battle with John Campbell Colquhoun of Killermont standing as a Whig.<sup>14</sup> The election resulted in twenty votes for each candidate and was decided by the Presiding Officer. The following year there was a new election between the same two candidates and the feelings of the people were greatly roused. The printers of the Vale of Leven were among the most radical supporters of reform and joined with the printers of Milton on election day at Dumbarton to lend their support to Colquhoun. On this occasion, Lord William Graham was again successful with twenty eight votes to Colquhoun's twenty three. In their disappointment, the mob attacked lord Graham who had to make his escape from the town by boat. Such had been the temper of the crowd that a party of dragoons was summoned from Bowling but by the time they reached the outskirts of the Burgh, they were informed the crisis had passed.<sup>15</sup>

Passage of the Reform Act lowered the qualifications for voting to £10, increasing the franchise to 924. In the election of 1832, John Campbell Colquhoun was returned but to the chagrin of the radicals he proved a great disappointment and spoke out against the extension of the franchise to the working class. The seat returned to the Tories when Sir James Colquhoun of Luss defeated Alexander Smollett, Esq. of Bonhill in 1837, though the latter was returned unopposed in 1841, and served until 1859.

#### WORKPLACE DISPUTES

Illegal combinations of workers against their masters are recorded early in the Vale and there is a report of a prosecution by William Stirling & Sons, of Cordale and Dalquhurn against the calico printers in Dumbarton County Court in february,1803. The charge was made under the statute of "Preventing Unlawful Combinations of Workmen," and it was claimed that a combination that included apprentices as well as journeymen had been in existence for about a year previous. The combination assured a public fund for those aggrieved workers who withdrew their labour until they could secure another position.

There was another strike by the calico printers at Todd's field in Alexandria in 1815 when the issues were increased wages and the introduction of machinery. It led to serious disturbances. Laws against combination were withdrawn in 1824 and legal assembly was allowed.

In January 1831, a dispute among the printers over the introduction of women as grounders at John Todd & Co.'s, Levenfield works resulted violence against the "nobs" who were brought in to replace the strikers. The issue was that women worked for considerably less wages than men, and the block printers felt that their craft was threatened. Soldiers were lodged in the works but this did not prevent one of the fair sex

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<sup>14</sup> "The Book of Dumbartonshire, Vol. I, County," Joseph Irving, W. and A. K. Johnston, Edinburgh, 1879.

<sup>15</sup> "Past Worthies of the Lennox," Donald MacLeod, Bennett and Thomson, Dumbarton, 1894.

ending up in the works lade. She was fished out, none the worse for her ducking, and the culprit was apprehended and sentenced to a number of years in prison.

The strike was recorded in a letter to the Editor of the *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, one of the Radical Newspapers of the day.

Sir,—In perusing the *Glasgow Courier* of Saturday, the 29th January, my attention was rivetted when I saw contained in its columns the following editorial account of a strike that had taken place with the Calico Printers employed at the various Printfields on the Water of Leven, which I will give you (verbatim) as it is contained in that paper:— “We have heard,” says this all but well-informed editor, “that the printers employed at the various printfields on the Water of Leven, have struck for an advance of wages. These men, who would dictate terms to their masters, have resorted to this measure, not so much because they were dissatisfied with the amount of their wages, but because they took umbrage at the number of females who have recently been employed at these establishments. The liberality and gallantry of the day are of a piece. Here a parcel of discontented fellows, every one, no doubt, deeply versed in the whole bearings of the Labour Capital Question, endeavour to throw out of employment a number of industrious, unprotected, and virtuous females, in order that they, as lords of the creation, may enjoy an exclusive monopoly of a particular description of work. We trust the masters will not be intimidated so far as to yield to the unreasonable demands of these fine specimens of the march-of-mind-men of-this liberal age.”

Now, Sir, calico-printers, as a body, are not in the habit of making known their grievances to the world, for this reason—that if their employers and them cannot agree, it is not likely that public clamour will facilitate a settlement: and although dragged before the bar of the public, as they have been at this time, with the mental paws of this modern *Caesar* they would rather allow him to stalk abroad, puffed up with the vain-glorious idea of having defeated a whole body of operatives, and gained the favour of their employers, by the strength of his *ironical* weapons, than stoop to conquer his false assertions. But if they do stoop, they are not afraid to use the keen-edged weapon of truth. And, Sir, this officious gentlemen has given such an exaggerated, nay, false account of the conduct of calico-printers to the public, through the medium of his *truth-telling Courier*, that I think the body of printers would be doing an act of injustice to themselves, were they not to contradict these assertions, and I have no doubt but they will for printers have not, at least, within the period of these last twenty years, struck for an advance of wages for, when they disagree with their masters about wages, or their masters disagree with them, it is only for an equalisation, which fact, I have no doubt, but any of the printing-masters, who have been in the business that length of time, will attest. But the printers on the Water of Leven have not even struck for an equalization of wages. True enough, a few of them are, by legal means, endeavouring to get rid of some females, who have had as much audacity as modesty, when they entered the same work-shop to learn the same business; and there are very few of us, who have seen so much of female delicacy, as warrant us in saying, that these females would not acquire some of the same habits, and take part in the same conversation

with the men. And, Sir, it is no unreasonable demand, in endeavouring to get rid of them; for, while printers are looking after their own interests, they never lose sight of the interests of the masters in general; and I suppose this is what the dictator of the *Courier* calls “men dictating terms to their masters.” Now, taking for granted that this is what he means, how would he look if a female was getting possession of his soft Beat, and him put to work the press. I am inclined to think, that these are terms which he would not like to be dictated by; and the first *term* would be long enough for him to remain at it. But I am inclined to think, that his liberality and popularity are of a piece. It is use-less for him to dictate terms to printing-masters; for if they cannot come to amicable terms with their servants, it is not likely that his ironical epithets will have the effect; and his C—r has surely gone far on in the March of Degeneracy, if this is the means he is using to stop its progress. And if it is at the instance of one or more individuals that he has inserted what he did, it will not have the desired effect; for such proceedings will only give strength to the silver cord that binds printers to bear one another’s burdens. I am, &c, Glasgow, 10th Feb., 1831. Aliquis.

*The Herald to the Trade’s Advocate* seems to have had a popularity in the Vale. Alexander Stevens of Bonhill acted as agent for the paper. The named subscribers to the paper were Alexander Robertson, a weaver, Duncan McKellar, both from Renton, David Auchinvole, John MacKinlay and John Lang all from Bonhill. There were also numerous subscriptions from Messrs. J. & J. Kibble, Printworks of Bonhill and Messrs. Stirling and Sons, Cordale Printing works.

After the 1832 reform, the radical spirit in the Vale of Leven, thwarted at the polls, directed energy into the workplace. However, trade was good and the industry was expanding with the introduction of mechanical printing so that workers were introduced to new ways of working. In 1833 there was a strike involving block-printers in the Vale and Milton. When *nobs* were introduced, there was considerable backlash and a number of them were attacked and injured. The dragoons were called and some of the strike leaders arrested. There were some trying times but the problems were resolved by 1834.

During the 1830s, the growth of the works and a strong demand for the finished textiles meant that there was little recourse to industrial action. Indeed it was to political ends that the Radicals in the Vale turned their attention in 1838 with the rise of Chartism in the country reached the local level. A full discussion of the Chartists in the Vale is held to later in the article. The favourable conditions for trading, however, did not last. By the early 1840s there was a slump in demand and short time in the local works. Poverty returned to the area. Wages were cut, and the Chartists were at the forefront of confronting the problems and bringing them to national attention.

A number of friendly societies such as the Oddfellows, Rechabites and Foresters provided help for workers who became sick. The Foresters in the Vale for example paid 10/- a week in sickness benefit and £10 death benefit. The Calico Printers Society paid a few shillings a week in unemployment benefit. In 1840, there were thirteen branches in the Vale with a total membership of 2500 but by the end of the depression in 1842, eight had been forced to dissolve.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “The State of the Scottish Working Class in 1843,” Levitt, I; Smout, C. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1979.

Thrift and savings societies had been set up in many of the works, promoted by the works managers. At one point, perhaps at the urging of the Chartists, workers withdrew their money from a savings bank set up by one of the works in Alexandria after the works manager took an interest. They believed that he would discover the extent of their savings and reduce their wages accordingly. The Commercial Bank in Bonhill was a safer refuge for their hard-earned cash.

By the middle of the decade, the works were again in full production. The appetite for confrontation had diminished.

#### CHANGES TO THE WORKS IN THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES

During the 1830s period, there were significant changes taking place in the works in the Vale. Introduction of Turkey Red dyeing and Steiner's process, and the introduction of cylinder printing, relegating block printing to small orders. The removal of the tax on calico printing in 1831 set the scene for changes in ownership. At the time, all the works in the Vale were experiencing full employment.<sup>17</sup> Details of the work come from the New Statistical Account<sup>18</sup> that was compiled by Rev. Gregor in 1839 when again, the works were in full employment. Unfortunately, the minister of Cardross Parish was less diligent in supplying information and so the Renton works are less well described.

One of the most successful works had been at Dalmonach with which the Kibble family had been associated since 1786. Indeed Matthew Bush of the works got a patent in March, 1827 for printing calicoes and other fabrics. However, capital was overextended and in 1828, the works ceased operations and caused many families to move to Lennoxton or abroad in search of alternative employment. The works regained prominence after it was reopened by James Black & Co in 1831, and after Black's death in 1844 it was carried on in various partnerships with Mr. Scott without changing the business name. In March 1835 Dalmonach had 899 employees (604 males, 295 female) and in 1839, 565 (252 men, 169 women and 144 children under 12) with wages over a six-month period of £5667:2s.:0d. The works boasted two steam engines of 10 hp and 16 hp and a water wheel 16.5ft x 15ft with a 26 inch fall. There were 8 printing machines printing 1-6 colours and 1200 yards an hour.

Across the river from Dalmonach was Ferryfield that dated back to 1785 when it was started as a bleachfield and continued in this way till 1831 when Guthrie, Kinloch & Co. began block printing of calico. By 1839 the works employed 416 (203 men, 121 women and 92 children under 12) with wages over a six-month period of £5395:8s.:8d. The works had two steam engines of 10 and 14 hp and one water wheel 20 ft x 7 ft with a 20 inch fall driving 8 six-colour printing machines.

John Orr Ewing was a partner in a goods and yarn business in Glasgow who dealt with turkey-reds manufactured at Croftingea and in 1835 took over part ownership of the works after one of the partners died. The works specialized in dyeing and calico printing. In 1839, the Alexandria Works had a steam engine of 20 hp waterwheel 18ft in diameter x 6 ft broad and a fall of 15 inches. The works employed 192 men, 142 women and 104 children, all of whom, it was said could read. Wages for six months totaled £5100 and the amount of goods was 1,310,400 yds. In 1845 John Orr Ewing retired from the business leaving it in the hands of Mr. Robert Alexander his partner.

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<sup>17</sup> *Scotsman*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1830

<sup>18</sup> New Statistical Account, *Northern Star*, December 17 1838.

At the adjacent Levenfield, the waterwheel was 16 ft x 6.5 ft with a fall of 3 ft and employment for 188 men, 97 women, 30 between 12 and 15 and 100 under 12 all of whom could read and 56 write. Wages in six months amounted to £4904:2s.:10d. Milton works, dating from 1772 when it was built by Todd & Shortridge. Milton was connected with Levenfield by a large wooden ferryboat attached to a chain to a stout post in the river and its figures are included with that works.

Levenbank works was built in 1784 by Messrs Watson & Arthur and was long owned by Messrs John Stewart & Co., printing cotton handkerchiefs. In 1839 the works boasted a steam engine of 15 hp, a waterwheel 22 feet in diameter with a 19 inch fall of water. The works employed 119 men, 50 women, and 52 children under 12. Wages for a half-year amounted to £3505. In 1845, Archibald Orr-Ewing bought the business from John Stewart and remodeled the works to accommodate Turkey-red dyeing and printing of cloth. He brought many of the foremen and managers from Croftengea so that the Alexandria works went into decline. In 1850 Archibald Orr-Ewing bought Milton Works from John Todd, Esq., of Levenfield. It was also used for Turkey-red dyeing, mainly of yarns.

Bonhill printworks, the "Wee Field," had a steam engine of 18 hp and employed 100 men, 32 women and 58 children under 12 all of whom could read and write. Wages for a six-month period were £2,000 and the output was 480,000 yards. This works was one of the first to close and went into liquidation in 1851. The adjacent Kirkland had a steam engine of 8 hp and 224 employees of which 83 children under 14. Wages for six months were £3106 and the output was 23,400 pieces of 28-30 yards in length.

Dillichip and Millburn both had a steam engine of 14 hp but which worked up to 16 hp. The Dillichip waterwheel was 15.5 in diameter and 11.25 feet in breadth while the Millburn wheel was overshot 23 ft in diameter by 3 ft in breadth with fall of 12-14 inches. The works employed 103 women and 63 children under 12 out of a total of 565. Wages for six months were £6820 with 53,424 pieces of furniture or garments, 11,251 handkerchiefs and shawls and 10,237 woollens, in all 2,085,257 yards.

The two works in Renton, Cordale and Dalquhurn, are unfortunately not covered in the New Statistical Account and so good numbers on the those employed and output are not available. However the Dalquhurn factory had about 300 hands employed in calico printing and dyeing, particularly a Turkey red in the early 1840s. The Cordale works had a similar number.

The Leven Gas-Light Co. was formed in 1835 in the appropriately named Gas Street that later became Lennox Street. North Street was also laid out about the same time. Gas was a considerable advantage to the nearby works but took some time to make its way into domestic use and supplant the William Hudson, the candle maker. Lennox Foundry was founded in the same area in 1840.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES.

In the late 1820s, the Vale of Leven was a place of expanding industry and commerce and growing population. Socially, it remained rather a backwater, remote from Glasgow, but communications on the outside were greatly improved over what they had been just a decade before. In the Vale itself, the River Leven presented a considerable obstacle and there was great public pressure for bridging. A petition had been presented to the feudal superior, Admiral Smollett who had refused to act unless the fords on the river were also closed. In 1834, an Act was acquired that included powers to erect bridges over the

Leven. However, Admiral Smollett bypassed the Act and obtained permission from the Commissioners of Supply to build a bridge where he could collect tolls in perpetuity.

The town of Alexandria also expanded to eclipse its older neighbour on the east bank. Opportunities for feuing were considerably greater on the east bank of the river. To accommodate the new bridge, a new street, Bridge Street, was surveyed and constructed in 1833, leaving the Luss road south of the junction with Ferryloan and joining the Ferryloan at the new bridge. By the end of the decade, Mitchell Street was added, forming a dog-leg between the Main Street and Ferryloan. From the bend in Mitchell Street, Random Street ran parallel to Ferryloan. Ann Street running parallel to Bridge Street, intersected with Random Street at John Street that joined Bridge Street and the Ferryloan at the bottom of the brae. Ann Street, and was renamed Kirk Street when the new Alexandria Parish Church was opened in 1840.

During this period, Bonhill also expanded on the brae head, and in Renton, Back Street was formed to accommodate the rising population. Balloch and Damhead were slow to increase but Sir James Colquhoun, who owned the ferry, erected a suspension bridge in 1841 under the same conditions as Bonhill Bridge. It experienced some problems less than a decade later.

Breaking of Balloch Suspension-bridge.—On Saturday last, while a small flock of sheep was passing along Balloch Suspension bridge, which spans the river Leven, near the entrance to Lochlomond, it suddenly gave way in the middle, at the south side, and sank about twelve inches, the other side remaining as before. The rupture seems to have been caused by the snapping of two rods, each about an inch in diameter and this has led to the twisting and breaking of other parts, which will make the whole, fabric difficult of repair, and costly at the same time, though we have no doubt that in a few days it will be all right again. In the meantime, traffic excepting for foot passengers, is stopped along the bridge, though luckily the bridge at Bonhill, which is not far distant, will supply the want till the repair be effected. The bridge is upon Dredge's principle, and is a very beautiful object in the landscape, being much admired by strangers. It has stood for upwards of eight years, and during the last Moss of Balloch fair was at times crowded with hundreds of people (exceeding in weight at least ten times that of the sheep) without evincing the least weakness. It is singular that the fracture took place opposite to the side of the bridge on which the sheep were placed at the time.<sup>19</sup>

Population in the villages had grown considerably. The 1841 census tells us that Bonhill had 2,115 residents, Renton had 2,326 residents, and Alexandria was the largest village with a population of 3,050.

