

BRIDGETON

Recollections from a
Time of Change

**Bridgeton Library
Local History Group**

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2014**

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1: Post-Industrial Bridgeton

From the 1870s, Bridgeton began to emerge as a Scottish industrial powerhouse. The early industries in Bridgeton were connected largely with the weaving, textile and dyeing trades, but Bridgeton began to expand dramatically into full-scale industrial manufacturing. Here could be found metal foundries, carpet factories, structural engineering fabricators, mine-working machinery manufacturers, chemical factories, rubber factories, wire-weaving plants and electrical equipment manufacturers. As well as all of these, there was the substructure connected with powering all of this activity: gas and electricity production.



James Street in its Industrial Heyday, c. 1935

This period of 80 years (1870-1950) was when Bridgeton was at its industrial peak, and, in the 1930s, Bridgeton was “possibly the most industrialised few square miles on the planet.”¹ Hume² reports that in the 1960s there were 189 manufacturing or industry related properties in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock. The view of James Street in the 1930s demonstrates clearly the cheek-by-jowl nature of Bridgeton life, with industry and dwellings in very close proximity. Most people lived near their

¹ Mitchell, E R (2005)

² Quoted in Eunson, E (1997)

This City Now: Glasgow and its working class past, Luath, p.156
Old Bridgeton and Calton, Stenlake Publishing, p.3

place of work and were employed in local factories and places of industry, and tenements and factories appear to be built in an apparently haphazard way around each other. One major result of this complexity of industrial and domestic construction was the poverty of housing provision. Despite the grandeur of an area such as Bridgeton Cross, for most people, home was a one- or two-roomed tenement flat with a shared toilet. The close and cramped living conditions were eventually appalling, and, by the 1930s, Lewis Grassie Gibbon was drawn to report that in this, “the most industrialised few square miles on the planet”, there were “over a hundred and fifty thousand human beings living in such conditions as the most bitterly pressed primitive in Tierra del Fuego never envisaged.”³



Main Street, Bridgeton 1926 Slum Housing

This can be seen in the photograph: it is far more than neglect: there is almost a sense of wreckage.

However, by the late 1950s things had begun to change, although few could have predicted the virtual disappearance of Bridgeton’s manufacturing industries over a period of thirty years. Post-industrialism had come to

³ Quoted in Mitchell, E R (2005) Op. cit., p.155

Bridgeton. Post-industrialism is characterised by changes in work and domestic life patterns: the structural changes in economic activity are such that demand for certain products of industry have collapsed. The demand for the majority of the products created in Bridgeton began, gradually at first and then accelerating, to tail off. The supply of the products mentioned above is now provided by overseas industry. Post-industrialism is a period where work and life are no longer based on heavy industry.

The changes can occur slowly and almost imperceptibly, or, as in the case of Bridgeton, they can occur very quickly with a sense of catastrophe and great dislocation. It is now clear that “the post-war industrial boom had masked the effects of the use of out-of-date industrial practices ... Glasgow was still making Victorian industrial vehicles and equipment using Victorian manufacturing technologies and Victorian manufacturing techniques.”⁴ Economic historians recognise that by the early 1960s British GDP was growing at a significantly lower rate than some other European countries, but “plainly Scotland was doing even less well.”⁵ As countries in the Empire began to seek independence, the captive markets were lost. Scotland had to compete in a more open market and was found wanting.



A view of post-industrial Dalmarnock, 1975

⁴ Glasgow Museums (2008)

⁵ Devine, T (1999)

Glasgow 1955: Through the Lens p. 8

The Scottish Nation 1700-2000, Allen Lane Penguin Books, p.570

Glasgow, being the industrial powerhouse of Scotland, and Bridgeton, being the industrial powerhouse of Glasgow, suffered badly. Major employers such as the Arrol Bridge and Crane Works and Anderson Strathclyde Mining Machinery hung on, but both were closed by the early 1990s.

For Bridgeton, this has been a period marked by industrial unemployment, social and economic exclusion, and a clear sense that some kind of boundary had been passed, from the “industrial” to the “post-industrial”.



Castlemilk High Rise Flats 1970s

In an attempt to hold back this post-industrial decline, Bridgeton was one of the twenty-nine Comprehensive Development Areas created by the City Council in 1957. The aim was for Glasgow to become a new modern city. The plan, which was somewhat Stalinist in concept and practice, favoured decentralisation: it moved people away from overcrowded communities such as Bridgeton, to the massive new housing schemes, such as Castlemilk, Drumchapel and Easterhouse on the periphery of the city. However, it was not simply a removal of people from the area. New building also took place within Bridgeton e.g. Madras St, Reid St., Rumford St., and Springfield Rd. Within Bridgeton the Corporation replaced many sections of old tenement

properties with new style three-storey tenement blocks, but even into the 1970s there were people living in very poor dwellings.



Main Street between Bridgeton Cross and Muslin Street 1974

There was also a movement of people to the new towns of East Kilbride and Cumbernauld outside Glasgow. This movement of population enabled the destruction of much of the Victorian housing stock but, because replacement moved at a slower pace, it caused the depopulation of Bridgeton. It is estimated that, between 1951 and 1981, over 100,000 people left the east end of Glasgow, including over half of Bridgeton's population.⁶ However, it will be seen that life in a working-class area such as Bridgeton has such a "peculiarly gripping wholeness, that after (reaching age) twenty-five, it can become difficult for a working-class person to move either into another kind of area, or even into another area of the same kind."⁷

The Glasgow East Area Renewal (GEAR) project in the 1970s was responsible for much of the subsequent clearing of huge areas of substandard housing. It also attempted to attract new manufacturing industry to replace the large works which had closed down or were in

⁶ Eunson, E (1997)

Op. cit., p.3

⁷ Hoggart, R (1957)

The Uses of Literacy (Pelican) p. 68

decline. However, in a period of post-industrial decline, it was inevitable that it would be impossible for any replacements to be on the same large scale.



London Road 1968

The area at the left of the photograph above is still derelict land. It has been claimed that “nowhere have the effects of Glasgow’s industrial decline been as visible as here.”⁸

There is, however, a paradox. There have been the characteristics of post-industrialism: poverty, unemployment, changes in work and living conditions, the social effects of disruption and dislocation in domestic life. But, Bridgeton has also been described as “the greatest place in the world to live”.⁹

The present is now an important time in the history of Bridgeton. With the creation of Clyde Gateway and its activities, there is a sense of revival. While there is still manufacturing going on in the area it is of markedly less importance than before and is insufficient to keep its population in employment. The new service and knowledge industries are bringing in educated professionals. At present most of them commute into Bridgeton,

⁸ Mitchell, E R (2005)

Op. cit, p.156

⁹ Wylie, Robert and Lorraine

Interviewed May 26 2013

but high quality public and private housing developments aims to ensure that there will be a professional class resident within the area.

There are therefore two drivers in the creation of this oral history. Firstly, it describes a period of forced urban renewal and consequent population dispersal and decline. Secondly, it describes a period of de-industrialisation without any adequate or properly planned replacement. Those who lived through this period are now of an age such that it is imperative that their recollections of life and work are recorded and set in context. These recollections, plus commentary, form the remainder of this research project.

2: Domestic Life

Hoggart has noted that “The more we look at working-class life, the more we try to reach the core of working class attitudes the more surely does it appear that the core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local: it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second the neighbourhood.”¹⁰ The keynote of this embodiment is the tenement.

2.1: The Tenement

As indicated in Chapter One, by the 1850s in Bridgeton, the strain upon existing housing stock was enormous. There was no political or governmental institution which carried the responsibility of providing housing. The result was that there was “gross overcrowding and conditions rapidly deteriorated with poor lighting, bad ventilation, totally inadequate water supplies, sewage and waste disposal.”¹¹ As a consequence of this, Glasgow suffered from outbreaks of typhus and cholera.

The City Improvement Trust was established through the 1866 Act for the purpose of acquiring and demolishing the worst properties in the city, and “... to provide replacement housing for the previous inhabitants. The Trust was active in Bridgeton but it was always beset with financial difficulties in providing suitable housing at a cost which the people could afford.”¹² In the years 1872-76 a great many tenements were built and it was during this period that their long serried ranks became a familiar part of the landscape, dominating the whole of Glasgow's urban housing well into the 1970s. (However, these tenements therefore all became old and decrepit at the same time, creating a massive problem of sub-standard housing.)

Many of Bridgeton's roads and streets were characterised by long, regular ranks of red or white stone tenements, with the streets as valleys of activity between the high frontages. One thinks of Hoggart's¹³ image of the working class area where “the houses are fitted into the dark and lowering canyons between the giant factories and the services which attend them”. They were “The barracks of the working class.”

Although there were great changes during the post-industrial period, some vestiges of the imposing rows remain throughout the district. This view of

¹⁰ Hoggart, R (1957)

Op.cit., p. 33

¹¹ Adams, G (1990)

A History of Bridgeton and Dalmarnock p. 26

¹² Adams, G (1990)

Op. cit., p. 28

¹³ Hoggart, R (1957)

Op. cit., p. 59

Bridgeton Cross in the 1960s is witting testimony to the confidence of builders and speculators of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.



The Olympia Building and tenements in the 1960s

The renovation of the area around Bridgeton Cross gives an idea of how grand and imposing some of these tenements were. However, it has to be said that not all tenements were of this quality, and with most interspersed between factories and workshops, conditions remained poor for ordinary people.

Most homes in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock tenements were either "single-ends" (one apartment) or "room and kitchens" (two apartments). Homes containing up to ten people were not unknown: mother, father and up to eight children. With at least two family groups per landing and eight families "up the close", more than 60 people in the one close, sharing three toilets, would not be uncommon. In the back-court, or, euphemistically, the "back green", were the drying areas, the midden and possibly a wash-house.

There were, of course, other configurations. Airlie Street had a tenement block with three flats per landing: the two outside flats had an inside toilet, while the middle flat had its own toilet on the landing.¹⁴



London Road 1976

“People were in close proximity to one another physically; this, together with the wider social context in which people lived their everyday lives was, arguably, conducive to the fostering of a genuine spirit of concern for each other, and for the flourishing of friendly relations.”¹⁵ Sometimes, the closeness led to a sense almost of wonderment: “Now when I walk up Fordneuk St I’m fascinated at the small piece of ground that held an L-shaped tenement block of seven closes. How did they manage to pack in so many families into such a small area?”¹⁶ These were therefore close, huddled intimate conditions of life which generated a group strength. Hoggart has it that “You are bound to be close to people with whom, for example, you share a lavatory or common yard.”¹⁷ This intimacy could only work if there were “rules” for domestic life, and, even when people moved

¹⁴ Stewart, Owen

¹⁵ McKenna, J (2006)

¹⁶ Robertson, Donna

¹⁷ Hoggart, R (1957)

Interviewed 20 July 2013

Last Exit from Bridgeton: an East End Childhood Remembered
(The Grimsay Press), p.19

Email reminiscence 3 December 2013

Op. cit., p. 81

into new tenements which had inside toilets, you still had to take regard for your neighbours.¹⁸ Let us now examine some of these.

2.2: Rules of Tenement Living

Hugh Wylie¹⁹ was brought up in Savoy Street between 1948 and 1966. The family consisted of Father, Mother and two sons and the accommodation was a single end (one room with a bed recess) and a toilet on the landing.

The bed recess was the parental bed and the children slept on a rolled-up mattress which was kept under the “set-in bed”. In some cases there was stored under the main bed “a truckle bed as part of the bed suite which could be rolled out”.²⁰ Other uses for the space under the set-in bed included the children’s toy-box, the tin or zinc bath and a suitcase which doubled as a seasonal wardrobe.²¹ The family’s winter clothes would be put into the suitcase at the beginning of Spring and the Summer clothes would go back into the suitcase in the Autumn. In a restricted space, such ingenuity was not uncommon.

There are instances²² where parents were separated: the father had a bed of his own with boys sleeping in the room bed recess, and girls shared a bed with the mother in a separate room.

Much can be gained from family photographs. While they may have been taken to celebrate and record birthdays, Christmas, new babies, and the other milestones of family life, they very often provide unwitting testimony which can be of great value to the later historian. This photograph of a family within a tenement interior, while ostensibly showing three delightful children, two of whom are proudly showing off a new sibling, also gives us an insight into the ingenuity which was needed for tenement life. It clearly shows the bed recess in the background: this was covered by closed curtains during the day, unfortunately the curtains do not reach! “Four of us slept in the bed-recess: my Mother Nessie McArthur, Father Jimmy McArthur, Linda and I. I slept at the 'feet end' as I was the oldest.”²³ The pantry cupboard can be also be seen in the photograph, and bread and

¹⁸ Wylie, Lorraine

Interviewed 27 July 2013:
“Even when the Council built new tenements with their own toilets, there were still tenement rules to be observed.”

¹⁹ Wylie, Hugh

Interviewed 8 July 2013

²⁰ McGeady, Vicky

Interviewed 27 July 2013

²¹ Johnston, Agnes

Interviewed 27 July 2013

²² Martin, Jessie

Interviewed 8 August 2013

²³ McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 26 November 2013

groceries were stored in there. It has a pull down lid which acted as a worktop to butter bread and do other kitchen tasks.



The McArthur Children, 202 Baltic Street, Bridgeton, 1960

Bathing for children was either in the bath or in the sink, with hot water provided by kettles. Where there were boys and girls in the family there was a convention that girls got first go at the hot water and the boys went after.²⁴ Parents would go to the Public Baths (cost varying between six old pence and one shilling, depending on if you took your own soap and towel), or to

²⁴ McClure, Alex

Interviewed 29 June 2013

friends who were fortunate enough to have a bath in their home. At the Public Baths, “you got about 20 minutes or half an hour to bath yourself and then the woman in charge would come and knock on the door to tell you to hurry up! Later they put in spray baths or showers, but I always felt they were very dark. Lots of the wee boys used to climb on the steamie roof and tell us they saw us in the baths through the glass roof. I was always looking up to see if anyone was watching me. I don’t think they did see us, but when you were young you believed all that rubbish.”²⁵

There were many variations of accommodation size and provision within different types of accommodation. There could be two, three or even four families per landing, and nine to twelve families per close. With up to ten in a family, a large tenement close could have over 80 people in it, and there are many instances of 24 residents on a landing sharing the single toilet.²⁶

If we take as an example a tenement with three landing lavatories, and sixty people living in it, simple arithmetic can show that between 6.30 and 8.00am (when most people require the use of a toilet) a lavatory could be required every 90 seconds. With this demand split among three lavatories, there would be a requirement, per lavatory, every four minutes and thirty seconds. It was statistically likely that, at certain times, someone would already be in the lavatory when it was required by someone else.

Lavatory paper tended to be made from newspaper and many respondents spoke of the Father of the house taking the daily newspaper to the toilet, reading it, and then tearing it into neat squares for communal use. Toilet paper was a luxury: the research group were told²⁷ of the grandmother who cleaned for a Jewish family in Newton Mearns: as well as her wages she would be given a roll of IZAL toilet paper by the lady of the house. Toilet paper was not communal property but was kept in each home for the exclusive use of its family. (The transparency of IZAL toilet paper seems to have made it an excellent tracing paper, capable of keeping children amused for hours!)

While there were many tenement dwellers in Bridgeton who enjoyed either the facility of an inside toilet or even the luxury of a bathroom, there was a convention that, if one had an outside toilet, men who had imbibed the previous evening at one of Bridgeton’s many hostelries would leave their house door “on the sneck” so as not to waken up family or neighbours during their perambulation to the communal toilet.

²⁵ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 17 October 2013

²⁶ Martin, Jessie

Interviewed 8 August 2013

²⁷ Mackie, Colin

Interviewed 27 July 2013

There was, of course a rota for cleaning the communal toilet, and, as women did not want to have the poorest effort at cleaning, the toilet was always spic and span. Often, the system was refined enough to have a card or wooden baton passed to the next person responsible for the cleaning.²⁸ As soon as the stairs had been cleaned, the baton was passed on. This ensured fairness and transparency, as well as ensuring that no-one could “duke their turn”! This worked very well and, unless you had an uncaring neighbour, everyone took pride in keeping the stairs and close clean. If someone repeatedly “missed” doing the stairs, they would be reported to the “factor” or landlord of the property.²⁹ New tenants were told of the system as soon as they moved in to the tenement. Women did not wish to gain a reputation as a “slitterer”.³⁰ A “slitterer” was a slap-dash woman whose efforts at stair cleaning often resulted in splashed walls. Every so often, the walls of the close would be washed, and the stairhead windows cleaned at the same time, and, again, there was a rota for this. “I well remember helping my mother to do this and also, because we had a “wally” close (a tiled close) we washed the tiles and polished the painted bits with linseed oil.”³¹

There were, of course, women who washed stairs for a living and people knew them by the state of their hands. “Even in the winter days, they would be washing closes and stairs. I can see them now with their crossover pinnies and turbans”.³²

Another chore was the weekly “brasses” which had to be done, when the letter box and doorbell were rubbed within an inch of their lives. The doorstep was scrubbed and “sometimes the women chalked a sort of half moon shape around the doorstep to make it look fancy”.³³ This was often the result of not being able to afford a doormat.