Communications with the rest of the country had also improved marginally. The tourist traffic from the steamer at Dumbarton to Balloch was maintained by coach in summer only as it had twenty years previously. In addition, there was a coach service from the bridge in Bonhill every morning at seven that made its way through Alexandria and Renton to meet the steamer for Glasgow at Dumbarton Quay. The coaches were named "Chieftain," "Rose," "Rapid," and "Defiance."

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<sup>19</sup> *Northern Star*, October 19, 1850

Carriage of goods was in the hands of William M'Quattie whose cart went from Bonhill every Wednesday and Saturday to Dumbarton and Tuesday and Friday to Glasgow. Andrew Blair had a similar schedule from Alexandria while Allan M'Millan went from there to Glasgow on Mondays and Thursdays and Duncan M'Farland and Duncan M'Intyre went to Dumbarton daily.

The Post was handled by Marion M'Kindlay in Bonhill, William Meikle in Alexandria and Catherine M'Gregor in Renton and came by foot each morning from Dumbarton.

A canal was planned between Balloch and Bowling to link with the Forth and Clyde Canal in 1841.<sup>20</sup> The Marquis of Breadalbane and other landowners had an interest in obtaining cheap coals to exploit the mineral wealth of the lochside. The canal was never built, planning instead for a railway taking precedence, making good use of the survey work done for the canal. Work was started in February 1848 when ground was broken a little south of Alexandria.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the next year, it was announced that Messrs. G. & J. Burns, the shipping firm, had leased the railway for six years and would place steamers on Loch Lomond. The railway company were bound to have the line opened by June 1, 1850. In fact it opened in the middle of July.

TO LEVEN WATER  
ON A RAILWAY BEING MADE ON ITS BANKS

HAIL, gentle stream! They tell me thou art changed,  
That on thy banks no eglantine is seen,  
Nor rural song of shepherd heard at e'en,  
As when, a boy, thy tangled groves I ranged.  
Affection knows no change, and will not know,  
In her loved object; she who day by day  
Sits by the couch of sickness, sees not grow  
Fainter and still more faint the pulse's play;  
Mistakes for coming health the hectic glow,  
Till naught is left but the cold, lifeless clay:  
Even so before my eyes, year after year,  
Inroads were made upon thy rural fame,  
But I ne'er saw them till the crisis came,  
And then the change, alas! was all too clear.

James Cochrane

In September 1850, the Balloch Fair received record numbers, thanks in part to the new means of communication.

The fair of Balloch was held on Monday. The supply of horses was rather above the average. The demand was confined to the best description of animals, for which good prices were obtained. Several young horses reached upwards of £40. The demand for second class animals was limited, and they could be obtained at moderate figure. There was an inquiry for good strong colts. Three-year-olds readied to upwards of £30; two-years-old betwixt £20 and £30. There were few saddle horses upon the ground, and little or no demand. The harvest around this district is about half finished. The crop is fully an average. A considerable portion of

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<sup>20</sup> *Scotsman*, September 29, 1841

<sup>21</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, February 24, 1848.

the potatoes are more or less diseased. The turnips, of which the breadth is annually increasing, are in generally good. The concourse of persons, not on business, from Glasgow, Dumbarton, Renton, Alexandria, and other places, was immense, the day being a holiday in the public works of the vale of Leven; and the new railway from Bowling to Balloch affording new facilities.<sup>22</sup>

#### FARMING

A detailed account of agriculture at this time in the Vale is beyond the scope of the work but the accounts indicate that the land was improved according to the best methods then available with enclosures and crop rotations. Much waste land had been reclaimed, and the ground under cultivation had benefited from draining and manuring. Furrow-draining, and the subsoil plough, were adopted at an early stage. The horses were of the Clydesdale breed, and the Ayrshire cows were used for the dairy. The live stock consisted principally of cattle and sheep, purchased in the Highlands, that grazed upon the moorland. Some oats and barley were grown but the cultivation of turnips and potatoes was widespread.

The farms at the time were Ardoch, farmed by Moses Buchanan, Tollochan, by Donald Fletcher, Woodside by James Galbraith, Hill of Napierston by John Gardner, Mullinbury by William Lindsay, Blairusk by Walter M'Indoe, Badshalloch by Thomas Risk, and Ladyton by John Thomson. There was a veterinary surgeon, James Gardner, in Alexandria.

A fair was held at Bonhill on the first Thursday in February, and another at Balloch on September 15th, both for horses.

By the early 1840s, the salmon fishery on the Leven was in decline and was run by David Auchinvole in Renton. The woods were famed for the number of woodcocks which visit them in winter, and the river and lake for the great variety of aquatic birds. During times of want, poaching was a problem.

Alexandria—Another Victim to the Game Laws.—On Wednesday, the 17th instant, the funeral of Mr. John M'Kinley took place. The circumstances were as follows:—On the evening of the 2nd of November, he and a companion were standing in the highway, holding a musket in his hand. Two gamekeepers, in the employ of Mr. Campbell, Tillichewen Castle, near Alexandria, came up to them, and, looking deceased closely in the face, some altercation arose between the parties. Deceased, being irritated at the gamekeepers' interference, struck one of them with his gun, and broke the stock of the fowling-piece over the gamekeeper's arm, and used the barrel in self-defence, which was loaded. While scuffling, the nipple of the barrel, on which was a cap, hit the stone wall: the musket went off, and the contents entered just above the left elium, passed immediately over the lower part of the back-bone, fracturing it, and came out on the opposite side, just over the right elium; the distance between the entering in and coming out of the shot being about twelve inches. He lingered in great agony until Sunday last, when death put an end to his agonies. The day before interment the body was opened by two medical men, who gave it as their opinion that death was caused by the contents of the gun passing through the body. A precognition had been taken by the

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<sup>22</sup> *Scotsman*, September 18, 1850.

Sheriff of Dumbarton and the fiscal the day following the accident. Being a member of the Rechabite order, a large procession of his brethren attended his funeral. A little before two o'clock they assembled at the Independent Chapel, about forty coming from Dumbarton and Renton, and about a hundred members of the Order in Alexandria. After forming three deep, each wearing a white sash and black rosette upon it, they marched to the house of the deceased; the streets of Alexandria were crowded with scores besides of the inhabitants and the acquaintances of the unfortunate youth. The funeral procession moved slowly to the New Church, Alexandria, attended by the abstainers in the above-mentioned Order. After arriving at the grave, the coffin was placed upon the grave side, and the Rev. Mr. Swan delivered a very impressive prayer; after which, the mangled corpse was let down into the narrow house, to mix with its kindred dust amid the unbroken silence of the grave. Although not a year connected with the Rechabite Order, and not entitled, by the laws of the body, to the funeral gift, yet the Order had a meeting of its members, and, with a generosity which does honour to it, entered into a subscription, and handed over £8 towards the funeral expences. The event has made a deep impression, as the young man seems to have been generally and deservedly respected.<sup>23</sup>

A listing of the merchants and traders in the Vale in 1837 is given in the following table.<sup>24</sup> The contrast with 1825 is most interesting. Not only has there been a general increase in the number of traders, but Alexandria has shown the greatest growth.

<b>Trade</b>	<b>Bonhill</b>	<b>Balloch/Damhead</b>	<b>Alexandria</b>	<b>Renton</b>
Bakers	Alexander Ferguson		William Rankin	John Carrick
	John McFarlane			Archibald Clark
Blacksmiths	Duncan Campbell	James Nairn	Thomas Brown	John Murdoch
	John Nisbet		James Gardner	
Shoe Makers	Allan Bisland		James Barton	John Campbell
	John Craig		James Buchanan	John M'Lean
	James Jarret		John M'Intyre	Duncan M'Naught
	William M'Kean		Donald M'Kellar	Alexander Thomson
	William Paul			John Weir
	William Smith			
Builders	George Kerr		William Mossman	Duncan Ebenezer
	James Nairn			
Cartwrights	James Nairn	James Nairn	John Gardner	
Coal Merchants	John Bryson			John Buntan
	William Lindsay			James M'Glashan
				John Weir
Coopers	John Bryce			William Weir
	Alexander Keer			
Copper & Tinsmiths	Adam Primrose			John Cunningham
Drysalters			Archibald Lindsay	
Dyers				Henry Graham
Fleshers	James Craig	John Wauson	John Ewing	William M'Farlane

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Star*, November 27, 1841

<sup>24</sup> Pigot & Co. *Guide to Dumbartonshire*, 1837.

	James M'Farlane			John M'Nie
	John M'Nie			
Glass & China Dealers	John Miller			
Grocers	William Craig	Mary Cunningham	Campbell Archibald	William M'Farlane
	James Finlayson	Robert Fenton	Guthrie Lewis	James M'Glashan
	Agnes Gillespie	Robert Kerr	William Mackinlay	Peter M'Kellar
	Alexander Gordon		Finlay M'Clintock	John M'Laurin
	William Graham		Walter Paterson	Duncan M'Tavish
	William Hudson			Duncan Ritchie
	William Kinloch & Co.			Thomas Robertson
	William Lindsay			John Weir
	John Pringle			
	John Smith			
	Peter Stewart			
Joiners & Glaziers	James Bryson & Co.		William Mossman	Duncan M'Coll
	James Nairn	James Nairn		James Shearer
				William Wilson
Linen & Woollen Drapers	Walter Anderson		William Barr	James Fraser
	Duncan M'Quattie			Marion Hewit
	David Maxwell			
	Sarah Meikle			
Merchants & General Dealers	William Graham		William M'Lintock	John Weir
	John Macfarlane			
	Macfarlane, Weir & Co.			
	James Wilson			
Milliners & Dress Makers	Mary Barr		Elizabeth Turner	Mary M'Millan
	Jean M'Kean			Jean Neilson
Plasterers & Slaters			James Bryce	William Allison
Shopkeepers & Sundry Dealers	Elizabeth M'Lay	Isabella Buchanan	Mungo Kelloch	John Gordon
	Thomas Young	M'Clintock & Campbell	James M'Kinlay	Robert Gow
			Colin M'Naught	John M'Corquodale
			William Meikle	Janet M'Kechnie
				Alexander Thomson
				Margaret Thomson
Straw-Hat Makers	Margaret Bisland			
	Elizabeth Buchanan			
	Sarah Meikle			
Stone Masons	James Brown			
Tailors	Archibald M'Intyre		Charles Cochrane	Alexander Cameron
	Peter M'Nicol		Daniel Ferguson	Hugh Jackson
	George Melvill		James Glen	Matthew Scott
	Moses Miller		David Houstonn	

			John Thomson	
Vintners	Andrew Bain	Hamish M'Indoe	Mary Ferguson	John Bayne
	Agnes Burns		Andrew M'Farlane	James Beatson
	William Cumming		Andrew Patterson	John Glen
	Archibald Houston		Elizabeth Wilson	Andrew Jenken
	William Leckie			John M'Donald
	John M'Ewen			Alexander M'Farlane
	Robert M'Kean			John Macnab
	John M'Nie			Duncan M'Naught
	Elizabeth Moody			John Murdoch
				Alexander Ritchie
Watch & Clock Makers	George Douglas		James Bannatyne Glass	
Wine & Spirit Merchants	John Macfarlane		William M'Lintock	
	James Wilson			

#### PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The scourge of cholera traveled to the Vale during the national epidemic of 1832 and Mr. James Humphreys, a surgeon, came to Bonhill to take charge of the cholera hospital in Bonhill. By the end of August he reported 38 cases of the disease in Bonhill Parish. Of these 10 had died.

Mr. Humphreys joined the regular Bonhill doctors, Alexander and Thomas Leckie. By 1837, there was one doctor in Alexandria, William Smellie, and Dr. John Cullen and Dr. John Steedman practiced in Renton.

In the Report to the Commissioners on Children's Employment (Trades and Manufactures) of 1843, James Humphreys, Esq., Surgeon, gave the following account:-

Resident at Bonhill nine years. Previously to which he was chaplain and principal of the Anglo-Chinese College, Malacca, where he resided eight years. Took out his diploma since his return to England. There are now no surgeons attached to works here. Having heard the paragraph upon surgical and medical diseases, pages eight and nine of the Instructions, read, does not conceive that the surgical diseases therein enumerated are more prevalent in children engaged in the print-fields here than amongst others in the same rank of life not so occupied. But he has been surprised to find how numerous are the cases of derangement of the liver (technical described as derangement of the "caelopathic viscera"), beginning as early as 10 years of age and continuing frequently throughout life. This he attributes to the great and sudden changes of temperature, partly incident to their employment, and partly owing to their own imprudence in exposing themselves improperly clothed to the external atmosphere, and this more amongst females than males. But the greatest evil he sees connected with these works is a moral one, the temptation to parents to take the children away from all means of education at too young an age. With regard to women employed at the wash wheel, he things they are usually a healthy set of people, being exposed to an uniform temperature,

though too much wet and cold. In the winter there are any cases amongst them of “dysmenorrhoea,” as there are also amongst the girls employed in “grounding,” from exposure to cold after being heated. The people who work in the “out-by” departments bleaching and dying are the most healthy, through receiving less wages and living worse; they are commonly labourers from the country, a great number of them highlanders. He has never known any permanent injury arise from the fumes of the colours, and he has a son of his own in the colour-house at Dalmonach, where, if anywhere, he would be likely to receive injury from them in their preparation, mixing the acids, boiling them, &c. Has several accidents from hands being caught in the cylinders in the printing machines; but in regard to toothed wheels, upright hafts, &c., the masters are very careful in this district to have them well protected. He has seen many manufacturing populations both in England and Scotland, and he thinks the people here the best off if any. The general rent of the operative’s houses, kitchen and room, is generally from 4l. to 6l., most with gardens. There is a good supply of spring water from pumps, &c. The sewerage is very good, but the habits of the people in general are not cleanly. At the time of the cholera (in which having been in India he was much employed) he found it very difficult to enforce cleanliness; but this is a national fault. A good many pigs are kept. Generally in the works here they are very strict as to immorality, either drunkenness or incontinence in females, and there is no open immorality here, though a good many women may be with child before marriage.

Conditions for textile workers in the Vale of Leven reported in the Poor Law Commission Report of 1844. Men comprised 42% of the workforce, women 22%, and juveniles 36%. The best paid employees in the textile works were engravers who earned around £2 perweek while block printers earned £1. Semi-skilled workers such as carpenters, mechanics and mill-wrights earned between 15s. and 18s. while unskilled workers earned between 10s. and 14s. No women earned more than 9s. and most just 6s. Juveniles earned 4s. 6d. or less if they were male and 3s. 6d. if they were female. A skilled calico worker reported:—

It has to be borne in mind, also, that the occupation of the calico printer is exhausting, and requires a better diet than that of the common agricultural labourer. I myself generally have for breakfast some porridge and milk, a little tea, a slice of bread and ham, and as far as I can afford it, a little steak. For dinner I generally have broth; sometimes potatoes and milk; and I generally take tea at night, with bread and cheese, or bread and butter, with a slice of toast. This is a fair specimen of what calico printers would like to have; but I should say that a great number of them do not live quite so well.

In 1849, there was another outbreak of cholera in Scotland. In January 13, there was one fresh case in Bonhill. On January 20, one fatality is recorded. By February 10, there were six fresh cases and 10 fatalities.<sup>25</sup>

THE MIDDLE CLASS AND RELIGIOUS DISSENT.

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<sup>25</sup> *Northern Star*, January 13, 20, and February 10, 1849.

The middle class in the Vale, works owners and managers, shopkeepers and small business owners, had a social agenda that was divided between causes closely tied to the churches and their own self interest.

#### CHURCHES

Religion in the Vale was dominated by the Parish Church at Bonhill under the patronage of Lord Stonefield. The community was deeply influenced by the idiosyncratic parish minister, Rev. William Gregor. There are many stories regarding his odd characteristics and these will not be featured here. He was a well-off bachelor with an annual stipend of £224:15s.:5d., with a glebe of the value of £15, and had a share in the National Commercial Bank which, interestingly set up a branch on the Main Street opposite the burn. By the 1830s he had become sufficiently infirm to be allowed an assistant who conducted most of the business, and a number of distinguished young ministers had their start at Bonhill.