Laundry was most often done at the “Steamie” where some had a ticketing system to book your time. It was the task of one respondent’s brother³⁴ to go to the Steamie and book his mother in at a later time. When there, the joshing of the women appear to have introduced him to the “facts of life”! Girls often went to the Steamie with their Mother. Hoggart³⁵ speaks of this as occurring when the daughter is reaching a marriageable age, and needs to find out how to do womanly things such as laundry. This does not appear

²⁸ Johnston, Agnes	Interviewed 28 August, 2013
²⁹ McMillan, Rosemary	Email reminiscence 17 October 2013
³⁰ McGeady, Vicky	Interviewed 27 July 2013
³¹ McMillan, Rosemary	Email reminiscence 17 October 2013
³² McMillan Rosemary	Email reminiscence 17 October 2013
³³ McMillan, Rosemary	Email reminiscence 17 October 2013
³⁴ McClure, Alex	Interviewed 27 July 2013
³⁵ Hoggart, R (1957)	Op. cit., pp. 50-53

to be the case in Bridgeton where girls of all ages accompanied their mother. “The Steamie was a great place and I loved to go and get a wee hurl on my mother’s “wheels”. This was a sort of home made bogie with four wheels that held your zinc bath full of dirty washing. She used to tell me to wait at the “wringer” in case someone went before her”.³⁶

When at the Steamie, girls could use the skills which were learned in the school Housewifery class. In the class, girls learned how to bath a baby (using a doll), polishing, tidying, washing, ironing, sewing, and how to clean pots and scrub a table. While adolescent girls may have “dreamed of becoming an air-hostess”³⁷ the school curriculum had its feet more firmly on the ground. There is perhaps unwitting testimony here to a lack of ambition by the school authorities, and a belief by those in authority that social mobility was not an important aim of an educational establishment. This will be discussed later.

The laundry would be dried in the back court. With a large number of families in each tenement, and some families having large numbers of children (and laundry), a rota was vital.

The clothes rope was not communal property (although there may have been a small run of communal rope between two of the closest clothes poles). Woe betide you if you upset the rota! If you were not using the rope on your day, it was a rule that you let the neighbours know, so that they could do small washings in the kitchen sink. If there was space left on the rope after the washing was put out, a space was available for anyone. Small washings could also be put on the house “pulley”.

Carpets were taken outside and beaten. This was usually done at the weekends. Rugs and carpets would be carried into the back court, hung over railings or washing line and beaten with a carpet beater to get the dirt out of them. Sometimes this could cause a problem: “if you went to the “Steamie” and hung your washing out in the backcourt, low and behold, there was always somebody who decided to come down and beat her carpets, then your nice clean washing got dirty with all the dust from the carpets”.³⁸

Some back courts had a wash-house, and some women preferred to use this rather than go to the Steamie. The boiler would be stoked up with coal or

³⁶ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 17 October 2013

³⁷ Wylie, Lorraine

Interviewed 27 July 2013

³⁸ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 17 October 2013

wood early in the day³⁹ (often as early as 5.00am) so that hot water was available after children had been taken to school.

Men's working clothes were often extremely dirty: Working in an iron foundry or an engineering works generates lots of dirt and filth, and these clothes would have to be steeped in the tin bath, laundered in the sink or wash-house, and then dried on the pulley or back-court drying green.

The concept of a common repair being the responsibility of the property factor did not seem to exist. What would nowadays be seen as common repairs were undertaken by the man of the family. Men either repaired things themselves or got friends to do it. This changed when Council properties were built in Bridgeton. In this case, the Council undertook the repairs.

With a regular rota for stair and toilet cleaning, a slower rota for wall-washing and stairhead window cleaning, a rota for the use of the back green to dry washing, visits to the Steamie timed to fit the wash green rota, communal obligations to keep the toilet provided with lavatory paper, and the setting-to to undertake common repairs, what emerges is the existence of an extremely sophisticated system of obligations, responsibilities and communal effort.

Relationships with the factor were interesting. A respondent reported that, when the husband of the couple next door died, the widow agreed to swap her two-apartment for the single end in which the respondent's family lived. The factor was informed of this private arrangement and, as there was no difference in the total rental income from the two residences, there was immediate agreement. Because of constant financial worries, some families moved to smaller accommodation, even in the face of a growing family (both in age and number) in order save the amount spent on rent.⁴⁰ Newly married couples would normally have already arranged accommodation⁴¹ beforehand through somebody "speaking for them" to the factor. The "somebody" would probably be the father of the bride or groom, who was already an responsible rent-payer known to the factor. Knowledge of empty flats would circulate through the mysterious grapevine characteristic of working-class areas, although there were also vacancy boards at the factors' offices. There was an informal rule about "speaking" only for your own kith and kin, further bolstering the sense of community solidarity which has emerged in this research.

³⁹ Johnston, Agnes

Interviewed 27 July 2013

⁴⁰ McClure, Alex

Interviewed 28 August 2013

⁴¹ Wylie, Robert

Interviewed 27 July 2013: "House first, and then the wedding."

There were unexpected consequences when the Council became more significant in the management and renting of property in Bridgeton. One obtained accommodation from the Council through formal contact (rather than the laissez-faire approach to the factor). With Council involvement came the “points system”. Many young people found that they were far down the points list and, if they wanted to remain in Bridgeton, they had to purchase. Flats were bought in the late 1960s for around £750, and this process continued until the 1970s when many people were re-homed through compulsory purchase by the Council. The story of one family is probably typical. The Wylies⁴² were moved away from Bridgeton to the 21st floor of a high flat. There was no close in which to meet your neighbours, there was no public house, and residents in the flat were from areas other than Bridgeton. “You felt strange”. There was a sense of “being stuck in the flat”. There were tales of people coming back to Bridgeton from the new town of Irvine at the weekends to keep some sense of identity. The only escape was to try to buy a flat back in Bridgeton.

For those who stayed, things were not pleasant: “Our last year in the tenement (1971-1972) we were the only family left in the close and were overrun with mice. Mice would climb up our curtains as we watched TV. There were mice footprints in the frying pan, it was terrible. I used to lie in bed at night and fire elastic bands at the mice as they keeked out from behind the chest of drawers. My Da knew a pal who worked in the fruit market and he gave us blue pellets which poisoned the mice and we'd find baby mice dead on the floor.”⁴³

However, the pull of Bridgeton was incredibly strong: “My mother refused offers of houses as she didn't want to move to Castlemilk or Easterhouse. Eventually she accepted a house and we moved to a 3 room and kitchen, bathroom and veranda at 2/2, 215 Braidfauld Street in Auchenshuggle. A house with a bath.”⁴⁴

However, when new properties were being put up under the auspices of GEAR, there were many incomers from the peripheral housing schemes who wanted back into the city. These incomers may have been brought up in Gorbals or elsewhere and were seen as outsiders, further increasing the sense of dislocation in Bridgeton. “You were born and bred here and cannot get a house.”⁴⁵

⁴² Wylie, Robert and Lorraine

Interviewed 27 July 2013

⁴³ McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 26 November 2013

⁴⁴McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 26 November 2013

⁴⁵ Wylie, Robert

Interviewed 27 July 2013

2.3 Home Entertainment

For children, the tenement stairs and back court formed the main playground area. This was often a place of great adventure: during the Second World War, bomb shelters were built in the ground enclosed by tenement blocks. “As with the roofs of the middens, and the innumerable brick walls, these shelters provided dens for generations of children to play in, filthy and dangerous as they had become.”⁴⁶ “Our playground consisted of broken metal railings, dirty middens, walls to climb into a sawmill, burst drains running into the backcourt and washings hanging all over the place. But it’s what we were used to and we enjoyed playing out there with our pals.”⁴⁷ There were also street games such a hide-and-seek, rounders, and “Houses”. In “Houses” boys and girls played together⁴⁸: the whole close became your “house”, and the girls would choose a boy (“You’re ma man”) and visit their friends in other “houses” pushing a doll’s pram!