The traditions of religious dissent were strong in this area. As mentioned earlier, there was a dissenting congregation in Renton that attracted some from Alexandria and Bonhill and a Relief congregation in Kilmarnock. It was from the latter congregation that a number broke off to form a Relief church in Bonhill in 1831. The church had a rapid growth, and was one of the more dynamic, supporting many social causes under the guidance of Rev. John Robertson Swan. The Burgher church in neighbouring Dumbarton was graced with a new incumbent in 1830 in the form of Rev. Andrew Somerville. He had a broad social perspective and impacted many events in the Vale. It was he who organized a great petition in 1837 signed by the women of the Vale and Dumbarton against slavery in the America.<sup>26</sup>

“All abolitionists have heard of the Vale of Leven—and remember its remonstrance to the women of America, sent over here some four years ago, and unfurled over the heads of the thousands in Broadway Tabernacle at an anti-slavery anniversary. The four thousand Scottish women who signed it dwelt in the Vale of Leven.”

By the early 1830s, the state of repair of the parish church, built in 1797, caused considerable concern and plans for a new building built farther from the river were brought forward. About the same time, recognizing the growth of the area, the mission extension committee proposed the creation of a new parish in Alexandria and a new building was commissioned there, much against the wishes of Rev. Gregor. The new church opened in 1840 and was a handsome edifice, containing about 1000 sittings. The Rev. Henry Douglas was called in April, 1841. The minister's stipend was £206:17s.:4d., with a manse, and a glebe valued at £6:13s.:4d. per annum, and a right to fuel on a moss, commuted for £4 worth of coal, and 13s.:8d. money.

The New Statistical Account for Bonhill lists adherents to the various religions as: Established 592, Relief 254, Old Licht 75, United Secession 36, Roman Catholic 12 and Unitarian 2. These numbers were to change dramatically in the next few years as the Disruption introduced further schism. It is interesting to follow the fate of the smallest sect of those mentioned, the Unitarians. Through the *Christian Reformer* and later the *Christian Pioneer* we find that in 1839 they formed a society for the establishment of a Unitarian Library, and co-operated with the Unitarian Association in obtaining occasional preaching. The *Christian Pioneer* reported in 1840 that there were “no new accessions

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<sup>26</sup> Nathaniel Peabody Rogers in *Herald of Freedom*, April 30 1841.

made lately; the attention of individuals seems to be devoted to political agitation; the best safeguard of civil liberty—enlightened views in religion—is thus cast behind.” By 1844, they report the “number of friends but few, though on the increase. Great need of something being done to arouse the attention of the people to the great principles of Christian Unitarianism. A few lectures would do much good; a hall can be got for their delivery.”

In Alexandria, there was also a place of worship for Independents which had begun to worship in a building in the Ferryloan. However, the church was too large for them and in 1843, it was taken over by the newly formed Free Church congregation. Renton had a Baptist Meeting House where the congregation was led by the Rev. Duncan M’Naught.

#### THE DISRUPTION

The Disruption of the Church of Scotland occurred in May 1843 when 423 ministers severed their connections with the State Church to form the Free Church of Scotland. This Exodus of the Evangelicals whose numbers at the time were in the ascendancy was ostensibly the result of the Voluntary Question, whereby a patron could subvert the will of the congregation in the selection of the minister. The problem had simmered beneath the surface for over a decade. Although the power of veto of the lay patron had been withdrawn by the General Assembly in 1834, it was restored by the courts, and the schism was the almost inevitable result.

#### ON THE DISRUPTION OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

YE senators and judges of the land!  
What frenzy has possessed you, to convulse  
A nation to its centre, and repulse  
Forth from our Ark, and with rebellion brand  
The loving Chalmers and his faithful band?  
Some laws there are, more honoured in the breach  
Than in th’ observance: if your statutes teach  
What Christ disowns, your statutes we withstand.  
Go with them, Lord! as with our fathers, when,  
Hunted, they worshipped in the mountain glen,  
Or on the ocean shore: nor ocean shore  
Nor mountain glen is to Thy people free:  
From this pursued, they to the highway flee,  
And driven from that, they brave th’ Atlantic’s roar.

James Cochrane

In the Vale, the disruption occupied much of the energy of the middle class. Many of the local gentry were heavily involved in the Free Church and made generous contributions to new building. Three new congregations were formed, one in Bonhill, another in Alexandria, and a third in Renton.

The congregation of the new Alexandria Parish Church came over largely as a block to the Free Church, meeting initially in Dalmonach Hall but then taking over the Ferryloan premises of the Independents in December 1843. As a result the new Parish Church was reduced in status to a Chapel of Ease. The minister, without his congregation was translated elsewhere and after lying vacant for a short time, the Rev. Kidd was appointed to the charge in November 1843. The Renton congregation was started as a mission in September 1844. William Campbell Esq., of Tullichewan was a great supporter of the Free Church and was an elder in the Renton congregation, giving generously to the

building of the church at Millburn in 1845. Likewise, James Ewing Esq., of Strathleven made generous contributions to the building of the imposing church at the head of the brae in Bonhill. The congregation in Bonhill formed as a mission in December 1844 and initially met in the "Wee Field" for some time until the new building was completed in 1846. The new minister was ordained in 1847.

ON THE ORDINATION AT BONHILL FREE CHURCH

SOME things there are, impressive and sublime  
From their simplicity, which circumstance  
And pageantry would lessen, not enhance:  
Such is this sacred rite, where things of time  
With things eternal blend. The gorgeous chime  
Here is not heard; no candelabrum burns;  
No censer smokes; no painted oriel turns  
The noon-day hour to matin's mystic prime,  
Cradling the mind. Pomp were incongruous here  
If back we look, too much it would appear;  
For what has He of Galilee to do  
With pomp? If forward we extend the view  
To the Great Shepherd passed into the skies  
How little is all greatness men devise!

James Cochrane

Rev. James Cochrane was installed as minister at Cupar in Fife in 1843 and was private secretary to Dr. Thomas Chalmers during the Disruption Times. He was a friend of the Ewings of Strathleven and spent a considerable amount of time in the Vale. He published *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, Johnstone and Hunter, Edinburgh, 1853. Several of the poems refer to the Vale and some are included in this section.

One important cause that many of the more liberal of the middle-class supported was the repeal of the Corn Laws. The Anti-Corn Law League was formed in 1838 and worked for repeal, eventually with success when the Prime Minister, Peel, announced in January 1846 that the Laws would be phased out by 1849.

FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE CORN-LAWS.

(WRITTEN DURING THE THREATENED FAMINE FROM THE POTATO DISEASE.)

MAINTAIN, O Lord, the cause of the oppressed!  
Whose doom the livelong day is toil, toil, toil,  
Who oft at midnight trim their lamp with oil,  
Nor intermit their labour scarce for rest.  
O! soften thou their rulers' obdurate breast,  
And make them yield to pity or to shame,  
What they deny to Justice' sacred name;  
Even those whom Thou with corn and wine hast blest  
Thus shall the threatened famine herald peace,  
And those heartburnings shall for ever cease,  
Which in the social fabric caused a breach ;  
So shall the wrongs of millions be redressed,  
And none will dare Thy wisdom to impeach,  
Nor with the impious deem Thou slumberest.

James Cochrane

Other middle-class interests were the promotion of education, thrift, and temperance among the working class.

#### EDUCATION

In the early part of the century, there were two schools in the area. The Parish School at Damhead where Patrick Macneil was the long-time master and session clerk of the Parish Church, and a subscription school at Cameron north of the Vale. In 1816, Admiral Smollett, responded to the growth in Alexandria, moved the latter school close to the works in Alexander Street. In 1828, the school was moved to Susanna Street and in 1837, the master was William Hood. John Neil indicates that this school in its earlier days was associated with Mr. John Robertson. By 1837, there was also a parish school in Alexandria, where the master was James Kelloch. The master of each of the parochial schools had a salary of £21. 7s., with about £15 fees, and a house and garden.

There were a number of additional subscription schools in the Vale. In 1837, Malcolm Colquhoun was running a school at Bankhead while, up the Drymen Road there was another at Blairlusk where Duncan M'Donald was master. It was unusual to find a woman as master, but Agnes M'Clintock ran a school in Bonhill and Thomas Meickle was master of the subscription school up the Burn. In Renton, where the Parish School was over the hill, there were two subscription schools with Norman Stewart and Mr. Neilson as their respective masters.

The more progressive works in the Vale had their own schools that started about this time. There was a realization that educating the children in their employment was a good investment. One of the best of the works schools was at Dalmonach where a new schoolroom was built about 1840 on the site of the smithy that had stood at the works gate. William Leggat, the teacher at Dalmonach School, was asked to provide evidence to the Children's Employment Commission in March 1843.

Teacher at Dalmonach school two years. The house and school were built by Mr. Kibble, the former proprietor of the works, for the children in them, with a view to allow the children to work part of the day and attend school the rest. On the purchase of the property by Mr. Black, this gentleman gave the use of the school and house to a society formed to manage the school, chiefly consisting of workmen, who subscribe 6d. a-year. The society appoint the present master. They also purchased the maps and pictures, &c. from a previous society which managed the school before. The master gets the house and school free, and the fees from the children, which are 1s. a-month for reading, and 2d. for each additional branch. In the night-school the children sent by the committee pay nothing, the master receiving for them nominally the same fees, but agreeing to educate three gratuitously for every 12 sent to him. The master was at the High school, Glasgow, and went thence to the college, there four years, where he went through what is called the "gown curriculum." After this he frequented the English department of the high school, to study the art of teaching. Three block cutters attend his evening-school for Latin, probably with an intention of going to college and becoming independent ministers. There is no limit to the age at which children enter his school, and he has them scarcely four years old, but they are generally about five when they enter, and the majority leave at eight years old; he has known cases of boys sent to work at six years old. Those that leave at the above age have only learned reading, no writing or

figures. Those who stay on for writing and arithmetic are generally children of foremen in the different departments, or of shopkeepers. He is not aware of any works which supply education to any children; but in the past winter arrangements have been made by the principal works to stop at six in the evening in winter as well as summer, instead of at eight as formerly (working two hours earlier in the morning), with the view of allowing an opportunity to attend night-schools. Two works, however, have not yet altered their hours. Hours of school from ten to one, and three to five; and for evening-school seven to nine. The system of teaching is the monitorial, combined with the simultaneous, and illustrated by maps and pictures. The books used are "Chambers Educational Course including the third Book of Reading."

The Glasgow Herald of June 24, 1844, contains an advertisement for a teacher for one of the Alexandria schools.<sup>27</sup>

#### TO TEACHERS

Wanted, for the Village of Alexandria, Dumbartonshire,

A person fully qualified to instruct in English Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Geography, Mathematics, Latin, and French. There is a very commodious Schoolroom, with the entire upper flat for a Dwelling-house, at a merely nominal rent. The average number of scholars for the last 7 years was 130, and the emoluments arising therefrom upwards of £100 per annum.

Alexandria is a Village situated in the Vale of Leven, having at present a population of upwards of 3000, and rapidly increasing; therefore a Teacher of ability with correct habits, and strictly moral conduct, should realize to himself a comfortable remuneration. Candidates will please forward their testimonials, as to moral character and abilities, to Mr. James Robertson, Secretary, Alexandria, Dumbarton, on or before Wednesday the 3d July proximo.

Continuing education for the artizans in the works was begun in 1834 with the formation of the Vale of Leven Mechanics' Institution. The programs were financially supported by works owners and the local gentry and the fees of the students. Courses on different subjects were run with a fee of 2/6 for a course of 26 lectures, held on Saturday nights. They also sponsored public lectures on different topics. Initially, the Mechanics' Institution had no hall of its own and it had to use schools or churches or rooms in one or other of the works. The Relief Church in Bonhill was generous in allowing access and later the schoolroom at Dalmonach was used extensively.

At the request of the members of the Vale of Leven Mechanics' Institution, Rev. George Harris delivered two lectures on the irrational and debasing nature and tendency of Capital Punishments at Bonhill, in the Rev. Mr. Swan's (Relief) Church, on the evenings of Thursday and Friday, November 22 and 23, 1839.<sup>28</sup>

By 1839 numbers in the Mechanics' Institution had grown to about 170.

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<sup>27</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, June 24, 1844.

<sup>28</sup> *Christian Pioneer*, February, 1839

There were two public subscription libraries, one in Renton, containing 1000 volumes where Archibald Ferguson was the librarian, and the other in Bonhill where John Davidson was in charge.

#### TEMPERANCE.

The works owners and managers were keen to support ideas of temperance and abstinence among their employees. Not only did this reduce absenteeism and accidents but the general welfare of the community was improved. The Vale of Leven Temperance Society dates from before the time of Waterloo. In 1830, there was an address by the Greenock physician, Dr. James Kirk, who detailed the results of a *post-mortem* examination: "I dissected a man who died in a state of intoxication after a debauch. The operation was performed a few hours after death. In two of the cavities of the brain, the lateral ventricles, was found the usual quantity of limpid fluid. When we smelled it, the odor of the whisky was distinctly perceptible; and when we applied the candle to a portion in a spoon, it actually burned blue—the lambent blue flame, characteristic of the poison, playing on the surface of the spoon for some seconds." As will be pointed out later, the working-class were also keen supporters of abstinence during the Chartist period although their motivation was rather different. During this period, the Vale of Leven Temperance Society continued to be active.

#### Demonstration to Mainzer in the Vale of Leven<sup>29</sup>

The justly celebrated Mainzer was invited to the Vale of Leven, Dumbartshire, by a requisition signed by nearly 900 of the working-classes, and all the proprietors and influential people of the district. He left Tillichewan Castle on Friday evening, the 18th inst., at eight o'clock, and was escorted by a party of his friends to the summit of Benlomond. He was accompanied by six of the best boats in the neighbourhood, manned by twenty-four of the finest rowers in the county; and as there was not a breeze to disturb the surface of the lake or a cloud to darken the brightness of the sky, it proved a trip altogether indescribable. They arrived at the Inn of Rowardennan at midnight. After sitting and singing for three hours, they commenced their ascent to the mountain, which they reached at the rising of the sun. Here flowers were gathered, letters written, songs composed, and anthems and songs sung, by different portions of the party. After proposing the healths of Joseph Mainzer, Andrew Park, and Robert G. Mason (the most in lemonade and a few in mountain-dew), and listening to appropriate replies, they measured their steps to the inn, took a hearty breakfast, and returned to their boats. As there were some of the best singers in Scotland associated with their company, and as all were in a musical mood, scarcely five minutes passed without a song sung in the most scientific and superior style. The effect produced by the whole party bringing their boats together, and resting on their oars while they united their voices in singing "Rule Britannia," in front of the beautiful mansion of Sir James Colquhoun, at 10 o'clock p.m. when the bright moon rose over the broad shoulder of Benlomond, and babbling echoes responded to the strain, they will remember a long as they live: After various other fine things said and done, the party proceeded to Balloch Bridge, where they were met by nearly 700 of the

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<sup>29</sup> *Glasgow Argus*, August 1843

order of Rechabites, Odd Fellows and Foresters, in full uniform; who escorted them through the villages of Jamestown, Bonhill, across the Leven to Alexandria. After arriving at Alexandria, they proceeded to hustings erected in the neighbouring field for the accommodation of Mr. Mainzer, his friends, and other gentlemen of the committee. A. Ewing, Esq., being called to the chair, stated the object of Mr. Mainzer's visit, and then introduced Mr. R. G. Mason who read and presented Mr. Mainzer with an address. Mr. Mainzer, in an excellent speech expressed high sense of the great honour conferred on him and the cause of musical education.

On Monday evening, Mr. Mainzer gave a lecture explanatory of his system of teaching music in the Independent Chapel, Alexandria—William Campbell, Esq. of Tillichewan, in the chair. Another one on Tuesday evening, in the Relief Church, Bonhill—A. Ewing, Esq. in the chair. At both meetings; thanks were voted to Dr. Alexander Leckie and Mr. R. G. Mason, for getting up the demonstration.