Other girls’ games included skipping ropes or sometimes “doublers” that was played with two balls together, bouncing them from the pavement on to a wall. “We also played “beds” or hopscotch as it is better known. Whip and peerie, when we coloured the top of the peerie with different chalks, so when it spun around, it made a rainbow pattern”.⁴⁹

Boys liked things to be a bit more robust. There were “gird and cleek” a sort of big metal hoop that was guided with a metal rod. Boys also enjoyed making “bogies” or “carties”. “This was made from an old orange box and had small wheels on it. Sometimes they decorated the outside of it with the tin milk tops to make it look like studs. If you had a boy who fancied you, he would offer you a ride to sit inside the bogie while he guided it by standing on the plank of wood that held the wheels. This was fine until he would run it over the big drain cover in the middle of the street. Oh the agony, no fancy suspension then, just the wood between you and the big drain cover!”⁵⁰

There was a dangerous game for really brave (or foolhardy) boys: “Hudgies or Niggies was a particularly dangerous ‘game’: it involved jumping onto the back of lorries and rear bus platforms – holding on for as long as possible before jumping off. On one occasion in Old Dalmarnock Road near the gasworks there was a yard where double-decker busses parked. One day a few pals and I hung around waiting for a bus to come out. When it did we

⁴⁶ Adams, G (1990)

Op. cit., p. 41

⁴⁷ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 3 December 2013

⁴⁸ Wylie, Lorraine

Interviewed 28 August 2013

⁴⁹ McMillan, Rosemary

Email communication 25 October 2013

⁵⁰ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 25 October 2013

jumped onto the rear platform. I foolishly hung on till the very last and the bus had built up some speed when I jumped off – all I remember after that is waking up lying on the pavement covered with coal sacks whilst the local priest from Sacred Heart was comforting me. An ambulance came and I spent ten days in the Royal with concussion!”⁵¹



Children in a back court, Fordneuk Street, early 1960s

Even the increasing dereliction of Bridgeton brought some benefits: “As many closes around us emptied the derelict buildings became playgrounds in their own right, great for hiding and latterly as we got older for kissing!”⁵²

There was a sense that, because so much play took place outside, the general level of health of children was better than it is today.

⁵¹ McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 11 December 2013

⁵² McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 11 December 2013

However, for many children, Saturday morning was the best part of the week. Friends would go together to the ABC minors in the Olympia. “We had to wait in a big queue and then the doors opened and in we trooped. We started by singing the ABC minors song to the tune of “Blaze Away”. I loved that, what a noise, but it made you feel important, that you were part of this great big gang! We saw cartoons, Flash Gordon serials, George Formby films, The Three Stooges and sometimes a cowboy film. We used to cheer and boo whenever the goodie or the baddie was on”.⁵³



A cul-de-sac such as Davidson Street, Dalmarnock, made an excellent place for street games

Given the lack of affluence in Bridgeton, entertainment for grown-ups was most often home-made. People could not afford to go out all that often. One

⁵³ McMillan, Rosemary

Email communication 25 October 2013

respondent⁵⁴ speaks of a neighbour with a “magic lantern” who would allow residents in the tenement to watch at a cost of one penny (“a half-penny if you were good-looking and he fancied you”). On Saturday night, friends or family would visit. There would be a sociable drink and the expectation that “you would do a turn or party piece.” Other activities revolved around games and radio or television. Families would play games together: cards, snakes and ladders, followed by listening to the radio at night. “The Black and White Minstrels, Saturday Night Theatre, The Billy Cotton Band Show” were great favourites⁵⁵. Most families had a radio (often used to surreptitiously listen in to the police waveband), and many aspired to a television in the 1960s. These were often rented from Radio Rentals or were coin-in-the-slot operated. Television was, for some, a mystery, and one respondent’s mother⁵⁶ was convinced that she could be seen by the television when taking her clothes off to go to bed. A person who was fortunate enough to have television would invite the neighbours in to see programmes: “... I remember it was a real treat for us to watch television in the Miller’s home.”⁵⁷

A social element to adolescence was brought by the Youth Club, hosted usually by a local church where there was an interesting mixture of Scottish Country Dancing and listening to the Beatles on a record player. Changing fashions can be detected as Rosemary Clooney and Bing Crosby give way to the Kinks and the Drifters. Here was a way in which adolescents could get together under the benevolent eye of the clergy. Indeed, this grew to the extent that parties for young people were sometimes called “record sessions”.⁵⁸

An exotic but heart-rending aspect of entertainment was provided by the back-court singer⁵⁹ who, often in need of drinking money, would put his cap down on the ground of the back court, and sing “Old Mother of Mine” or “O Sole Mio” to the tenement’s rear windows. Sometimes they would play the accordion or mouth organ. It is difficult to imagine how life had treated one poor woman who turned up to sing in a back court. She had ⁶⁰ “a shoe on one foot and a boot on the other.” We will never know if she needed drinking money, or life had been so cruel that she needed money to feed her children. This sad aspect of tenement life lasted until well into the 1960s.

⁵⁴ Johnston, Agnes	Interviewed 28 August 2013
⁵⁵ McGeady, Vicky	Interviewed 28 August 2013
⁵⁶ Johnson, Agnes	Interviewed 28 August 2013
⁵⁷ McKenna, J (2006)	Op. cit, p.30
⁵⁸ McGeady, Vicky	Written reminiscence 19 October 2013
⁵⁹ Stewart, Owen	Interviewed 28 August 2013
⁶⁰ Wylie, Lorraine	Interviewed 28 August 2013

2.4 Shopping

Home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living room on to the street⁶¹, or else you descend the close stairwell into the street: your home becomes part of the domestic life of the neighbourhood. Shopping is an extremely significant part of this domestic life, especially for women. As a rash generalisation, it could be said that the streets of Bridgeton during the day were women's place: at night, the streets belonged to men. What strikes one today when looking back at Bridgeton in the 50s, 60, and 70s is just how many shops there were. Of course, there were butchers, bakers, and grocers: however, there were also jewellers, leather and shoe shops, wool shops and a bookshop.

Robert Wylie⁶², a member of the Research Group, has created a list of the shops and public houses in Main Street recollected from the 1950s and 1960s. When it is categorised, it becomes apparent that it gives a remarkable insight into the range of shops which were in business during the 1950s and 1960s in one street (although one of the most important streets) in Bridgeton. The list is quite overwhelming: a total of 43 shops and 17 public houses, means that 60 retail venues were generating a living from the residents of Bridgeton, especially in the Main Street area. With regard to public houses in Bridgeton, they have been described as being like "a lighthouse at every corner".⁶³ This conveys a wonderful image of men staggering home like ships in a storm at sea, navigating by pub names. More importantly, it can be seen that almost every human need is capable of being met within the community. What is also clear is that the streets must have been a hive of activity in the 1950s and 1960s, where gossip could be exchanged, social relationships cemented, and assistance given

The wool shop also sold baby clothes, and was especially popular because "she allowed you payment terms"⁶⁴, i.e. you could pay in instalments. It was not only the wool shop which was able to do a good turn⁶⁵: "I did the shopping from about 8 years old and was told what to buy and went to the butcher, baker and candlestick-maker. They knew what my Mother was prepared to pay for so and so, and to make sure there wasn't too much fat on the meat."

⁶¹ Hoggart, R (1957)

⁶² Wylie, Robert

⁶³ Mackie, Colin

⁶⁴ Wylie, Lorraine

⁶⁵ McClure, Alex

Op.cit., p. 58

Presented 28 August 2013

Interviewed 27 July 2013

Interviewed 27 July 2013

Email reminiscence 3 September 2013



Wilson the Butcher

Every shopkeeper knew my Mother and because of the size of family they always did give her the best.” Indeed, children were often sent for the messages because the shop-keepers knew the family’s daily order. Another way in which a sense of community arose was through children being sent to do the neighbour’s messages. If Mrs McGregor was ill, wee Mary Abernethy would be sent to do the messages on her behalf. This social good really did cement relationships.

One shop which Main Street did not have was a pawnbroker, but people made use of the pawn facilities: “There was the twice weekly trip to the pawn, I always had to run from our close into the opposite No 11 and run fast enough hoping no pals would see, even at aged 8 or 9. I knew what shame was. Anyway I'd get my usual instructions to tell Robert (the pawnbroker) that my mother wanted 4 shillings - that was always on a Monday and I had to go back again on the Friday to get to his suit back out so he could go out for the football or whatever, and he'd get a clean collar to go with his shirt. It cost 4 shillings and sixpence to get the suit back out.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 3 September 2013

There were also some unexpected shops: “My enterprising granny ran a small business from shop premises located opposite number 13 Marquis Street. It was, in effect, a small restaurant that was popular with the locals who could choose either to sit-in or take-away. Granny’s take-away customers brought their own plates and large soup jugs as containers for her home-made soup, pie and peas, mince and tatties and steak pies all of which were prepared on the premises by granny and her helpers. My sisters and I would often enjoy a sit-in for a special treat of jelly and custard. Lime-green jelly with custard was then my all-time favourite.”⁶⁷

There was a loyalty to particular shops, but this may have been where particular groups of women went, and it was a disguised loyalty to the group! What this means is that people know one another with an intimacy of detail⁶⁸: they have sons who have “got on”, daughters who “went wrong” or “married well” , they know that old Mr X “is kind and gives the children sweeties”, or that Mrs Y “has never been the same since her husband died”. One can understand how, through shared experiences by meeting in the tenement close, the Steamie and the shops, a tremendous sense of communal solidarity developed.

2.5 Husbands and Wives

The lives of families are uniquely and mysteriously different from each other in many respects. Added to this is the fact that we recollect our past in ways unique to us. This makes it very difficult to be confident in absolutes when writing about family life and the ways in which fathers and mothers influenced their families in the domestic setting of the tenement. There is a general agreement that it was the mother, closely followed by the grandmother, who had the fundamental responsibility of bringing up the children. It was the mother and grandmother who would cuddle the children, ensure that they were fed, and make them feel secure. While there were clearly many loving and demonstrative fathers, there are many recollections of fathers “who took no interest in their children”.⁶⁹ Indeed, few of the Research Group could recollect a new father pushing a pram. In many cases, as well as buying the clothes for her children, the wife would also be responsible for buying the clothes for her husband. Often these purchases would be made by incurring debt, and women would wait at the mouth of the tenement close to pay the debt man “so that the husband would not

⁶⁷ Roxburgh, Jessie

Email reminiscence 28 November 2013

⁶⁸ Hoggart, R (1957)

Op. cit., p. 60

⁶⁹ McArthur, Will

Interviewed 23 November 2013

know about debt.”⁷⁰ A possible reason for this is that the mother could maintain some pride, in that “her husband would not know that she was not being given enough money for her household needs”.⁷¹ Of course, hiding under these stories is the supposition that some wives had no idea how much their husbands earned, and this is a clear recollection of many of the group: “Many women did not know how much the husband earned. They took what they were given.”⁷² How are we to interpret this? Given the apparent lack of interest by many men in their domestic situation, it may be that they had no real idea of the cost of living and gave the wife what they thought was an adequate sum to cover household bills and expenses (a situation exacerbated by the wife taking on debt to cover up the fact that she did not get enough housekeeping.) It may also be that the man needed a certain amount of money for his own purposes, and the wife got what was left.

So, where did the money held back by the husband go? By and large, it was often spent on drink. There are many recollections of the “Father was drunk every Friday” variety, and poignant recollections of “women going round pubs to look for their men on pay-day.”⁷³

However, we must not stretch this too far, and should not demonise the role played by the father in Bridgeton households. Some households were different: “I never got an opened pay packet in my life given to me.”⁷⁴ In this case, the wife would take what she needed to cover the running of the home, and give the husband “pocket money” to cover his expenses. So, it would be a very rash generalisation to claim that all fathers drank too much and denied their wives the full amount of their wage earnings. It must also be remembered that the male and female roles of parenting were firmly fixed. It is almost like a code of behaviour: the man went to work and the women stayed at home to mind the children. “In thinking more about the errant fathers who drank too much or gambled too much or were much too taciturn by far, it must be borne in mind that by and large the nature of their workaday world was, to say the least, uncongenial. For the man of the house it was a continuous cycle of, in a majority of cases, nothing short of misery bordering on penury for five days of the week. On the sixth day the man wanted the 'fitba' and some leisure time in the pub in the certain

⁷⁰ Brown, Rena

Interviewed 23 November 2013

⁷¹ Roxburgh, Jessie

Interviewed 23 November 2013

⁷² Brown, Rena

Interviewed 23 November 2013

⁷³ Roxburgh, Jessie

Interviewed 23 November 2013

⁷⁴ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 26 November 2013

knowledge that the wife was either looking after the home front or enjoying some time off going round the shops with her sisters and mother.”⁷⁵

It is psychologically important for men to feel that they have status, and one should also ask how men gained status among their peers in a working-class community such as Bridgeton. Often, standing your round in the local hostelry was the only way in which this could be achieved.

2.6 Religion

Adams notes that religion has always been a significant part of Bridgeton's story. “Churches have thrived in variety and number under the influence of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation. This has left a legacy of church history which can be rather confusing. The name changes alone undergone by the Bridgeton churches through the years can be bewildering.”⁷⁶

Adams gives a very full account of the variety of places of worship throughout Bridgeton's history, and this is confirmed by the recollections of the Research Group. From the 1950s there was the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Congregational Union, the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopalians, and, on the periphery, The Salvation Army, Bethany Hall, the Temperance League, the Band of Hope, and other small evangelical groups.

There are six dimensions of religious experience: doctrinal, ritual, experiential, mythical, social, and ethical. Of these, the most significant for most people is social and ethical. While Hoggart is fairly patronising in his view of the working class, his point is that “ ... in so far as they think of Christianity, they think of it as a system of ethics; their concern is with morals, not metaphysics.”⁷⁷

There are contradictory views on how significant religion really was in the lives of the people of Bridgeton. It is claimed simultaneously that not all that many people were religious, but also that churches and chapels were thriving. Perhaps this is testimony to the size of the post-war population of Bridgeton: that even if some people were apathetic, there was still enough of a religious disposition to fill the churches. Indeed, a new chapel was built in

⁷⁵ Currie, Robert

Email communication 27 November 2013

⁷⁶ Adams, G (1990)

Op. cit., p. 50

⁷⁷ Hoggart, R (1957)

Op. cit., p. 60

the early 1960s.⁷⁸ On the social side, Churches offered grown-ups the Women's Guild, the Men's Guild, Badminton Clubs and Whist Drives. However, what was most important was religion's perceived importance for young people. There were Sunday School, Boys' Brigade, Life Boys, Salvation Army Rosebuds, Girl Guides, and



The 219th Company of the Boys' Brigade, Bridgeton, 1974

the Church Youth Fellowships. It is in institutions such as these that religion is seen as a guide to our moral duty, our obligations towards others, and "the repository of good rules for communal life."⁷⁹ "My parents never attended church but I was very fortunate to have a family member who

⁷⁸ McMillan, Rosemary
⁷⁹ Hoggart, R (1957)

Interviewed 28 August 2013
Op.cit., p. 116

attended Dalmarnock Congregational Church and she introduced me to the Boys Brigade. I say fortunate because all around our streets were ‘gangs’, fights, stabbings and I was never caught up in it because of the great work of the BB officers and my parents.”⁸⁰

The following extract shows how these aspects were far more important than doctrine:

“My Mother was Catholic I don't think my Dad was anything when it came to religion, but nonetheless the boys were sent to church every Sunday and then the Lifeboys and at 12 years you went to the Boys’ Brigade where you were taught first aid and did all sorts of Gym. Your shoes had to be whitened the night before so that they dried right next morning, and then we would have a parade and you learned how to march which stood you in good stead when you went into the army, and you'd never believe the lads who were unable to march.”⁸¹



Dalmarnock Congregational Church: early 1960s Revival Meeting

⁸⁰ McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 11 December 2013

⁸¹ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 9 September 2013

Here we can see the social and ethical dimensions at work. There are no doctrinal tensions within the household. Indeed, there is a view within the Research group that “there was no real sectarian divide in Bridgeton”⁸² in the 1950s and 1960s. The Group tells of going to hear the band of the Orange Lodge as well as going to see the First Communion Procession. This speaks of an easy getting along. The same point is made by McKenna⁸³ who tells us that “... my parents used to enjoy watching the Orange Walk parades pass along Dalmarnock Road ...we also used to watch the parade of children from Sacred Heart Roman Catholic School.”

However, there are some unavoidable realities with regard to religion, specifically the Protestant – Roman Catholic divide. There are many anecdotes that a usual interview question was “What school did you go to?” Sometimes it could be “Were you in the Boys’ Brigade?” The answer to these questions identified your religious denomination. Sometimes in Bridgeton it was more direct: “Are you a Billy or a Dan?”⁸⁴ Robert Currie makes the extremely important point that “it is true to say that a “live and let live” philosophy prevailed, especially among churchgoers whether RC or Reformed. The truth is that the real meeting of minds occurred when those of differing faiths rubbed shoulders with one another in the work place.”⁸⁵ It would not be a rash generalization to claim that most Roman Catholics found their friends and associates within their own faith group and likewise Protestants within theirs. The fact that some stigma was associated with mixed marriage implies that there were still rough edges to be found when discussing different Christian faiths.

However, it must be said that, even into the 1960s, there was still a lot of fire and brimstone. After a poorly-attended Church meeting on “Stewardship”, the Rev T A Beaton wrote in the March 1963 church magazine “Dalmarnock Doings” that “I hope that those who were not there are thoroughly ashamed of themselves if they have not a worthy excuse. Only extenuating circumstances should have kept you away.”⁸⁶

The Church Secretary, Mr Colin H Morton, reveals the reasons for the Minister’s fury. In his report, we discover that there was a hoped-for attendance of around 1000 (Dalmarnock Congregational Church plus Bethany Congregational Church plus Hood Memorial Congregational Church) and only 60 members had bothered to attend.