By 1852, the total abstinence society of the Vale had “fallen asleep,” and a meeting was held to organize a new society based on the principles of the Scottish Temperance League in the village schoolroom, Alexandria, on Saturday, 6th December. The turn-out was respectable and those present were enthusiastic about reinvigorating the movement. “Mr James Robertson occupied the chair, and after a few remarks, introduced Mr D. Ferguson, who read a most eloquent protest against the drinking customs, which, along with certain alarming local statistics, relative thereto, furnished and authenticated by Mr Sheriff Steele and others, was authorised to be published under the auspices of the Vale of Leven Total Abstinence League, the designation of the new association. The bold and determined position taken by the more active members, and the vigorous aspect assumed by the society as a whole, bid fair to a return to the ‘good old times,’ when total abstinence exercised such a healthy influence over the habits of the thriving population of the Vale.”<sup>30</sup>

“Some curious items are furnished from the Vale of Leven, as to the comparative expense of religion and strong drink. In one village, for example, the people pay for drink £5407:9s.:4d. annually; while the ordinances of religion stand them only £645:12s.:4d., leaving a balance in favour of the bad spirit, to the amount of £4761:17s.:0d. For the Vale of Leven at large, the amount expended on strong drink is estimated at £10,987:9s.:4d., while religion, education, and poor-rates are, together, set down at £4573:16s.:9d. If this be an average specimen of the operative classes of Scotland, the self-imposed taxes would seem to exceed all other taxes combined in the draught they make upon the working man's income.”<sup>31</sup>

#### THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

There was a predictable reaction to the disillusionment felt by the artisan classes with the realization that the Whig parliament elected after the 1832 Reform Bill was not in favor of a further extension of the franchise. The People's Charter grew out of this frustration. The London Working Men's Association formed by Henry Hetherington, William Lovett, James Watson and other radicals in 1836 put forward a draft of the Charter at the

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<sup>30</sup> *Christian News*, 1852.

<sup>31</sup> The Scottish Temperance League Register And Abstainers' Almanack for 1852.

end of February in the following year with the aim that it would eventually be presented to the House of Commons.<sup>32</sup>

The six points of the Charter were: 1. Manhood suffrage, 2. Vote by ballot, 3. Abolition of the property qualification for Members of Parliament, 4. Payment of Members of Parliament, 5. Equal electoral constituencies, and 6. Annual Parliaments.

About the same time, one of the old reform organizations, the Birmingham Political Union was resurrected and produced a similar set of demands. It was led by Thomas Attwood, a Member of Parliament who had been active in the 1832 Reform, and among others from Birmingham was John Collins. The commonality of the goals between the London and Birmingham organizations was no coincidence and both of these groups quickly sent out missionaries to organize Working Men's Associations and obtain support throughout both England and Scotland. The Charter was published in May 1838 and was accompanied by a move to petition Parliament in its support. A Convention where the charter would be heralded was called for February 1839 to present the petition to Parliament when it was hoped there might be two to three million signatures.

In addition to the London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union, a third leg of the stool of Chartism was provided by Feargus O'Connor, an outspoken Irishman who had been removed as the Member of Parliament for Cork in 1835 and was now pursuing the broader cause of universal suffrage in the United Kingdom. As a mouthpiece for the cause, he launched the *Northern Star* newspaper in Leeds towards the end of 1837. While the leadership of the London and Birmingham organizations preached that the agitation for the Charter should be restricted solely to peaceful and lawful means—moral force, O'Connor believed that while moral arguments should be used to convince the government to extend the franchise, force should remain as an ultimate threat—physical force. Although he did not call for armed rebellion, he associated with a minority of the radical leaders who used violent language at their meetings to incite the crowd. This argument between the moral force and physical force camps came to occupy much of the energy of the Chartists.

#### CHARTISM IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland the Radical fervour was slower to erupt, and with the memory of 1820 ever present, it took a more subdued tone than some of the violent protests that occurred south of the border.<sup>333435</sup> In the early years, the principal organ of the Radical Press in Scotland was John Tait's *Liberator*, and on his death in 1836, he was succeeded as editor by Dr. John Taylor. Taylor, from an Ayrshire mine-owning family, was an excellent orator but was somewhat unpredictable and apt to make statements that incited violent acts. He also floated various schemes including *Dhurna* societies, aimed at cutting off revenue and shaming the government.<sup>36</sup>

Other leading Scottish Chartists were John Fraser, the Edinburgh publisher of *The True Scotsman*, a moral force advocate and proponent of total abstinence, Rev. Patrick Brewster, the Church of Scotland Minister from Paisley Abbey, James Moir, leader of the Chartists in Glasgow, and William Thomson, editor of the *Scottish Patriot* and the

<sup>32</sup> Gammage, R. G.; "History of the Chartist Movement," Browne & Browne, Newcastle, 1894.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, A.; "The Chartist Movement in Scotland," Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, L. G.; "Scottish Chartism," Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1953.

<sup>35</sup> Fraser, W. H.; "Chartism in Scotland," Merlin Press, Pontypool, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Fraser, W. H.; "Dr. John Taylor, Chartist," Ayrshire Archeological and Natural History Society, Ayr, 2006.

*Chartist Circular* based in Glasgow and also a total abstinence advocate.

A strike by the Glasgow Cotton Spinners Union in 1837 protesting reduced wages as a result of trade depression provides a good starting point for an account of the Vale Chartists. The strike turned violent and the leaders were arrested and held for trial. Harsh sentences were imposed and this prompted Chartist leaders from south of the border to come to Glasgow in May 1838 and join Taylor, Moir and Fraser and other Scottish leaders in major demonstrations to push the cause. The result of the 1820 debacle was still in the minds of the people. A hard core of Radicals, already involved in social agitation and strike action and inclined to support physical force would have limited impact as the success of the Charter required a broader appeal and the moral force argument was in the dominant view.

From the passing of the Reform Act in 1832, the Radical element in the Vale had been quite well behaved. They were concerned mostly in responding to changes in working conditions and in 1838, the Vale was a busy place. We are told that in December 1838 print works in Vale of Leven were so busy that they were working night and day.<sup>37</sup>

It was in response to an indication that the Birmingham Chartist, Collins, would visit the Vale of Leven that the "Vale of Leven Working Men's Association" was formed on November 4, 1838.<sup>38</sup> Between 500 and 600 joined the Association and they immediately set about making up for time lost. With the print works booming, they were able to muster financial resources that other associations could only envy. They enrolled with the Renfrewshire Union and stated that they had resolved to persevere with union, and determination, till all classes of society were placed on an equal footing, and till the stigma was wiped out of the laws of the country, which placed the working classes as an inferior order of society.

Some of the leading Chartists in the Vale appear in the 1841 census. For the most part they are young men with James Cameron was a 30 year old calico printer who lived at 150 Main Street with his wife, Helen (35) and sons James (6) and William (10) who was employed as a tearer. David Wright was a 30 year old calico printer living in Rosebank with his wife Margaret and sons David (10) and Archibald (8) both of whom were employed as tearers, Helen (6), James (4) and Agnes (2). James Buchanan was a 30 year old calico printer who lived in the Main Street with his wife Elizabeth (30) and four young children. James McIntyre was a 25 year old calico printer who lived in Ferryloan with his wife Mary (25) and children Mary (4), Daniel (2) and Elizabeth (4 months). James Wright was a 25 year old calico printer who lived in Susannah Street with his parents Duncan (60), Agnes (70) and a sister Elizabeth (35). Charles Glen was a 20 year old Print Cutter's Apprentice who lived in Dalvait. The last three were Vale natives.

The delegates from the Vale were present at a meeting of the Renfrewshire Union where a letter was read from Mr. Sharman Crawford, former M.P. for Dundalk. Crawford indicated that he was declining to stand as the representative of the working classes of Renfrewshire at the upcoming Chartist Convention on account of the violent language used by Mr. O'Connor and Rev. Stephens. The local secretary indicated correspondence from Mr. Fraser of Edinburgh and Mr. Abram Duncan of Alva suggesting a course of action and that Mr. Brewster was in favor of this. Placed in an awkward position, Rev. Brewster addressed the meeting, indicated his disapproval of O'Connor and particularly

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<sup>37</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17 1838.

<sup>38</sup> *Northern Star*, May 11, 1839

of Rev. Joseph Rayner Stephens<sup>39</sup> and disclosed that next day a meeting at Calton Hill in Edinburgh had been called by Messrs. Fraser and Duncan as “an expression of disapprobation against the violent course pursued by the parties he had referred to.” Rev. Brewster would attend and support the condemnation. There was a positive response from the rank and file in the meeting with some dissent.

The Calton Hill meeting was a turning point in the early days of Chartism in Scotland. In fact Rev. Brewster was in the Chair and some sense of the outcome can be gleaned from the following resolutions.

“That this meeting deem it quite unnecessary to express any opinion, whether or no it be constitutional for the people to have arms, and to use them in their own defence; because they have a full conviction, that in the present struggle for liberty, the exercise of moral power is completely adequate to maintain it, in defiance of all opposition.”

“That this meeting, relying with unshaking confidence in the efficacy of the many moral means the people possess for the achievement of their rights, unequivocally denounce, in the strongest terms, any appeals to physical force, any exhortations to purchase arms, being fully persuaded such appeals tend to diminish the vast influence of moral power—to draw the people away from its use—to rouse and keep alive the lowest and worst feelings of their nature, to tempt them—smarting, as they are, under a sense of manifold wrongs and sufferings—to make unlawful attacks on persons and property—to disgust and alienate the best friends of human freedom, and to bring disgrace on the sacred cause in which the people are so honourably engaged.”

“That this meeting is of the opinion, were the people to use with wisdom, vigour, and perseverance, peaceful and constitutional means only in the present struggle—use them with becoming dignity, determination, and earnestness, no government whatever could long resist their claims to civil and political equality.”<sup>40</sup>

This was a complete rout of the physical force point of view and for Feargus O’Connor in particular. His reaction to the Calton Hill meeting was swift.<sup>41</sup> He hurried North to visit Edinburgh, where he compared the moral force stance to “bear patiently, wait submissively, endure slavery, not turn on your oppressors,” and was well received. He bested Brewster on his own turf in Paisley and at a meeting in Glasgow. There can be no doubt that the notion that moral ’suasion would win the day was attractive and that few if any were calling for armed insurrection but the threat of force if moral means failed had much support and indeed, it was the threat of violence from the working classes that had moved the government to extend the franchise in 1832. A pledge of non-violence as a test for Chartism, while appealing to the middle classes, would break the movement asunder.

On the first Friday of the new year, the Vale Chartists met at Bonhill, presumably to

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<sup>39</sup> Rev. Joseph Rayner Stephens was a Methodist minister who railed against the 1834 Poor Law in England and allied himself with the Chartist Movement. He frequently called on the people to arm themselves.

<sup>40</sup> *Operative*, December 16 1838.

<sup>41</sup> *Northern Star*, January 19 1839.

discuss where they stood.<sup>42</sup> The Renfrewshire Union had still to meet to select a delegate for the convention. Rev. Brewster might have been the natural choice but after a contentious meeting in which the Vale had a hand, he was defeated by the physical force advocate, Dr. Taylor, who favored taking an active role to advance the Charter.<sup>43</sup> The opposition to Brewster voiced that “he was doing the dirty work of the tyrants, by dividing that they might conquer.”

With their strong base, the Chartists of the Vale supplied £17 for the initial support of Dr. Taylor, and remitted to Paisley, £10, as one contribution to the National Rent in support of general Convention expenses. They also sent their petition to Mr. Moir, with more than 1,500 signatures, and along with it £15, as a further contribution to the National Rent. A subscription for Rev R. J. Stephens was commenced and £7. 12s. remitted.<sup>44</sup>

The National Convention opened in London on February 4, 1840 and ground slowly along while the good folks of the Vale followed the discussions and continued to debate the issues that appeared in the Chartist Newspapers. They also continued to collect money for the National Rent to support the Convention and the broader movement. At the request of Dr. Taylor, they supplied £5 for Mr. James Fenney of the quaint address “Near the Gas Works, Leigh, Lancashire” to allow him to remain at the Convention. The petition with just over 1.2 million signatures was presented to Parliament on May 7 and in anticipation of a negative outcome from the Government, the Convention moved to a friendlier location in Birmingham and released a manifesto of sorts to the membership around the country asking if they would commit to forthcoming action: withdraw their money from local savings banks; convert their paper money to gold or silver; take part in a sacred month avoiding items that were taxed, including intoxicating liquor, to deprive the government of revenue; arm themselves to defend the laws; put up Chartist candidates at the next election; participate in exclusive trading with those that support the cause; hold out for the Charter and nothing but the Charter.

On Saturday, May 25, a delegation, including a band, went to Dumbarton to escort Mr. John Rodger, the delegate for Bridgeton and a Mr. McKay from the Glasgow steamer. The meeting was held out of doors and Mr. Peter Glen was in the chair. Mr. James Currie proposed a vote of thanks to Doctor Taylor, and other local chartists who participated were Mr. Robert McInnis, Mr. Richard Montgomery, Mr. James Cameron, Mr. Daniel Campbell, Mr. James Wright, Mr. James McIntyre, Mr. McAlister, and Mr. David Barr. Mr. McKay “called for three cheers for the Convention, for Doctor Taylor, Bailie Craig and the Chairman which was given nine times and one cheer more.”<sup>45</sup>

Taylor himself was not unknown in the Vale. In June he returned to Scotland and made speeches in Alexandria and Bonhill, giving them an update on the Convention and his thoughts on the resolutions. James Barr recounts an incident during a visit where he almost toppled into the water when he embarked on the Loch Lomond steamboat of the day and was easily recognized by his long hair and colourful clothes.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Northern Star*, January 8, 1839.

<sup>43</sup> *Northern Star*, February 23 1839.

<sup>44</sup> Stephens had a reputation for violent speeches that led to his arrest on 27th December 1838 for making a seditious speech, among other charges. The case was tried at the Chester assizes on 15th August 1839 where he was sentenced to 18 months in jail.

<sup>45</sup> *Operative*, June 9, 1839

<sup>46</sup> Barr, James, “Balloch and Around,” G. Hopner and G. Lappin (Eds.) Dalmadan Press, South Bend, 2010.

The crowds in Birmingham were agitated into an angry riot in early July and a number of Chartists leaders, including Dr. John Taylor were arrested. Taylor's long hair was cut-off in jail, provoking much negative comment against the authorities. The Vale of Leven Chartists registered their indignation by subscribing to the National Defence Fund and resolving to "abstain from all excisable liquors, together with tobacco and snuff, and other articles of luxury contained in the manifesto issued by the General Convention of the industrious classes."<sup>47</sup> They took the arrest as a sign that "before the people of this country can achieve their freedom, they must have arms in their hands."<sup>48</sup> Eventually, no evidence was placed against Taylor and the case was dropped. Others were not so lucky. Both Lowry and Collins were jailed for signing the resolutions.

Towards the end of August, the Vale radicals, represented by their secretary Mr. James Cameron at the Scottish Delegate Conference in Glasgow, responded that they thought the call for a Sacred Month was premature but they had been participating in exclusive dealing for the past three weeks.<sup>49</sup> They felt that these measures would soon bring about Universal Suffrage.

On the National scene, in November, there was talk of a national rebellion in a number of industrial areas of England including Newcastle, Leeds and South Wales. In fact, the most serious clash was in the latter location at Newport. A number were killed and injured and the leaders, John Frost, Zepheniah Williams, and William Jones were arrested and charged with sedition. Leaders in other areas were also arrested as the government attempted to gain control. Clearly the government's answer to physical force was an escalation that only they would win and the Movement was put on notice.

Arguments on the matter of physical vs. moral force preoccupied the Vale Chartists for much of the early months of 1840. At the end of January they changed the name of the Vale of Leven Working Man's Association to the Vale of Leven Universal Suffrage Association to make it less exclusive of those who were not working men.<sup>50</sup> Lest this be considered too much of a concession to the moral force party and an olive branch to the middle class, they also made it clear they looked to the leadership of Feargus O'Connor for the faction leaning towards the physical force side. Open rebellion had moved to the background but the threat should remain if no progress towards the Chartist demands was made.

Some local independent actions were also undertaken. The Chartists sent a deputation to Admiral Smollett, the local landowner to examine the title deeds to the Bonhill estate and assess whether he indeed was the rightful owner or if it might rightfully be restored to the people. The wily old man got wind of their approach to Cameron House and had his butler entertain them with food and liquor so that when he appeared, they had lost their animosity. They had to provide a reason for their visit, however, and instead of asking to see the deeds, asked him for the use of a field near Alexandria to play shinty. Smollett graciously granted the request and they bothered him no more.<sup>51</sup>

Frost, Williams and Jones were found guilty in January 1840, and sentenced to be hung and quartered, later commuted to transportation. A Mr. J. Forshaw reported from a meeting on February 10th that the men of the Vale responded generously to the defense

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<sup>47</sup> *The Charter*, July 28, 1839.

<sup>48</sup> *Scottish Patriot*, July 20, 1839.

<sup>49</sup> *Northern Star*, August 24, 1839.

<sup>50</sup> *Northern Star*, February 1, 1840.