⁸² Research Group Discussion 28 August 2013

⁸³ McKenna, J (2006) Op. cit., p.19

⁸⁴ Currie, Robert Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

⁸⁵ Currie, Robert Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

⁸⁶ **Dalmarnock Doings** (March 1963)

The Monthly Magazine of
Dalmarnock Congregational Church, Glasgow

Dalmarnock Doings



Minister : Rev. T. A. BEATON, L.T.C.L.,
40 Strathord Street, E.2.
(Tel.: SHEttleston 2236)

Secretary : Mr. COLIN H. MORTON,
26 Gilmerton Street, E.2.
(Tel.: SHEttleston 4030)

Treasurer : Mr. JAMES COLLINS, 8 The Oval, Stamperland, Glasgow.
(Tel.: MERrylee 2802)

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No. 279

MARCH

1963  
~~~~~

Dear Friends,

May I say thank you to the ladies who have volunteered to scrub the Large Hall and the other rooms on the Church premises. It is refreshing to see people taking an interest and pride in the

Rally, and it will be on the 17th at 7.30 p.m. I started these Rallies two years ago and since that time we have spent many happy Sunday evenings together in the Church. Our speakers have been excellent and we have enjoyed many talented soloists. I have interviewed all

Dalmarnock Doings: a very revealing document!

The Treasurer bemoans falling income. The church magazine also reveals the social organisations which are on offer. These include the Church Choir, Junior Choir, Boys' Brigade, Church Cleaning Rota, a Bookstall, Bowling Club, Flower Arranging and a Young Mothers' Group. The magazine pleads for more young boys to come to the Boys' Brigade, and the Young Mothers' Group is being renamed as the Young Wives Group in order to boost numbers. It is unwitting testimony to the beginnings of a spiral into decline.

These significant religious institutions could not survive in the post-industrial era, not only because of increasing secularisation, but also because of depopulation. They became unviable. "During their heyday most churches and missions in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock prospered, but in the

years of redevelopment and depopulation that followed the Second World War many had to close their doors, and their congregations moved on.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Adams, G (1990)

Op. cit., p. 60

3: School Life

3.1 Primary School

The Research Group attended nine different Primary Schools in the area and it was, for most, a very positive experience. “I went to Dalmarnock Primary School and absolutely loved it. Our teachers were lovely and I remember the thrill of learning how to do “joined-up writing”.”⁸⁸ One major element in the happiness of Primary School is that the cohort you meet aged 5, stays with you until the time of the 11+ examination. In the Bridgeton area, these cohorts were between 40-48 pupils.



London Road Primary 1964

Given the number of schools, most were nearby their pupils. “I only lived round the corner but my Mother always took us there.”⁸⁹ Sometimes, “all children from the one close would walk with an adult.”⁹⁰ At other times, an

⁸⁸ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 19 October 2013

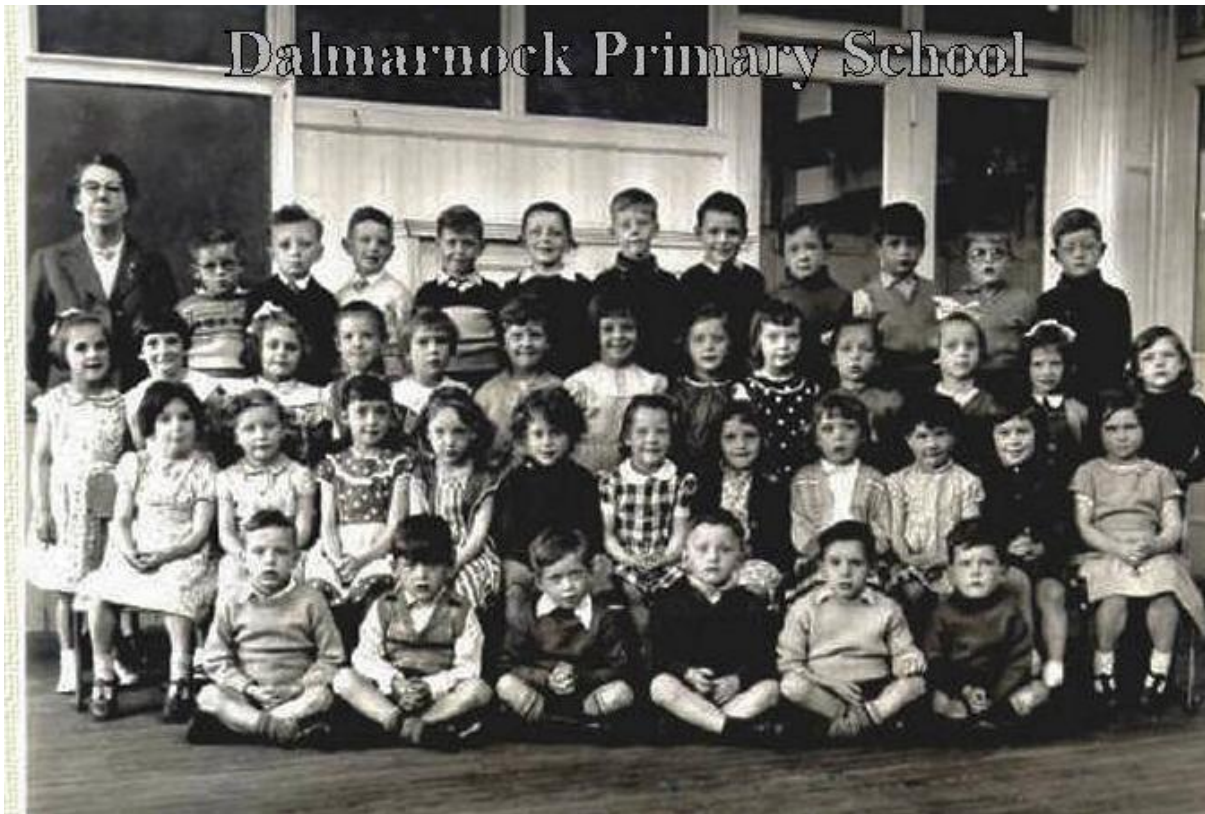
⁸⁹ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

⁹⁰ McGeady, Vicky

Interviewed 9 October 2013

older sibling would be responsible. When the children had arrived at school, they would be “Lined up in playground and marched in to “The Stars and Stripes Forever” being belted out on the school piano.”⁹¹ Indeed, I can remember the same phenomenon in the late 1950s in Greenock, when the pupils marched in to the “Dambusters’ March”!



Dalmarnock Primary School, 1959

Schools, of course, did not have much leeway in terms of curriculum: there was the necessary reading, writing and arithmetic. Some schools, however, did make splendid efforts in the areas of social and cultural education. “Miss Findhope started a school library. She also organised a choir and we used to perform in churches on a Sunday.”⁹² Singing was a popular activity, teaching the benefits of co-operation, teamwork, and the “give-and-take” which is necessary for the pursuit of a happy life. Similar activities included country dancing and recitation, especially the poetry of Robert Burns. There was also the Nature Table where would be leaves and pine cones gathered from walks in Glasgow Green, and charts detailing the different aspects of the seasons. In terms of gender-specific education, girls would be given needle-work and knitting while boys would get model-making and woodwork.

⁹¹ Craig, Irene

Written reminiscence 9 October 2013

⁹² Stewart, Owen

Written reminiscence 17 September 2013

The staff in Primary Schools were predominantly female. Indeed, the only males in the school would normally be the Headmaster, the Assistant Head (who took the football team and aspired to eventual Headmastership) and the School Janitor. The women were predominantly single and characterised by “twin-sets and pearls.”⁹³ Indeed, until the early 1960s, female Primary teachers had to leave the profession upon marriage. Many of these women were aware of the social aspects of their activities and impressed with their kindness: “... the teacher I had was a wonderful old woman who was kind and would encourage weans instead of keeping them down and feeling bad about themselves.”⁹⁴

Occasionally, the kindness of a teacher could have a strong effect on a young boy. “Then a very big thing happened we moved up a class and then Miss Peddie was our teacher and I fell in love. She was beautiful, and she knew of my illness (T.B.) and she would put her arm around me and always gave me a hug. I would go scarlet and just want to stay there. And then about two years later my whole world fell apart. She got married to an officer in the parachute regiment, and she came to the school on her wedding day and everyone was cheering but I just ran home and didn't want to see her anymore.”⁹⁵ There could also be effects on young girls too! “My one regret is not to have been chosen for the choir. Miss Gibb (the teacher who took the choir) came round the class with a tuning fork listening to us singing something she had taught us. For reasons best known to myself, I was so sure she would let me be in the choir. I was heartbroken when after listening to me for a few minutes, she swept past me and chose my two best friends.”⁹⁶

However, it must also be said that some Primary teachers were guilty of the most crass and unthinking stupidity: “One wee boy, oh I can still see the soul. He was about 8 or 9 with a bad squint and stammer. His clothes were always filthy and I felt so sorry for him and he wasn't too bright and got picked on by the teacher a lot. The nit nurse Miss Mackie came in one day and took him away. An hour later he came back shining, his hair all shedded and washed, a new grey jumper with a collar with red edging and matching socks and new boots. He was paraded in front of us to ‘OOHS AND AHS’. Damn that teacher and that stupid nurse doing that to this wee boy.”⁹⁷ Here was a child of clearly poverty-stricken parents being patronised

⁹³ McGeady, Vicky

Interviewed 9 October 2013

⁹⁴ Donna Robertson

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

⁹⁵ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

⁹⁶ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 19 October 2013

⁹⁷ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 29 November 2013

and unwittingly humiliated by the good intentions of staff who had no idea of the working class dynamics of a school like this.

This may not actually be the case, but only one of the schools (Sacred Heart) appears to have had a uniform. Often, there may, in fact, be a school uniform and it is just that no-one can afford it. It must be said that all respondents are quite sure that their school did not have one. However there was one uniform which had unfortunate unintended consequences. “There weren't any school uniforms, unless you count what was termed Parish clothes. These were only for the poor (us) and it was a badge I could have done without, as it labelled you.”⁹⁸ It consisted of grey trousers and a grey jumper with a black stripe around the neck. It was a public signal that you were poor.

Most schools had separate entries for boys and girls and sometimes there were segregated playgrounds. Playground games tended to be based on gender with girls playing Peever, skipping, Chinese Ropes (also called French Ropes in different schools) using ropes made from elastic bands, hula hoops and tig. Boys engaged in mock fighting, sword fights, soldiers, football, racing and chasing.

The playground was where the toilets were situated. They were basically a tiled shed and it was a winter bonus if you were “sent home when the toilets were frozen.”⁹⁹ The general recollection of Primary School toilets is fairly traumatic: “What however sticks in my mind most was the horrible toilets. I can still see the deep red shiny bricks round the walls of the open freezing toilets where there was never toilet paper and the doors hadn't a snib, so you were bent in half trying to hold the door shut waiting for some nice wee girl to kick it in and bang your head.”¹⁰⁰ It would seem that if a girl had a door to her cubicle, she was lucky: “School toilers were not at all salubrious. Probably worse for girls who had to sit down to pee especially since, as I recall, most lavatory cubicles had either doors removed or lavatory seats ripped out.”¹⁰¹

At lunch time children either went home, ate a packed lunch (which may have been handed by a mother through the school railings¹⁰², or went to the Dinner School. There were different coloured tickets for those getting free meals. Again, the stupidity of some teachers is breathtaking: “Then the

⁹⁸ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

⁹⁹ Wylie, Robert

Interviewed 9 October 2013

¹⁰⁰ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 29 November 2013

¹⁰¹ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 28 December 2013

¹⁰² Stewart, Owen

Written reminiscence 17 September 2013

other thing I hated was shouting weans out to the teacher's desk on a Friday to get their dinner tickets. It was first the ones who paid, so she'd call for them. Then 'FREE DINNERS'. I wanted to cry for these weans who were shamed through no fault of their own, who had to answer to this cretin of a teacher with no feelings."¹⁰³

Visits by the nurse were a source a terror and hilarity. The children thought that the main purpose of the nurse's visit was to make sure that they were flea and bug free. Hence the soubriquet "the nit nurse"! "After a visit by the nurse, some children would appear with a close-cropped haircut and a covering of gentian violet."¹⁰⁴ Mothers made sure that children were well kept free of anything like that by scrubbing heads and using a fine comb. If she found a flea she would kill it by crushing it between her thumb nails, but "there was a legend that if you did kill a flea it just caused trouble as a thousand came to the funeral."¹⁰⁵ There was a sense that there were vaccinations against every possible disease. "We would line up in a queue and, as you got nearer the doctor and of course the dreaded needle, you would start to get really frightened."¹⁰⁶ Sugar lumps were a great step forward!

As well as the unwittingly stupid teachers we have encountered, there were the occasional bad apples: "One teacher in particular had a clique of clever weans she fussed over and left the rest to their own devices. She had a hatred of me and some other weans: I don't know why. I tried hard all the time. She never recognised all the good work I did like English compositions which I won prizes for in other classes, and my art which was above average. She brushed them aside and never gave compliments... she was a two faced swine of a woman who was all nice to me in front of my mother on parents day."¹⁰⁷

Moving on to Secondary School was traumatic. Primary was "milk and Royal Scot biscuits."¹⁰⁸ Most did not look forward to Secondary school and the thought of teachers with gowns. All were completely unprepared for the mindless cruelty of some teachers.

¹⁰³ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 29 November 2013

¹⁰⁴ McGeady, Vicky

Interviewed 9 October 2013

¹⁰⁵ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

¹⁰⁶ McKenna, J (2006)

Op. cit., p.103

¹⁰⁷ Donna Robertson

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

¹⁰⁸ McGeady, Vicky

Written communication 9 October 2013

3.2 Secondary School

Secondary School was very different. “I attended John Street Senior Secondary and hated every minute of it. Everything was so impersonal, you would have perhaps six different teachers in one day, so you never really got to know each other”.¹⁰⁹ There would be a registration class cohort of around 35, and then the day split into timetables so that the registration cohort was not always together.



John Street Secondary School Badge

Most Secondary Schools had a uniform. “This school had a blazer and school tie and anyone arriving at the school without a tie was sent to the headmaster’s office where after a stern warning you wore one of his ties, chosen from a horrible collection he kept in a drawer! Girls were not allowed make-up or jewelry, and skirts had to be knee length.”¹¹⁰

The old Primary School system of a “Parish” uniform which broadcast the poverty of your family was replaced by a more discreet grant for uniform and skirt or flannels. It consisted of a “line” or voucher, but there was still a sign of your need: you went to a *separate entry* of Fishers Warehouse to obtain the items.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 19 October 2013

¹¹⁰ McArthur, Will

Email reminiscence 11 December 2013

¹¹¹ Wylie, Robert

Interviewed 9 October 2013



Bernard St Secondary 1964

There was the usual secondary school array of subjects available. English, science, art, mathematics, geography and history were for both girls and boys. Girls were also directed to Home Economics, which comprised the housewifely skills of laundry, cooking, cleaning and rug-making. Some girls also did commercial subjects such as shorthand, typing and book-keeping.¹¹² Boys did woodwork, metal work and technical drawing. Physical Education was, of course, compulsory with team games and the opportunity to try to play for a school team. Sports included football, hockey, netball, and in one case, rowing! Teachers were a bit of a mixture. Many of the men in the 1950s and early 1960s would have been war veterans, and sometimes it showed: there was the Mr McAllister “who never taught one bit of English though that was his job, but he did have us in quiet giggles as he told us for the umpteenth time how he was wounded on his hand, and had to sew the wound himself and he would describe all the bits which were supposed to frighten us.”¹¹³

¹¹² McGeady, Vicky

¹¹³ McClure, Alex

Interviewed 9 October 2013

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

Gym teachers, art teachers and music teachers tended to be the most charismatic. “Mr Tominey was a great wee guy, he was small but he had us jumping through HOOPS ... he was a good gym teacher, if you couldn't do what he asked of you he didn't persist or lose his temper he just let it go and when you managed to do what he wanted done it was a big Well Done”.¹¹⁴ There was also the music teacher, Mrs Ferguson, who “made all us hard cases sing real pansy songs such as “Yeomen of England”, and other manly ones like “Scots wha ha’e” and “A Soldier Boy to War has gone” (Irish) and “Land of my Fathers.””¹¹⁵ Here also one can find unwitting testimony to the patriotic nature of the songs: there is a United Kingdom, centre of a glorious Empire.

The headmaster, in one case at least, made a bizarre impression. “The headmaster was barking mad, with a flowing gown and hair that stuck up all over the place. He had written a school song and came round the classes every other day to rehearse it. Oh my God, it was rancid, an awful song, but he was so pleased with his efforts and insisted we sing it at every gathering and assembly. I can still remember the first line: ‘TO THOSE WHO IN THE EVERLASTING ... something or other.’”¹¹⁶

For some, homework does not appear to have been a significant element of secondary school life. This may be the result of a lack of aspiration by the education system, designed to produce workers rather than high flyers, or an acknowledgement that much homework set would not be done. In a later chapter, there will be a further discussion of the lack of aspiration within the school system. For others, homework was a big part of their lives: “... we had tons of homework, and every night my briefcase had to be carried up in my arms it was so full. There was far too much homework for any child to take. We could have maths, French, English, History, Shorthand, Geography, all on the same night!”¹¹⁷

3.3 Punishment and Rules

Primary Schools and Secondary Schools are very different from each other in terms of punishment and discipline. Teachers have far more autonomy in the scale and severity of punishment. “In Primary School we were loved, or I felt so, and you realise that when you are suddenly confronted with martinets who believed the only thing you understood was the pain that a strip of leather could cause. Six whacks with that and you couldn't think

¹¹⁴ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

¹¹⁵ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

¹¹⁶ Donna Robertson

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

¹¹⁷ Donna Robertson

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

for the rest of the day.”¹¹⁸ There is a very real over-arching sense of wickedness.

One respondent speaks of a sadistic teacher who had a selection of leather straps which had names. The names were “Brown Bess” and “Black Beauty”. “If he took out Black Beauty you knew you were going to have very sore hands. I honestly don’t know how that man got away with it. The strap was half an inch thick and almost a foot long and when he swung to hit you his right foot came off the floor. We often met our ex-mates years later and his name would come up. The word “B....d” was always present.”¹¹⁹ He was not the only one: “We had one sadistic P.E. teacher who would hit the boys with a sandshoe across the backside. This was actually preferable to the belt as he would nearly kill you with the belt.”¹²⁰ This casual sadism was not unusual. “There was a lot of unsolicited corporal punishment inflicted when trouble makers in class failed to own up to misdemeanours which led to everyone in class being belted. I absolutely hated the unfairness of that procedure.”¹²¹