<sup>51</sup> MacLeod, Donald, "Past Worthies of the Lennox," Bennett and Thomson, Dumbarton, 1894.

fund for the Newport rioters.<sup>52</sup> The aftermath of the Convention had been a disaster. The authorities had gone after the Chartist leaders, including O'Connor, who was convicted of seditious libel and jailed in York for 18 months.

In April, they were visited by John Fraser, the strong moral force advocate, and a deputation met with him to ask that he not introduce the subject of moral vs. physical force in his lecture in deference to those in the area who were in the physical force camp.<sup>53</sup> He admonished them in the pages of the *True Scotsman* for not facing up to the issue and encouraged them to put aside their past differences and commit themselves to assure the electoral and middle classes that they “will give no countenance whatever to physical violence amongst you, but do your best to put it down.”

Barr comments on these times, writing at the end of the century.<sup>54</sup>

“In all popular movements there are over-sanguine and impulsive spirits, who are apt to drive on recklessly without regard to possibilities and rational methods, and this was the class which wrecked the Chartist organisation. What was chiefly wanted was the lowering of the franchise, and although the demand was for universal suffrage, a household suffrage, such as we now have, would have averted all the commotion and rancour of those fulminating days. In order to concuss the Government, some very whimsical and ludicrous proposals were made. It was proposed to starve it out by abstaining from all exciseable articles, such as spirits and tobacco, but a very short trial sufficed to show that the sacrifice was too great even for the sake of securing political emancipation. Again, as most of the clergy of the Established Church and some dissenters were opposed to the movement, it was proposed to abstain from attending such churches on Sunday, but at the same time to meet and find laymen among themselves to expound and conduct the devotions. In the carrying out of this scheme, a considerable number of self-ordained parsons came upon the field, and notwithstanding the want of credentials from universities and divinity halls it was wonderful how well the legitimate article was sometimes simulated. In this new scheme prophets soon failed and tongues ceased. There was still another move which, if it should do little for the main object, would in all probability annoy the enemy. That scheme was to attend in large numbers meetings got up for other purposes, and by moving counter resolutions turn these meetings in favour of the Charter. Not a little annoyance was effected in this way, but after the overthrow of the National Convention the movement fell into the old rut of hustings and petitions. Chartism proper still survives in the present Liberal programme. We had in our district a sprinkling of the various grades of Chartists—physical-force men, who actually went the length of purchasing muskets; moral suasionists and preachers not a few, some of whom in after years occasionally indulged in a good laugh over the recollection of their canonical days.”

As Barr notes, part of the exclusive dealing and general dissatisfaction with the established church they set up their own church and school. In the early months the

<sup>52</sup> *Northern Star*, February 15, 1840, *True Scotsman*, February 15, 1840

<sup>53</sup> *True Scotsman*, April 11, 1840.

<sup>54</sup> Barr, James, “Balloch and Around,” G. Hopner and G. Lappin (Eds.) Dalmadan Press, South Bend, 2010.

leaders of the Association and visitors took turns to preach on chartist subjects and set up a school, acquiring a building that was known as the Democratic Seminary. They appear to have carried themselves off in rather well. The following intimation was published in the Northern Star.

“Another Young Feargus O’Connor.—On Sunday last was baptised, by Mr. Caird, in the Christian Chartist Church of the Vale of Leven, Elizabeth Feargus O’Connor, daughter of Mr. William Hays. This was the first baptism which had taken place in that place of worship.”<sup>55</sup>

In October they finally had their visit from Collins.<sup>56</sup> The Association appeared to be on a sound footing.<sup>57</sup> At a meeting in the Democratic Seminary, the Association took three shares in the joint-stock printing and publishing company, as advertised in the *Scottish Patriot* and remitted £1 to the Birmingham Restoration Committee, in order to assist them in their endeavours to memorialise the Queen, to restore Frost, Williams, and Jones, to their families. After an address from Henry Vincent on the evils of intemperance was read to them, they resolved to form a democratic teetotal society in connection with the Universal Suffrage Association, and many signed the pledge before the meeting broke up. They also appointed a committee to receive donations of books to form a library in connection with the Association.

However, there were dark clouds of a worsening local economy on the horizon, but help was on hand in the form of a new and energetic leader.

#### WILLIAM THOMASON

In December, 1838, William Thomason, a one-time Scots lead miner and Secretary of the Newcastle Political Union, was discharged from Cookson’s glass works in Newcastle for collecting money for the Glasgow Cotton Spinners. He had rallied to the Chartist cause and subsequently went to work as an employee of a newsagent in Newcastle that dispensed the Northern Star and he corresponded with Dr. John Taylor who was one of the delegates to the Chartist Convention on the state of working men’s wages in the Newcastle area. He developed a relationship with the “Foreign Policy Movement” in Newcastle that raised questions about Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary’s relationship with Russia and was paid to travel about the country bringing this to the attention of Chartists. At the time of the Newport rising there had been rumours of a more widespread rebellion and Thomason was implicated in the agitation in Newcastle. He was arrested and indicted for sedition but the case was carried over until the next assizes and Thomason was released on his own recognizances. In December 1840, he left Newcastle.<sup>58</sup> As a portent of future matters, in February 1841, his name appeared in connection with a court case concerning the Northern Star newsagent in Newcastle who had run up an unpaid bill of £40. Thomason, in his absence, was accused of being responsible for the loss.

Early in 1841, Thomason appeared in the Vale and offered his services as a preacher and schoolmaster. He was hired and immediately set about organizing the Association and using the considerable resources that it provided. The task was a considerable one.

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<sup>55</sup> *Northern Star*, August 8, 1840.

<sup>56</sup> *Northern Star*, October 3, 1840.

<sup>57</sup> *Northern Star*, February 13, 1841.

<sup>58</sup> *Northern Star*, March 7, 1840.

There were about 150 pupils in the school.<sup>59</sup> However, Thomason appears to have been a practiced orator and was well received. For example, in March he christened Margaret Thomasson Johnston, the daughter of Mr. James Johnston.<sup>60</sup>

He was a popular speaker at other neighbouring Chartists organizations. Some idea of the message that he put forward can be gleaned from a review of a pamphlet he produced at the time.

A MANUAL OF POLITICS. By William Thomason, Alexandria, Vale of Leven. Glasgow: W. and W. Miller, 90, Bell-street. 1841.

This is a sensible little book, containing plain truths for plain men. In the first chapter, "On human rights," there is some clear and forcible reasoning, couched in language which cannot be misunderstood. The rights of man, both natural and acquired, are placed in a clear and convincing point of view. Chapters 2 and 3 treat of the various points of the Charter, and set forth the just claims of the people, well sustained by a reference to ancient use and practice. The last chapter is on miscellaneous matters, introducing the Church, the national expenditure, education, and religion, all of which are handled in a clear and convincing manner. The work, though small, is calculated to do much good. We extract the remarks as to the means of getting the Charter, and also those on the use to be made of power when obtained by the people. On the former subject the writer says—

"Your claims appear to be quite just; how do you intend to carry them out? First, we intend in the first instance to disclaim anything like violence, and peacefully, legally, yet resolutely, to urge our request upon the Legislature. We are endeavouring to spread among our own order useful knowledge, and to give to the rising race an education which will acquaint them with their rights and duties as citizens. Aware that habits of intemperance have done much towards our national debasement, we are labouring to cultivate habits of sobriety. Convinced that a people can only command respect by becoming virtuous and intelligent, we are trying to circulate information by Reading Rooms and Debating Societies, and making every class of the community acquainted with our real objects. We intend to establish a system of missionary operations, and employ men of accredited worth and abilities to spread information. By avoiding violence, spreading knowledge, and securing the assistance and co-operation of the virtuous and humane of every class, public prejudice will be beat down; the unmeaning calumnies circulated against us rebutted; our cause advancing, as every cause should do based on truth and justice; the operative and artisan will be admitted into the constituency; the spirit of a prostrate nation will come out in all its native greatness; and we shall become the possessors of those immunities which are our right, and find ourselves invested with all the attributes of free and unrestricted

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<sup>59</sup> The location of the Democratic Seminary is not known. However, Thomason appears listed as a 50 year old labourer in the 1841 census, living in Ferryloan. While it is known that he took lodgings later in his time in the Vale, it is likely that initially, while he was preacher and schoolmaster, that he lived in the Seminary.

<sup>60</sup> *Northern Star*, April 10, 1841. The name is spelt both Thomason and Thomasson in the records.

citizenship.”

In reference to the use to be made of the power which the people are now seeking to obtain, he says—

“You have said much about the evils to be redressed, will you just state the change you contemplate when you get the Charter? One of the first would be to upset the law of primogeniture; that law which makes the eldest son the inheritor of the father’s estates and titles, and then sends the rest of the family on the country, as parsons, judges, lawyers, admirals, and military officers. Another would be to abolish the bread tax, and permit free and unrestricted intercourse with other nations—a Parliament representing the entire mass of the nation would have an equitable adjustment of the National Debt—a Government proceeding on principles of economy would not keep a standing army in time of profound peace; and hence, the services of soldiers and police would be put into requisition as little as possible. In order that every man might be free and unfettered in matters of faith, a full and entire separation of Church and State would take place. And, in order that our people might be intelligent, a good system of national education would be instituted, a fair field and no favour would be opened to each member of the commonwealth; an extravagant civil list would be cut down, and no pensions granted but for real services. All those unmeaning usages which stand between a working man and his constitutional liberties, in the shape of revising barristers, would be done away. Nor would a Parliament, representing the entire mass, be less attentive to the honour of the state abroad—its whole energies would be employed to maintain an honourable intercourse with other states; and colonies, instead of being as at present, kept for no other purposes than to find livelihoods for the members of wealthy families, would contribute to the general advancement of the country. Science would advance—improvements in arts and manufactures would be patronised—and the entire people living in the possession of equal political rights, would assume a higher position in morals and religion—misery and crime would almost entirely cease, because their sources would be nearly dried up, and the people of this country live in the peaceable enjoyment of those rights, to the possession of which, existence, reason, and intelligence, give them an indubitable claim.

Thomason was an ambitious man. He presented himself as a Chartist candidate on the hustings for the forthcoming Parliamentary election for Paisley and was the people’s choice. The hustings provided an informal show of hands in which the working class could participate. Thomason intended to make a point in this informal process and retire before the proper election as it was clear that he could not win with the limited suffrage. However, in a move the authorities used to discourage Radical candidates, the Sheriff-Clerk presented him with a bill for £15, half the expense of the poll for which Mr. J. Campbell had to stand surety. The move was not legal and the bill was later withdrawn.<sup>61</sup>

On the national stage, with O’Connor in prison during election, other leadership arose. In particular the Anti-Corn Law League, with much middle-class support was a growing force in Scotland. Joseph Sturge brought into being a rival organization, the Complete

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<sup>61</sup> *Northern Star*, July 10, 1841.

Suffrage Union, aimed at courting the middle class, and this was promoted heavily in the area by Rev. Brewster. However, Thomason, while trying to mend fences between the physical and moral force camps, kept the Vale Association firmly on Chartist lines. While they resolved to keep within the law, they also clearly refused to commit themselves to any litmus test.<sup>62</sup> This was in effect, the position advised by O'Connor's National Charter Association, and an invitation was sent to Feargus O'Connor to visit the Vale on his release from prison.

“Alexandria, Vale of Leven.—On Wednesday evening, an address was given in the streets of this place, by Mr. Wm. Thomason. The principles of Universal Suffrage and the Charter were argued with thrilling effect by the speaker to the crowd assembled. A proposition was submitted to the meeting to re-organise the Chartists, which was carried unanimously. In Bonhill, Dumbarton, and Alexandria, the cause of political equality is forcing its way among all classes. On Thursday evening, the Council met to lay down a plan of organization. It seemed that another association based upon Mr. Brewster's motion was about to be started and it was thought desirable to secure the co-operation of our association if it could be obtained on that condition. After some discussion, the Council arrived at the conclusion, that to parley about a resolution was only wasting that strength necessary to carry out the Charter, and in order for ever to silence any altercation about the matter, the following resolution drawn up by a committee composed of Messrs. James Cameron, Charles Glen, and Wm. Thomason, was unanimously adopted. “That in order to meet the views of all parties, and keep the eye of the public upon the principles for which we are contending—we as an Association refuse to commit ourselves to any test—excepting that we will endeavour peacefully, legally, and constitutionally to extend our views, and by keeping strictly under all circumstances within the pale of the law to carry out the principles of the Charter.” On Saturday evening, another meeting took place in the School room, and Democratic seminary, Mr. George Ferguson in the chair. The Chairman said that the meeting was convened to lay before the members of the Association, a resolution come to at the Council on Thursday evening. Mr. Thomason read the resolution and stated the object of the resolution was to put an end to discussions which created endless divisions and rendered united action for carrying the Charter impossible. Mr. R. Freebairn asked what was the line of the conduct of the Association would pursue in case the other party would not act on those conditions. Mr. Cameron remarked, we must act independently of them in our own way. Mr. John Weir said in reference to parties who demanded Mr. Brewster's motion should be law in their Association, that they were not bigotedly attached to Mr. B.'s words if better could be substituted. Mr. Adam Macaulay said that the Council ought to see other parties in order to adjust any differences which might exist between them. Mr. Thomason remarked that the Council had no power to submit any articles of pacification until such articles had been previously sanctioned by the Association. After some discussion, it was moved by Mr. Robert M'Gangan, and seconded by Mr. James Brock, local Secretary, that the resolution of Council be adopted as the rule of the Association. Mr.

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<sup>62</sup> *Northern Star*, August 14, 1841.

Freebairn moved, and Mr. Robert M'Naught seconded the reading of a former rule of the Association at the meeting for adopting the present one. Mr. Cameron moved, and Mr. Thomason seconded the adoption of a rule similar to the one referred to by the Dublin Association respecting the books being open, if required, to the authorities of the place. Moved by Mr. James M'Intyre, seconded by Mr. Richard Montgomery that one pound be sent towards vindicating the claims of O'Brien, Binns, and Lowery to seats in Parliament. Moved by Mr. Thomason, seconded by Mr. James Cameron that an invitation to Feargus O'Connor, Esq., to visit the Vale of Leven when he comes to Scotland. Mr. Thomason was then requested to write to Mr. O'Connor and get his consent as early as possible. Everything goes well for a vigorous agitation in this part of the country. God speed the cause."

The General Election that year had returned Peel and the Tories to Government replacing the Whigs who had been in the ascendancy since Reform. As the year wore on, the economy worsened and poverty increased. The increasingly distressed state of the poor resulted in an increased interest in solutions from the middle class with whom relations were improving. The primary focus of the middle class was the Anti-Corn Law cause and there was a general disillusionment with the established church and its approach to the problems of poverty. As a self-ordained minister, Thomason presented himself at a Clerical Anti-Corn Law Conference in Manchester in August.<sup>63</sup> He and his fellow Chartists were at first refused permission to attend as the Chartists were known to be disruptive and to try to turn resolutions towards the Charter. Despite the intercession of Rev. Sommerville from Dumbarton on their behalf they were excluded from the proceedings, but afterwards addressed an open meeting, complaining of clerical bigotry.<sup>64</sup>

"Mr. Thomason, from the Vale of Leven, Scotland, next addressed the meeting. He observed that a very wise man had said, "There was nothing new under the sun." But for his part, he thought it was something original to see so many black coated gentlemen sit down so gravely, in order to mend the condition of the poor. When he went first to the Vale of Leven, there was a certain minister, who, for many Sundays together, made it the theme of his discourse to shew the wickedness of himself and others, in daring to mix politics with religion; but since the Tories had gained a majority in Parliament, that very minister had for the last few Sundays passed his strictures upon Sir Robert Peel and the Tories, which he (Mr. Thomason ) thought smelt strong of politics. (Cheers.) He next read a statistical account which proved that a very useful class of men (miners) were not receiving, for themselves and families to live upon, more than 1s. 6d. per head per week. He also related an anecdote of a parson, who visited a poor woman on her sick bed, in the last stage of distress; and, by way of relief to her physical and spiritual wants, told her to content herself, and read for her consolation the 53rd Psalm! (Laughter amid execration.) After relating several other anecdotes, Mr. Thomason concluded by recommending them to press forward until they had obtained those rights and immunities which, by the laws of God and nature, they were entitled to; and retired amid loud cheering."

Rev. Sommerville also adds his account of the meeting.

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<sup>63</sup> *Northern Star*, August 21, 1841.

<sup>64</sup> *Northern Star*, August 28, 1841.

“Recollecting the sufferings which I endured as a workman in my youth from the want of employment, and seeing so many persons without work around me whose families were reduced to great hardships, and being persuaded that the Corn and Provision Laws had much to do with this state of things, I called a meeting in Dumbarton, on the 25th day of May 1841, and gave a lecture on the evils of these laws. In the month of August that year (1841) a conference was held in Manchester, chiefly at the suggestion and under the influence of Mr Richard Cobden, of the ministers of religion of all denominations, on the subject of the laws which restrict the supply of food. It met in the Town Hall, on the 17th day of August and the three following days, and was attended by about seven hundred ministers. I was deputed by the people of Dumbarton and neighbourhood to attend it. It was there that I first saw and heard Richard Cobden, and had a brief personal interview with him. I was also a member of the executive committee, the committee that regulated all the proceedings,—mine being the first name put on it from Scotland; and there I had the satisfaction of meeting with the leading ministers of the Independent and Baptist denominations. Four Chartist ministers, one of them being the minister from the Vale of Leven, though I did not then know of his presence, applied for admission as members of the conference. I advocated in the committee the admission of these men on the ground that the conference had no religious bias, that ministers of all denominations had been invited, and as the applicants were the recognised religious teachers of those who had sent them, I did not see how they could rightfully be excluded. But the majority of the committee refused the request, as they said that these men would, as they did then in all meetings, move the charter in bar of all proceedings, and when that motion was rejected, would stir up the working classes and annoy them. Some one told the Chartist minister from the Vale of Leven that I had in the committee pleaded for their admission, and he reported this to a large meeting of his constituents, gathered around a tree which grew in the centre of the village of Alexandria, when the Chartists there and then passed a vote of thanks to me. The result of this was that they came in great numbers to the meetings which I held in Dumbarton and in the Vale of Leven, heard me lecture on the Corn Laws and other subjects, and never offered the least opposition. I enjoyed the Manchester conference, and had the honour of proposing a leading motion. The proceedings and the speeches were all published in a neat pamphlet. I brought down with me a considerable number of Anti-Corn Law Tracts, which Mrs Somerville covered with grey paper; these were sent into wide circulation and helped on the movement.”<sup>65</sup>

During O’Connor’s incarceration, the Chartist movement made some progress. A new petition to Parliament was organized and a Convention set for the spring of 1842. As the date of O’Connor’s release approached, there was anticipation of a promised tour of Scotland to rally support for the new initiatives. The Vale was to be graced with a visit from the leader<sup>66</sup> and there were preparations to make. Barr tells us that a request was made to the Relief Church in Bonhill for the use of its building for the visit. The request

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<sup>65</sup> Somerville, Andrew, “Andrew Somerville D.D.: An Autobiography,” Rev. William Graham (Ed.) Macniven and Wallace, Edinburgh.

<sup>66</sup> *Northern Star*, September 11, 1841.

arrived while the minister, Mr. Swan was out of town and the deacons, reflecting on the minister's habit of allowing secular meetings in the church, which he regarded as only stone and lime, and not more sacred than any other house, granted permission. On his return, Mr. Swan was indignant and from the pulpit referred to the "hot-headed young men who had completed the degradation of the church." Eventually, the matter resulted in a schism between the Minister and some of the congregation.<sup>67</sup> On the date of O'Connor's release, there was much rejoicing, displaying flags and banners in the Vale, in anticipation of the visit.<sup>68</sup>

#### A CHARTIST PARADISE<sup>69</sup>

O'Connor's visit to the Vale in September was a major event, perhaps the major event, of the Chartist period. O'Connor crossed the Clyde from Greenock and landed at Dumbarton where he addressed the ship carpenters and apprentices.

"Our meeting was not to have been in Dumbarton; it was to have been in the Vale of Leven, a heavenly valley, commencing about three miles from the town, and forming a beautiful vale embossed in a rising ground, not hills or mountains, but as it were, a radiant boundary of slopes. Our meeting was to have been held in this sweet spot; but the tyrant masters, after having given their men permission to attend on Tuesday, recalled the leave on Wednesday at noon."

This hitch in the proceedings was countered by postponing the meeting in the Vale till the evening. It began with a torchlight procession from Dumbarton, led by bands through Renton, through Alexandria, and down to the Leven.

"The night was awful; but at six o'clock, the ship carpenters' apprentices, and a number of good Chartists left Dumbarton with a band of music, to join the procession about three miles onward. I started with the Committee about half-past six, and the silent vale upon our approach, made the slopes around re-echo with the shouts of liberty, while the brilliant blare of torch light illumined the valley for miles around. We passed through a town called Renton, where we received an accession of luminaries, flags, and a band, and thus augmented, we marched on about one mile and a half further to Alexandria, where we were met by another set of torch bearers, a reinforcement of numbers, and another band; and the procession being thus completed, the vale presented such a scene as none of its inhabitants ever before witnessed. As far as the eye could reach the smiling countenances of the sons and daughters of the peaceful valley were to be seen sending forth their jocund mirth in spite of wind and rain, which fell in torrents."

The crowds were immense, in the thousands, perhaps as many as six thousand and much larger than the organizing committee had anticipated. The original plan had been to hold the meeting in the Bonhill Relief Church. But, "alas, the monopolists have built a toll bridge over the water, and a halfpenny toll is paid by each foot passenger." As the procession approached the bridge, an equally large procession approached and was waiting from the Bonhill side. It was a dangerous situation that could have resulted in

<sup>67</sup> Barr, James, "Balloch and Around," G. Hopner and G. Lappin (Eds.) Dalman Press, South Bend, 2010.

<sup>68</sup> *Northern Star*, September 11, 1841

<sup>69</sup> O'Connor in *Northern Star*, January 29, 1842.

violence. The ship carpenters from Dumbarton approached the gate, intending to take it apart if it was not opened but O'Connor saved the day by turning around and telling the assembly that he would address the Alexandria crowd first and then on to those from Bonhill and Jameston.<sup>70</sup> He addressed the crowd at Parkneuk, highlighting the advantages of representation, denouncing the tyranny of employers, and exhorting the crowd to support the Charter. After crossing the bridge with a small entourage, he addressed an open-air meeting on the Bonhill side, on the high part of the town. The Church was found to be too small for the assembly and a platform was erected outdoors. Mr. John Miller chaired the meeting and introduced O'Connor who presented a panoramic view of Chartism, and recounted his own struggles in bringing the popular cause to its present state. He also talked about the progress of Chartist principles, and "after cautioning them against violence, and urging the necessity of union, he concluded amid long continued applause."

"Three resolutions were adopted. The first pledged the people to the six points of the Charter. The second was expressive of the gratification felt by the English and Scottish Chartists, at the prospect of Ireland embracing the doctrines of Chartism, and their readiness to co-operate with Ireland to gain Universal Suffrage, and also her domestic legislature. The third recommended a National Petition and Convention, and a pledge from the immense assembly to carry out the plan to the utmost of their power."

"At the close the procession again formed, and with torches blazing, colours flying, and bands playing, we retraced our steps to Alexandria, where a public supper had been prepared; as we reached the bridge a second time I made my way in advance to the gate, but the toll-keeper very good naturedly threw it open free to all. I had now—ten o'clock at night—been at work for twelve hours; had addressed three out-door meetings; and proceeded to take my place at the festive board. The people's own room was beautifully decorated with the *Star* portraits, laurels, and evergreens; an excellent supper was tastefully laid upon the table; that best and most eloquent of men, John M'Crea, was in the chair; Mr. Thomason, the people's schoolmaster and friend, was in the vice-chair. John M'Crea made a splendid speech, as did Mr. Thomason, and they were pleased to say that mine was not a bad one."

The supper was held in the school room and the Northern Star gives a good account of the proceedings. "The Chairman opened the business in a speech of considerable talent, in which he portrayed the sufferings of the Chartists, and the insufficiency of opposition to put down the spirit of a united nation. He eulogised at great length the labours of Feargus O'Connor, and exhorted the operatives to unite together to complete their country's emancipation. He proposed, as a sentiment, "The People, the source of all power." Song, by all the company, "Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled." Next was "The health of Feargus O'Connor, Esq." and done in good style."

"Mr. O'Connor then replied, in a speech in which he stated, that while his past course had been honourably alluded to, yet, he remarked, their expressions of confidence would serve as a retaining for the future. He

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<sup>70</sup> John Neill gives a different account in "Records and Reminiscences of Bonhill Parish," Bennett & Thomson, Dumbarton, 1912, whereby the tollbooth keeper set his dog on the crowd who killed it and then broke down the gate to allow free access to the other side. The contemporary account would appear to be more reliable.

then pointed out the causes of public misery, viz.—excessive taxation—a bad distribution of wealth—a wholesale want of employment, by the action of machinery superseding manual labour, and all the natural fruit of exclusive legislation, and until the producers of wealth were represented, their miseries would continue. He then referred to the power of the people in the case of Catholic Emancipation, and remarked that the Tory Duke and Peel found it unsafe to withhold a removal of Catholic disabilities, when the 32nd Regiment were subscribing to the National Rent. He made some remarks on Peel's mistake in supposing his majority of ninety-one represented the people. He then referred to the state of Ireland under Whig rule, the introduction of nine thousand policemen, at 18s. weekly, equal to an armed force of 27,000 men, at 6s. a week. He then proceeded to prove that all aristocrats, whether Whig or Tory, were opposed to concessions being made to the people. He then referred to the Corn Laws, and remarked that free trade in labour and human industry was all contended for by the party, leaving the people more to do, but not much for doing it, and referred to Mr. Sturge at Birmingham, in asserting that the League had abandoned principle, and remarked that if Chartists were to do the same, they would be upset as a party. He observed that no system had ever been originated but what was first despised, then hated, then reasoned with, then courted, and finally legislated for. Chartism, he remarked, had passed the first stages, and now they were courted, but he cautioned them against striking a bargain for anything short of Universal Suffrage. He then referred to the bugbear of physical force, and talked about the inconsistency of Tories denouncing it when they talked about the constitution being based upon the blood of their ancestors, and our liberals commemorating the Polish Revolution—the glorious days of July, and the achievement of American Independence, all physical struggles. Poverty might drive a people to violence, but he exhorted them to be peaceful, to be united, and avoid any movement that might bring them into collision with the law. They might calculate upon the assistance of the intelligent portion of the middle class, and remarked that the Whigs themselves would give the Charter, rather than remain long on the bleak side of Downing Street. After pointing out in a pleasing style the concurrent causes at work to favour them, he exhorted them to organise, unite, petition, agitate, and, by peaceful efforts, their cause would be triumphant, and crowned with complete success. (Hear, and cheers.) The learned gentleman resumed his seat amid the cheers of the meeting.”

The next toast was “Universal Suffrage and no surrender.” And so it went on. Mr. Charles Glen gave an address, Mr. George Ferguson sang “Exile of Erin,” A toast “The females of the Vale of Leven,” was responded to, and Mr. Charles Glen sang “O, Scotland, I love thee.” “The remaining part of the night was spent in songs, addresses, and cheerful chat; when the meeting broke up, fully convinced that a more brilliant day, considering the size of the place, was never witnessed in the annals of Chartism. The proceedings throughout, proved Leven to be worthy of the place assigned it in the struggle for freedom. The impression left on the public mind, has been overwhelming among the middle classes; one man especially was so convinced of the injustice done to Mr. O'Connor, that, although a moral-force man, he enrolled next morning, fully satisfied that Mr. O'Connor was what he was himself on this question.”

In the morning, O'Connor left for Glasgow but took the time to visit the children in the

Chartist school. The “people have a most talented and virtuous instructor in the person of Mr. Thomason; and, prior to leaving that town, I visited his seminary of from 100 to 150 young Chartists, all brought up in veneration of God and love of liberty. I shook hands with every one of them, and blessed them all.”

In a letter of thanks in the *Northern Star*, O’Connor counseled them to avoid the litmus tests that were, in his opinion, detrimental to the Cause. “You will not have forgotten my prophecy relative to Church Chartism, Knowledge Chartism, and Teetotal Chartism and that I was not a false prophet may be inferred from the appeal of Brewster to the total abstainers, as also from the sneaking and cowardly manner in which the Chartist Synod of Glasgow sought to use the poor blunt thing as an instrument for my destruction. But here allow me to discriminate between the shepherds and the flocks, between the committee and the body of teetotallers.” He urged them to take proper care in electing courageous and talented delegates to the National Convention.<sup>71</sup>

The visit was timely and well received. The trade in the Vale was in a slump and there was increasing poverty and distress. The Chartists held an outdoor meeting where they agreed to approach the local landowners and clergy with an address. One of those contacted was Mr. J. Ewing of Leven-side who suggested that the villages be canvassed for information on their means and he would take steps to organize a meeting of the heritors. So, two-by-two they went door to door to obtain the information.<sup>72</sup> Thomason was particularly good at putting together a factual and convincing case and bringing it to the attention of those in power. He was also working hard to increase the power and effectiveness of the Chartists in the area.<sup>73</sup>

“Vale of Leven: Alexandria—The state of trade in this place is really distressing. About three months since Mr. William Thomason gave an address in Bonhill, and urged the appointment of a committee to investigate into the state of the unemployed, and laying it before the heritors and ministers and manufacturers of the parish. The committee was selected and the following facts will give the public some idea of the state of the Vale, including Alexandria and Bonhill; Cardross parish is being canvassed by another committee. This statement includes twelve hundred and eleven persons, their wages were as follows, averaging a period of twenty-eight weeks. There were, persons per day:—

4 at the rate of $7\frac{3}{4}$ d.	10 do.	$3\frac{1}{4}$ d.
2 do. 7d.	89 do.	3d.
6 do. $6\frac{3}{4}$ d.	31 do.	$2\frac{3}{4}$ d.
11 do. $6\frac{1}{2}$ d.	151 do.	$2\frac{1}{2}$ d.
5 do. 6d.	65 do.	$2\frac{1}{4}$ d.
21 do. $5\frac{1}{2}$ d.	135 do.	2d.
11 do. $5\frac{1}{4}$ d.	126 do.	$1\frac{3}{4}$ d.
13 do. 5d.	128 do.	$1\frac{1}{2}$ d.
14 do. $4\frac{3}{4}$ d.	15 do.	$1\frac{1}{4}$ d.
10 do. $4\frac{1}{2}$ d.	55 do.	1d.
11 do. $4\frac{1}{4}$ d.	31 do.	$\frac{3}{4}$ d.
31 do. 4d.	28 do.	$\frac{1}{2}$ d.

<sup>71</sup> *Northern Star*, November 20, 1841.

<sup>72</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, November 25, 1841.

<sup>73</sup> *Northern Star*, November 27, 1841.

28 do.	3 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> d.	9 do.	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> d.
96 do.	3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> d.	65 do.	0d.

This is a pretty view of things in a spot full of churches and chapel-goers; our great men are turning away journeymen and filling their places with apprentices. In this way the hopes of many a family are sacrificed before the altar of Mammon. The working men are beginning to see that they can have no shield of protection but in equal laws, and universal representation. Our association is increasing in members.”

The publicity generated by these alarming statistics that represented averages for half a year had its effect. At the beginning of December, there was a large meeting of influential gentlemen with connections to the Vale held in the County Buildings to devise how to alleviate the distress among the operatives.<sup>74</sup> A few weeks later the Edinburgh Chronicle reported that they “have nothing favourable to note regarding the printing in the Vale of Leven, as many hands still go idle.”<sup>75</sup>

Thomason began to make sure he would have a voice in the new convention and made addresses around the area to garner support. First, however, there was a Scottish Convention where the strategy of the Scottish Chartists would be discussed. The new petition to Parliament included some additional pleas; for dissolving the Union with Ireland that might attract the increasing number of Irish Catholic immigrants, and amending the very unpopular 1834 English poor Law that did not apply to Scotland. O’Connor had campaigned in Scotland for the Scots to go along with this for the sake of the unity of the Chartist movement but by a narrow margin, the Scots requested their own petition.

O’Connor fired off an angry and rather unfair commentary in the Northern Star accusing Thomason of voting for the Whig motions.<sup>76</sup> To this Thomason gave a long and involved response.<sup>77</sup> A further point of contention referred to the practice that Chartists had introduced of moving support for the Charter in every public meeting, frequently frustrating and antagonizing those who called meeting for some completely different purpose. The meeting had resolved to do this only when it was judicious.

“That while this Convention declares that it is the right of the people to attend all public meetings, to give a fair expression to their sentiments on every subject affecting their interests; and that it is the duty of Chartists to take every opportunity at public meetings and otherwise to disseminate the principles contained in the People’s Charter; where it can be done judiciously and effectively, and it is further of opinion, that the vote of a majority, however triumphant, cannot convince the minority, it is neither wise nor politic on all occasions to move the usual amendment at public meetings; called for the promotion of liberal opinions, the alleviation of local or national distress, and the destruction of infamous monopolies.”

To which Brewster had added the amendment:

“That as it is right that the people should maintain their legitimate influence at public meetings, and as it may be proper on urgent occasions

<sup>74</sup> *Northern Star*, December 4, 1841.

<sup>75</sup> *Northern Star*, December 18, 1841.

<sup>76</sup> *Northern Star*, January 29, 1842.

<sup>77</sup> *Northern Star*, February 5, 1842.

to bring the sufferings of the people under notice of such meetings it is necessary that Chartists should continue to attend them, and act as circumstances may require.”

In his defence, Thomason indicated that at the time of this debate he was involved in drawing up the new Scottish Petition and that while he supported the outcome, he could not be blamed for the vote. It would seem that in O’Connor’s eyes, mere support for anything tainted by Brewster was problematic, and was now clear that there was a growing difference between O’Connor and Thomason.

As if to drive home the point, an account of the new conduct at a meeting of the Corn-Law Repealers in Dumbarton appeared in the *Northern Star* a month later. The Mr. Stirling mentioned was likely the delegate to the Complete Suffrage Union Convention in London, scheduled to be held at the same time as the Chartist Convention. The Vale Chartists continued to try to sway the meeting to their own point of view but in the end a more conciliatory approach was proposed.<sup>78</sup>

“Dumbarton.— On Tuesday evening the 22d ult. a public meeting was held in the Rev. Mr. Somerville’s Chapel, to hear an account from Mr. Stirling, of his delegation to London, as representative of the Dumbarton and Leven Corn Law Repealers. The meeting was large, and a considerable number of Leven Chartists were present expecting a move on the question of the Suffrage. After Mr. Stirling had read the London resolutions, and described the treatment which the Repealers had received from this house of their own creation. The Rev. Mr. Somerville proceeded to make some observations on the evils of the Corn Laws. The inconsistency with religion and humanity, the effects produced upon trade, and submitted a declaration which stated that enfranchisement was necessary to be conferred upon the people before their repeal could be effected. Mr. Young rose to submit an amendment to the effect that “as the Charter had been near four years before the country, the meeting could not at that advanced stage of the agitation agree to an alteration of its details; that they were determined peacefully, and legally, to agitate their claims, until that Charter were recognised as the law of this country.” Mr. William Thomason seconded the amendment. He pledged himself to hold by the six points of the Charter in all their integrity. The motion after some discussion was withdrawn, and also amendment, and Mr. Thomason moved, and Mr. Somerville seconded a resolution expressing the desirableness of a union between classes—still leaving it in the hands of the entire people to propound the terms. The meeting separated more deeply convinced, that as class legislation had been the cause, so the Charter would have to be the instrument which alone could save the country.”

“Alexandria.—On Thursday evening, a meeting took place in the Independent Chapel, Alexandria, to hear Mr. Stirling’s report; nothing particular occurred, besides confirming the resolutions of the London Conference. A resolution condemnatory of Peel’s plan, and a vote of thanks to the delegate; the whole passed away quietly. The Chartists were there to stand by their order if anything had occurred requiring their

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<sup>78</sup> *Northern Star*, March 5, 1842.

interference.”

“Trade is dreadful—this lovely vale is now the scene of poverty and want. Scores are out of work, and the few who are employed are getting their scanty pittances reduced 6s. 8d. in the pound. The prospect is dismal. The petition is being numerously signed, and some of our middle classes are viewing us with feelings of greater complacency.”

The National Chartist Association Conference alongside that of the Complete Suffrage Union was held in April in Birmingham and Thomason was the delegate from the Vale and Campsie. Before leaving, he gave a rousing address in the streets of Alexandria on Peel’s Tariff and the next night, a Friday, there was a concert in the Oddfellows’ Hall that continued till near midnight, followed by dancing till dawn.<sup>79</sup>

The National Conference addressed few issues but did allow Thomason an important platform where he presented the statistics he had gathered on poverty in the Vale.

“The introduction of machinery into the print-works had nearly superseded manual labour. A printer with the aid of a block could put one colour into ten pieces in a day; by the aid of machinery they could put three colours in and throw off one hundred and fifty pieces in a day; and they found those masters who were the loudest in their cry for cheap bread were those who were the greatest tyrants in their establishments; they now scarcely employed any one save, women and children. But notwithstanding this distress, their numbers were now as large as ever they were. In Alexandria, Bonhill, and Renton, there were only three middle-classmen who refused to sign the National Petition.”

The petition was presented to Parliament on May 4<sup>th</sup> by the Radical M.P. for Finsbury, Thomas Duncombe and in his speech, he referred to Thomason’s statistics. O’Connor had dreamed of 4 million signatures, and in fact over 3.2 million were collected. However, the timing was poor and the petition was again rejected by Parliament. The Chartist Movement suffered a tremendous setback. Different strategies were called for and Complete Suffrage Unions became more prevalent.

#### FALL FROM GRACE

One might wonder how this schoolmaster and pastor was carrying out his essential but more mundane ministry in the Vale. The answer is obvious. He was not. In July the Association announced a new set of officers.<sup>80</sup>

“Vale of Leven.—All communications for the Vale of Leven Chartists are to be addressed to John Millar, bookseller, Bonhill, who is elected corresponding secretary for the ensuing six months.

A Meeting of the Vale of Leven Universal Suffrage Association took place in the Democratic seminary on Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> inst, when the meeting was addressed by Mr. M’Crea.”

From June until November, Thomason was to be found lecturing in Bilston, Derby, Leicester, Wednesbury, Tipton and Walsall and doubtless other places in between. In September a Mr. James M’Pherson of Aberdeen was enquiring about an address for Mr.

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<sup>79</sup> *Northern Star*, April 9, 1842.

<sup>80</sup> *Northern Star*, June 25, 1842.

William Thomason, late of the Vale of Leven.<sup>81</sup> In November, it was the turn of the Bonhill bookseller.<sup>82</sup>

“Will Mr. Wm. Thomason, late of the Vale of Leven, send his present address to John Millar, bookseller, Bonhill, as he wishes to communicate with him?”

The mystery was explained more fully in a rebuttal to charges made by Thomason that he was owed money by various Chartists, dating back to his time in the Vale. Thomason had returned to Newcastle in 1842 where he worked with the miners of Northumberland and Durham for a while and wrote pamphlets critical of O’Connor.<sup>83</sup> Subsequently he was schoolmaster and minister in Wednesbury and in 1849 was trying for a position in Manchester but was receiving some bad publicity in the *Northern Star* when he went on the attack. He had earned the soubriquet “Wandering Window-breaker” for smashing the windows of the Metropolitan Office of the National Land Company.<sup>84</sup> The Vale’s response to O’Connor, by now a Member of Parliament, reveals that the wounds were raw even after seven years!<sup>85</sup>

“Dear Sir,—There have been a great many letters received in this locality from that nondescript Thomason, some of them by persons entirely unconnected with—nay, I had almost said hostile to,—the Chartist party. These letters were uniformly filled with the most violent attacks, malicious insinuations, and innuendos against your own character, the *Star*; and many of the other leaders of the Charter and Land movements, together with the most infamous lying attacks, and malevolent insinuations against the character of some of the individuals in particular, and of the parties in general with whom he used to act when residing in this locality. It was thought that the miserable wretch who could pen such extraordinary calumnies and send many of them to the very persons who know that—in as far as regards everything connected with this locality—they were a parcel of downright lies, must have been insane.

And as we believed that the charges against yourself and the other leaders were equally false, it was agreed to treat him with ‘that degree of silent respect’ that a person in his unfortunate condition is entitled to receive. Latterly, however, the opinion that he is more knave than fool has been generally adopted in this place; consequently, I took the liberty of enclosing one of his letters in the last communication which I sent to you with regard to the charges that he made in the letter which appeared in the *Star* of the 14th April—the parties referred to will speak for themselves. I am, dear Sir, yours most respectfully, James M’Intyre”

“Respected Sir—We, the undersigned, having been members of the school society; and of the church that engaged Thomason, to act in the capacity of teacher and preacher, in this locality, have had our attention directed to the following paragraph of that person’s letter which appeared in the *Star* of

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<sup>81</sup> *Northern Star*, September 17, 1842.

<sup>82</sup> *Northern Star*, November 12, 1842.

<sup>83</sup> Thomason, William, “O’Connorism and Democracy Inconsistent with Each Other, being a statement of events in the life of Feargus O’Connor,” 1844 Newcastle: Printed at the Tyne Mercury Office.

<sup>84</sup> *Northern Star*, April 14, 1849.

<sup>85</sup> *Northern Star*, May 12, 1849.

the 14th April : viz. "I was literally robbed by a portion of the Chartist party, of my books, chest and clothes, when in the West of Scotland, and a sum of money due me, £17 3s 2d." Being the parties referred to, we beg leave to cite the following brief account of our connexion with him: He came to this place early in the year 1841, when he was engaged to teach and preach in the Democratic seminary. A salary of 25s. per week was guaranteed to him, provided, however, that he attended regularly five days per week, and discharged his duties faithfully. He commenced his school with from 150 to 160 pupils, but, in consequence of his gross negligence, the number of his scholars soon dwindled down to about twenty. In fact, his conduct was a complete burlesque upon teaching. At one time he would be absent day after day, perhaps nearly a week at a time, nobody knowing where he was; at other times, he was to be seen loitering about the streets during school hours. The children, meanwhile, in consequence of being left entirely to themselves "enjoyed such glorious fun," that the whole neighbourhood was deaved with the noise: while, at the very best, he would leave his school in the hands of any inexperienced working man or lad that he could happen to find idle at the time. Yet, nevertheless, being unwilling to do anything that would have the slightest appearance of harshness, and as we took him to be an easy good-natured kind of a mortal, we occasionally remonstrated with him and gave him good advice, and continued for a number of months more to pay him his salary in full. Ultimately, however, we told him plainly, that as he had entirely failed to discharge his duty to us, that we were unable and unwilling to continue paying him his salary any longer, and that he was to consider his connexion with us at an end. He then entreated us to try and give him a few shillings a week, and as he was a single man he thought he could live till trade got better. This was about the beginning of 1842, and trade was fearfully bad, yet we made a determined effort and gave him on an average about 7s. or 8s. a week, for doing next to nothing, as long as he remained here, and we may state that very few of the families who contributed to make up this sum were in the receipt of so large an income. Thus, you will perceive, that so far from owing him anything, we, in point of fact; gave him much more than he was entitled to receive. Having been compelled to say so much in self-defence, we will now show you how he fleeced two or three of his own flock; we could extend the number considerably, but we give these as mere samples of that worthy's love of honesty and plain dealing. When he came here first he was like a beggar, and as it was absolutely necessary that he should have a respectable appearance, Robert Freebairn, being brother-in-law to Mr. Thomas M'Kechnie, tailor, and clothier, Glasgow, became surety for two entire suits of clothes of the very best quality, which Thomason received from that gentleman; the one suit was for the pulpit and the other to make him appear respectable as a teacher: they cost about £9, sterling and all that we could induce him (Thomason) to pay for them (if we except a great deal of gratuitous insolent abuse) was 30s; which leaves a balance of £7 10s sterling. He received from James Buchanan, a hard-working shoemaker, a pair of boots, and several mendings amounting in all to about £1, and made his *exit* without paying a single farthing of them. He boarded with Mrs. Aitken, a poor old widow woman, who now resides in Kilbarchan, and the heartless wretch decamped owing her nearly £8 sterling. These

three sums alone amount to about £16 sterling. As it regards his chest, he owes George Ferguson, (now in America) the price of it; it is now in Mrs. Aitken's possession and she would be very glad to see Mr. Thomason coming to take it away. As to his boots and clothes, he knows best about them himself; he carried off everything of the kind that he could lay his hands on in a huge black bag. There was more than one bookseller in this place who gained a loss by having him for a customer; and he was not content with cajoling the booksellers, for you must know that he could and did borrow, and in too many cases never returned the publications to their proper owners. But there is no use in lengthening out this black catalogue, we have said sufficient to vindicate our own characters, and to caution the Chartist body against being deceived by the "Wandering Window-breaker." We hope that you will, in accordance with the notice in last Saturday's *Northern Star*, insert this communication in the next number of that valuable journal, and you will much oblige. Yours, with every sentiment of respect, James Buchanan, Robert Freebairn, Daniel Jardine."

Dear Sir,—I may state that Thomason, over and above receiving a handsome salary for attending the Convention, in 1842, received 12s. from this locality, for defraying Conventional expenses, and kept it for his own use. I am, yours, most faithfully, James M'Intyre."

The story does not quite end there. In 1847, Thomason was organizing the East London Co-operative Trading Society and lecturing on the causes of disease in Limehouse, in the east end of London. He continued his animosity towards Feargus O'Connor and was arrested for a physical attack on O'Connor at the latter's home in Notting-hill Terrace in July 1851. He is known to have been employed in a warehouse in Greenwich in 1865.

#### RETRENCHMENT

The tone of the Chartist Movement changed after the rejection of the second petition. Different tactics and themes began to evolve. A trades conference responding to reductions in wages during the previous few years was held in the summer of 1842 and called for strikes. Many of the leaders were chartists, and while strikes were widespread throughout the nation, especially in mining districts, they do not appear to have been touched the Vale. This shift towards trades unionism in the broader movement was opposed by O'Connor, and the radicals of the Vale stuck by his leadership.

At the end of November, they met in the Democratic Seminary to elect a new committee with Mr. Montgomerie in the chair.<sup>86</sup> Mr. Alexander M'Kean was elected chairman and Mr. M'Intyre, vice-chairman and secretary, to whom all communication must be sent.

"Lecturers wishing to visit this place must communicate at the least eight days with their address, otherwise their services will not be accepted. Letters addressed to Mr. George Ferguson, Alexandria, by Dumbarton."

The Vale Chartists continued to maintain an active lecture program and on December 10<sup>th</sup> selected Mr. Con Murray as delegate to the Birmingham Conference at the end of 1842.<sup>87</sup> A week later he lectured and was given his instructions.<sup>88</sup> Messrs. Glenn, M'Intyre, Montgomery, Kirk, Roberts, worked on the motion that was moved by Mr. Peter Glen

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<sup>86</sup> *Northern Star*, December 3, 1842.

<sup>87</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842.

<sup>88</sup> *Northern Star*, December 24, 1842.

and seconded by Mr. J. Moody. “That this meeting of the inhabitants of the Vale of Leven, pledge themselves to stand by the Charter, in name, principle, and details, and instruct our delegate to support that document as the proposed bill from the Conference, believing that it would go far to unite the working classes in one determined body, against the common enemies of injured labour, besides bringing about a union of sentiment and a union or action, between them and the shopkeeping class whose interests are one and the same.” Murray was Catholic and his selection may indicate an attempt to attract some of the influx of Irish immigrants to the Vale at this time. The topic of the Union with Ireland proved popular.

At the Conference, Mr. Murray spoke eloquently about the need to marshal resources on a national level for the defence of those imprisoned or transported for political offences. He went on to provide details of a plan suggested by Mr. M’Intyre, secretary to the Chartists of the Vale of Leven to collect one half-penny from everyone who signed the Petition, and if only half were willing, this would raise £3,000, and “if they act with spirit and energy in this matter, and raise the above sum, there will soon be an end to prosecution for opinion.”<sup>89</sup>

The Chartists in the Vale continued but in clearly reduced circumstances but they were not discouraged. They no longer sponsored delegates to national meetings but they kept firmly abreast of the topics that captured the national stage. In May they brought in a group of travelling players who put on “The Trial of Robert Emmet”<sup>90</sup> for two nights, to raise funds for friends to build a hall.<sup>91</sup> Visits from different speakers presented a mix of topics from the Repeal Movement in Ireland to nascent Trade Unionism and Chartists topics. In June, 1843, they listened to Mr. Robert Peddie<sup>92</sup> who had recently be released from jail. He lectured on the Repeal movement in Ireland. Mr. George Ferguson proposed a resolution, seconded by Mr. Burns that:—

“We, the inhabitants of the Vale of Leven, in public meeting assembled, do express our warm and heartfelt sympathy with those brave and patriotic men in the sister island now so gallantly struggling for the re-attainment of a domestic legislature; and not only do we sympathise with them, but also pledge ourselves to give them every assistance that we legally and constitutionally can do, in this their glorious effort to obtain that freedom which God has given to every creature under Heaven, namely, the right of self-government. The more especially do we feel ourselves called upon to come forward at this time with expressions of satisfaction at, and warmest wishes for, the success of the Repeal agitation in Ireland, as certain portions of the British hireling press has most falsely and most wickedly stated that the working men of England and Scotland feel no interest in these truly grand and glorious struggles for rational liberty; and still further, as with grief and heartfelt sorrow we behold what we cannot help calling a most dishonest, and diabolical attempt on the part of the enemies of freedom to enlist on the side of power the religions prejudices of the Protestant Christians, by insinuating that the real interest of the leaders of

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<sup>89</sup> *Northern Star*, January 21, 1843.

<sup>90</sup> Leader of the United Irishmen who was executed in 1803. In addition to their own Seminary, the Chartists used the Oddfellows’ Hall at the bottom of Random Street and latterly Mrs. Elizabeth Moody’s large room in her public house in Bonhill. It may have been this that was financed.

<sup>91</sup> *Northern Star*, May 13, 1843

<sup>92</sup> *Northern Star*, June 10, 1843.

the Repeal agitation in Ireland is to establish Catholic supremacy in that country. As Protestants ourselves we do fearlessly assert that we are persuaded that these wicked insinuations are but a weak invention of the enemy, meant to throw the apple of religious discord amongst the friends of freedom,—only another proof that the Tories have not forgot their old axiom—divide and conquer—an attempt that, we feel confident, will prove as useless to them as it is wicked in intention. And we, the inhabitants of the Vale of Leven, do most seriously exhort our Irish brethren to continue fearlessly their noble and patriotic career, nothing doubting that a speedy and bloodless triumph awaits them. Also, as men of stern principle, we feel called upon to say, that in class legislation—and in class legislation alone—is to be found the origin of both Ireland's and England's woe. And, moreover, had it not been for the existence of class legislation, Ireland could not have been so basely robbed by a British Parliament of her resident House of Representatives.”

The Irish question was clearly one that attained some momentum locally, perhaps it was aimed at attracting the influx of Irish into the printworks in the Vale, a group hard to motivate in their own interests, perhaps reflecting fears from the local populace from this new source of labour willing to undercut their wages. Peddie stayed over for an outdoor meeting in Alexandria on the following Monday evening with Mr. Roberts in the chair. Three bands were present and almost 2,000, were present. Mr. J. M'Fadyen, Mr. Burns, Mr. G. Ferguson and Mr. C. Glen proposed or seconded various resolutions on Irish Repeal, and the latter, in “a speech of striking eloquence, appealed to the people to do their duty in resisting all encroachments upon their civil and religious liberties.”

In September of the same year, William Hill visited and commented that the Church has kept Chartism alive. By this time they had replaced Thomason with a new schoolmaster and minister.

“The spirit of Chartism is diffused throughout the whole population; the Church is the form in which it appears, and the school is the means of ensuring its continuance and progress. The pulpit and the school desk are ably occupied by Mr. Roberts. of Glasgow”

He warned them against the O'Connellite Repealers.

“The O'Connellite Repealers muster very strong in Glasgow. It was thought exceedingly desirable, if possible, to effect a junction between them and the Chartists: an effort was made for it at the end of my lecture, as I told you in my last letter. It failed; and I advise that no more such efforts be made. Leave the O'Connellites alone. Let them go their own way. At public meetings, when “the Repeal” is the matter of discussion, give them your assistance by the assertion of your opinion on that question abstractedly and on its own merits, and independent of any other consideration. If they have the manly honesty to act similarly by us, let us at public meetings receive their assistance cheerfully; if they do not; if they join with the “League” and with the enemies of freedom to suppress us, let us pity them; let our warfare be merely defensive—never offensive—against men who are struggling for liberty.”

In November of 1844, Thomas Clark recounted his visit to the Vale. He had previously lectured in Glasgow on “Labour's wrongs and Labour's remedies,” and the question of

“Trades Unions.” By this time the Chartists appear to have given up on their Democratic Seminary and had meetings of a broader appeal in the Odd Fellows’ Hall in John Street.

“The Scotch Calico Printers seem to entertain the notion so generally prevalent at the present time amongst the intelligent portion of the trades, namely, that unions, upon their old footing, will never do; but that in order to succeed they must have at least an accumulating capital. This, of course, can only be secured by cooperation in the purchase of land or manufactures. On Thursday I visited that delightful and picturesque spot, the Vale of Leven; and in the evening lectured in the Odd Fellows’ Hall at Alexandria, on the “Rights of Labour.” The chair was ably occupied by a veteran Chartist, who opened the meeting in a neat and appropriate address. After which I spoke about an hour and a half, and at the conclusion enrolled a great number of members. On Friday evening I lectured at Bonhill, a village divided from Alexandria by the water of Leven. Mr M’Intyre, a democrat of the right stamp, was unanimously chosen to preside. My subject was Repeal, Federalism, and Chartism. I took the opportunity of exposing the fallacy of Federalism as compared with Repeal, and the inability of both when contrasted with Chartism, which I argued must be carried ere the Union can be repealed. No opposition showing itself, I went again to the work of enrolment, and succeeded in forming a strong locality, which bids fair to prosper.”

In February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1846, the Association through Daniel Jardine, jun., Richard Montgomery, Thomas Angus, Edward Hannah, Sub-Treasurer, and James M’Inity, Secretary addressed an open letter lamenting their inability to raise subscriptions and detailing the history of the Movement in the Vale, the successes and the trials and tribulations they had faced. When the Association in the Vale was first formed, things went “smoothly and vigorously” but then the “physical and moral force” conflict came to the fore and by the time it had played out, the strongest advocates for either side “retired from the movement, leaving the waters of Chartism contaminated with the filth and mud of prejudice and disunion.” The in-fighting among the national Chartist leaders was another area of weakness that brought a dark cloud over the movement. There “was still a few who stood faithful to their principles. And first among the foremost was to be found our brave and dauntless champion, Feargus O’Connor.”<sup>93</sup> The letter went on to detail the most recent issue that was important locally.

“But it would appear the evil genius of Chartism was not yet appeased; he determined to make another grand effort to crush the movement altogether, and, accordingly, he poured out upon our ranks another phial of his wrath. It contained a mixture which the Scotch people look upon as being the most deadly and malignant of all mixtures—viz., the mixture of religion (irreligion, we should have said) with politics. This is the thing which, in this locality, has done us more harm than all other evils put together. It has completely paralysed all our efforts to extend the organisation. It crushes us down to the earth like an incubus. The religious prejudices of the people are fairly set against us. They (the people) will scarcely come to hear a Chartist lecture, so much is the very name despised on account of this mixture.”

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<sup>93</sup> *Northern Star*, February 21, 1846.

At this point, the Association in the Vale was reduced to just 12 enrolled members and had difficulty putting together a meeting even with the attraction of a lecturer and would “find it very difficult to raise from £10 to £50 by subscription.” On the bright side, the national leadership was now united, focused and worked hard for the movement, the sanctioned lecturers were faithful to the movement and they “have the people’s paper, the *Northern Star*, shining with more than its wonted splendour.”

“We must not scare away the people from the movement by wounding and insulting their religious feelings. No; this is a cause which ought to know no distinction of creed or colour: every virtuous man ought to be encouraged to join our ranks.”

They had their suggestions for making progress in the movement by seizing on current issues of public concern. And asked for support for a scheme to support “a talented and sensible missionary, who knows how to respect the religious feeling of the people” who might lead them on these issues.

“Now, as there are a number of circumstances in existence at present, which, if taken advantage of, would tend most materially to brighten out future prospects, viz., the embodiment of the militia, a subject in which every family in the nation is interested—the Scotch Poor Law Bill (in this parish there is an assessment upon incomes of £40 per annum of 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d. per pound: this is quite a new affair in this locality, and is causing very great dissatisfaction); and in consequence of the clumsy working of the Act for the Regulating the labour of children, &c., of calico print works, the Ten Hours’ Bill presents an attraction in this locality which it never possessed before.”

On a Friday in March, they had a meeting on the Ten Hours’ Bill in the Odd Fellows’ Hall, Alexandria, to petition Parliament to pass the bill for limiting the hours of labour in factories and calico print-works to ten hours per day.<sup>94</sup> Mr. James Robertson was in the chair and Mr. Charles Glen presented the case and proposed a resolution that was seconded by Mr. Andrew M’Lintock and carried unanimously. A second resolution was proposed by Mr. William Barr and seconded by Mr. John M’Lean and carried unanimously. A young man “possessing natural talents of a high order” who had “received the benefit of a classical education,” Mr. Archibald Guthrie,<sup>95</sup> moved the adoption of a petition, founded on the resolutions. Mr. J. Kemp provided a second and it was carried unanimously. The meeting was most impressed with Mr. Guthrie’s speech that “was one of the most connected and forcible specimens of oratory which it has been our lot to hear for many a day.” A large committee was appointed to secure the signatures of the workpeople at the various public works; and also to wait upon the villagers at their respective dwellings, in order that as many names be appended as possible. A vote of thanks was then proposed to Mr. Archibald Guthrie for his kindness in drawing up the petition, and for the ability that he displayed in moving its adoption.”

The employment of children in the local works was extensive, and the current limits on the time these most vulnerable employees were allowed to work were largely ignored. The Factory Inspector for the County, James Stewart, made a report on the works that employed children in May, 1846. Both male and female children were employed.

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<sup>94</sup> *Northern Star*, March 28, 1846.

<sup>95</sup> Archibald Guthrie was a 22 year old print cutter living in Turnbull Crescent.

Children employed	M	F	Total	post town
50 Bailey and Co Millburn	None			Dumbarton
51 Bailey and Co Dilliechip	63	51	114	Bonhill
52 Glen and M'Indoe	26	30	56	Bonhill
53 Guthrie Kinloch and Co Dalmonach	22	19	41	Alexandria
54 Guthrie Kinloch and Co Ferrifield	71	41	112	Alexandria
55 A. Orr Ewing and Co.	37	26	63	Dumbarton
56 John Tod	15	16	31	Alexandria
57 Robert Alexander and Co	36	51	87	Alexandria
58 William Stirling and Sons Dalquharn	0	2	2	Dumbarton
59 William Stirling and Sons Cordale	48	60	108	Dumbarton
60 Gilbert Lang	None			Dumbarton

At the beginning of March, they returned to a perennial theme and had a meeting concerning a petition for the release of the Chartists who had been transported or were incarcerated.<sup>96</sup> In two nights they had acquired the signatures of two thousand one hundred persons, and it was sent to T. S. Duncombe, Esq., for presentation. A letter was sent to Alexander Smollett, the local M.P. asking for his support. In June, they returned to the same theme and had a collection for Mr. Frost, that resulted in a Bank order for £1 10s that they sent to Mr. O'Connor to show that they had confidence in him.<sup>97</sup>

In January 1846, Peel, the Prime Minister announced that the Corn Laws would be repealed and would be abolished entirely on February 1, 1849. This removed a major contention for the middle-class support of political change in the nation and had a divisive effect on the Chartist Movement. In their reduced state, the Vale Chartists continued with their organization but many of the meetings were more broadly based and carried an increase in Trade Unionism and issues affecting the workplace.

“Mr. Jacobs lectured to the trades of Alexandria Vale of Leven in the Odd Fellows’ Hall. The lecturer set forth injuries inflicted on the trades by the encroachment of the master class and competition of machinery, and reading a text from them, introduced “the Monster Combination” as the only remedy, of which all seemed fully convinced. A resolution approving the association was carried, and the Block Printers expressed their determination to join.”<sup>98</sup>

In February, 1848, Dr. Peter M'Douall made a tour of Scotland to try breathe new life into the Movement and to build up support for a new petition to Parliament.<sup>99</sup> He reached Glasgow on Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> of November and in the middle of the next week visited the Vale. At the time, there was much unrest on the Continent and the Government was concerned with the threat of invasion and had recalled the militia.

“I proceeded thence to the Vale of Leven, where, although the weather was adverse, I addressed the largest meeting which has been held according to the authority of the committee, during the last seven years. The petition was adopted, and the Charter, as well as resolutions carried adverse to a militia farce. Mr Rogers contended that it would be better to

<sup>96</sup> *Northern Star*, March 14, 1846.

<sup>97</sup> *Northern Star*, June 27, 1846.

<sup>98</sup> *Northern Star*, November 28, 1846.

<sup>99</sup> *Northern Star*, February 12, 1848.

come out for the pure principle, instead of adopting the humbug cry of ‘No vote, no musket;’ but gave credit for the policy and tact of such a movement. I replied that the cry was no clap-trap, but a really sound and rational expression of principle.

The idea of an invasion might be clap-trap, but the fact of a government compelling a man to perform a duty, whilst denying him the exercise of a right was a physical wrong, which ought to be morally resisted. That right was the suffrage, and until it was granted, we were justified in refusing to form a rampart around the property and persons of our oppressors.

Ultimately all opposition was withdrawn, and the meeting terminated peacefully. The influence of such a meeting will be felt in the Vale, and ought not to be allowed to slumber. Scotland will exceed herself if a constant agitation is maintained, and I have no doubt, if I am followed by others, that a larger number of signatures, will be procured than ever yet were recorded in the ‘land of mountain and of flood.’”

In April 1845, Feargus O’Connor had launched a Chartist Cooperative Land Company that was subsequently renamed the National Land Company. The basic idea was that working men could pool resources to purchase estates, leasing land back to working men, selected by a lottery, who would then have the property requirements to be eligible to vote. The project would be sustained and expanded by the rents collected. The first of these estates was Heronsgate, near Watford, and was renamed O’Connorville. The idea received much general criticism but a Land Society was begun among the Vale Chartists. It was a last gasp and slowly fizzled away.

“On Friday evening a numerous and highly respectable meeting was held in the Mechanics’ Institution, Alexandria, to hear Mr. Christopher Doyle expound the principles of the “Land Society.” Mr. James M’Intyre filled the chair, and opened the business in a brief but impressive speech, and then called upon Mr. Doyle to address the meeting. The lecturer’s speech occupied an hour and a half in the delivery, and was listened to with earnest attention, and at the conclusion he received the hearty applause of his hearers. Mr. Doyle’s address will be productive of much good in the Vale of Leven.”<sup>100</sup>

On the following evening a Soiree was held in the house of Mr. James M’Intyre, after a tea prepared by Mrs. M’Intyre. Mr. James Smith, of Glasgow, was in the chair and there were speeches by Mr. M’Intyre and Mr. Doyle. Numerous toasts such as “The People, the only legitimate source of all power,” “The Charter, may it soon become the Law of the Land,” and “The Chartist Co-operative Land Society, and may success crown the efforts of its members,” and songs by Mr. Doyle and others; “Base oppressors leave your slumbers,” “The O’Connorville Demonstration” song, “Woodman spare that Tree,” “Spread the Charter,” and “Rally around him,” completed the program.

A year later, Mr. Samuel Kydd visited and entered a debate with Rev. Mr. Wallace in the United Presbyterian Chapel on the social issues of the day.<sup>101</sup> The contrasting merits of the National Land Movement became a point of disagreement. Rev. Wallace admitted the advantages of the possession of small plots of land but security of the property and

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<sup>100</sup> *Northern Star*, October 3, 1846.

<sup>101</sup> *Northern Star*, December 25, 1847.

the protection of the public needed improvement. Two years later in 1849,<sup>102</sup> Robert Freebairn, as “a member of the Land Company, although not a paid up one, owing to want of work” responded to criticism of Feargus O’Connor over the Land Company and offered the reflection,

“I would give you my humble advice, and that is, to wind up the affairs of the Land Company, and give all the grumblers up their money, and by doing you will sift the chaff from the wheat. Believe me, sir, when I entered the Company I never expected to get on the Land, for I am unfit for that work, but I was willing to do all I could for the good of my country; and, if the Company was broken up tomorrow, I would say, do what you think best with my money, for I would be ashamed to look for a single farthing back.”

The Vale Chartists seem to have been dissipated as a force by the end of the decade. They had one further visit, from Mr. Julian Harney on September 26, 1851. In a letter to the executive of the National Charter Association, he speaks of forming a new association at Alexandria.<sup>103</sup> Presumably the old Vale of Leven Universal Suffrage Association had expired.

In 1851, the Dumbarton Herald newspaper began publication and provides a more accessible local view of matters social, political and criminal.

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<sup>102</sup> *Northern Star*, December 29, 1849.

<sup>103</sup> *Northern Star*, October 11, 1851.