Non-corporal punishment consisted of lines, which would have to be written out 50, 100 or 200 times, depending on the severity of the offence.¹²²

Occasionally the punishment was psychological, displaying a callousness which beggars belief. “At John St School, our registration teacher Miss Penman was calling us all out individually to the front to ask details of our parents as some of us were going to the South of France for two weeks. My name was Irene Brown, so I was called after two other girls in alphabetical order. The first two were asked their *father’s* name, which they gave. Then it came my turn. “Can I have your *mother’s* name please?’ I smiled and said to her, ‘No Miss Penman you’ve made a mistake.’ ‘No, I haven’t made a mistake, your *mother’s* name please.’ I could feel my stomach churn and I felt sick. I knew then that something was wrong and right off I thought: ‘I’m adopted’. I went home and while my mum was at the Bingo I started to pull out bags where she kept papers and policies and found it, my birth certificate, and almost cried. I was in fact my mother’s sister’s daughter and now my mum and dad were my aunt and uncle. I’ll never forgive that teacher for her callousness and the way I found out.”¹²³

¹¹⁸ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

¹¹⁹ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 14 October 2013

¹²⁰ Turnbull, Jim

Email reminiscence 30 December 2013

¹²¹ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 28 December 2013

¹²² Wylie, Robert and Lorraine

Written reminiscence 9 October 2013

¹²³ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

3.4 Leaving School

Most were delighted to leave school. “I couldn’t wait to leave and start work”.¹²⁴ Because of a still buoyant economy, most went straight into jobs. There was no such thing as career advice or discussion of options. “The best thing about secondary was leaving day.”¹²⁵ It was not until the later 1960s that there was such a thing as work experience prior to leaving school.¹²⁶ For some, there is a sense that advice would have been welcome: “I left school at 15 and went straight into a Factory. How I regret that now.”¹²⁷

Sometimes the lack of flexibility of the school system is very harsh: “I was approached by my three art teachers to stay on till fourth year and I said I would if I could drop Arithmetic. But it wasn’t allowed to do that and I sadly left school. Of course now I wish I’d given it a try at least to get to Art School after school, but I was a shy child and none of my friends were staying on. So I left: the wrong decision in many ways.”¹²⁸

There is no reason to doubt that Bridgeton had the same wide range of children as any other area. Statistically, some would, in fact, be extremely bright. But we have seen the significance of schooling and the often lack of ambition by teachers. “... their were many from Bridgeton whose academic brilliance earned them their rightful place in society as captains of industry and commerce while there less fortunate compatriots soldiered on in humdrum jobs that earned them a living all largely due to the fact that school teachers chose to focus their efforts on the brightest in class.”¹²⁹

¹²⁴ McMillan, Rosemary Email reminiscence 19 October 2013
¹²⁵ Craig, Irene Written reminiscence 9 October 2013
¹²⁶ Wylie, Robert and Lorraine Interviewed 9 October 2013
¹²⁷ Craig, Irene Interviewed 9 October 2013
¹²⁸ Robertson, Donna Email reminiscence 1 December 2013
¹²⁹ Currie, Robert Email reminiscence 22 January 2014

4: Working Life

4.1 Getting a Job

Jobs were still plentiful in 1950s and 1960s post-industrial Bridgeton. For most young people, it was straight from school into work (normally locally), with no career advice at all. Given the closeness of community life seen in the earlier chapters, one cannot blame young people or their parents for a lack of ambition: they did not know any better. “I often think back to the time when I left school and I never remember either of my parents talking with me, or asking me what I would like to do with my life. In general, in working class areas, it was expected of the child to work and contribute to the household income, rather than what was in the child’s best interest. This was obvious in my schooldays, when I would come home with my report card and be so proud to have “Excellent” or “Very good” marked beside each subject. Your parent was expected to sign the report card and that is exactly what my mother did, I don’t even think she looked to see how well I had done! I am sure most children in my area now feel as I do, that they were never encouraged to aspire to greater things.”¹³⁰

However, there is a clear culpability in schools (staffed in the main by middle-class university graduates) which had no ambition for their pupils. “I certainly did not receive any career advice from teacher Mr McLean then the designated Careers Officer at John Street Senior Secondary School. However, on recollection it was he who simply sent me to William Beattie & Sons. 116 Paton Street, Dennistoun (bread and cake makers) for interview as an Office Junior in their Factory Office.”¹³¹ This is a typical story, often repeated: “I found my job by myself and believe me, it was hard work in those days in a sewing factory. I never thought I was good enough to do anything else. Despite good grades at school, I was never encouraged and was happy with my lot.”¹³² This lack of ambition from the local schools persists through the 1960s and into the 1970s: “In 1971 I reached the age of 15 and attended Riverside Senior Secondary School, having joined from Camlachie Primary School. Looking back, I should have stayed on and gone on to college or university, but like many at that time I embarked on my work career.”¹³³

¹³⁰ McMillan, Rosemary

Email Reminiscence 6 November 2013

¹³¹ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 23 November 2013

¹³² McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 18 November 2013

¹³³ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 29 November 2013

This lack of ambition still rankles: “Significantly, there was a notice posted in the school hall regarding an examination that could be taken to obtain employment with Glasgow Corporation. I suppose I was then much too timid to imagine that I could pass such an examination. Besides, neither Mr McLean or any of the teachers ever mentioned it as a possibility for future employment. In later years when I met some who worked for the Corporation I harboured a grudge against the school about that for it appeared to me that I was just as clever as those who took the examination and 'got in'.”¹³⁴

The official Careers Service was not all that helpful: “There used to be a careers office in Bath Street in Glasgow and I went there but all I got was a lot of pamphlets on various types of careers, no other guidance.”¹³⁵

Often, a job was obtained by a relative, neighbour or family friend making a recommendation. “My neighbour recommended me for the job and I started as a labourer in Ure and Menzies of Bishopbriggs,”¹³⁶ or “I got my job through a relative who heard there were vacancies.”¹³⁷

In the late 1960s and early 1970s things began to change: “Riverside arranged an appointment for me at the Careers Guidance office at Brook Street, and I duly went to see what options awaited me in the world of employment. I was interviewed by a man there, and he asked me various questions, and after a short time he produced three job vacancy cards, and spread them on his desk. He gave me short resume of what they were, and eventually advised me of the most suitable for my skill set, and phoned the employer to arrange a job interview for me.”¹³⁸ Sometimes it was a very simple process: “I left school on the Friday, went to the youth employment on Monday, what do you want to be, a draughtsman I said. I was given a letter and told to go to A & J Mains of Hawthorn St, Possilpark, Structural Engineers.”¹³⁹ It really does seem to have been as easy as that!

4.2 Training for work

Once people are in work, the next main thing is to train them for the job required. In the 1950s and early 1960s, training seems to have been somewhat haphazard. “There was no training, we learned as we went along. Some of the jobs were very demanding and dangerous. I was a stripper, and

¹³⁴ Currie, Robert

¹³⁵ Turnbull, Jim

¹³⁶ McClure, Alex

¹³⁷ McMillan, Stewart

¹³⁸ Mortimer, Peter

¹³⁹ McNamee, Norman

Email reminiscence 10 December 2013

Email reminiscence 30 December 2013

Email reminiscence 19 November 2013

Written reminiscence 21 November 2013

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

Email reminiscence 8 December 2013

stripped sewage pipes which we made of rough concrete.”¹⁴⁰ The regular tried-and-tested method was getting an experienced workman to show you the ropes: more enlightened employers were aware of the benefit of some academic input as well: “Training was working with a journeyman and he showed you the ropes, night school also.”¹⁴¹ As time went on, this became more highly developed with day-release often forming part of a young worker’s development. “In late August of 1971, I started my day release course, which was a two year affair, at the College of Commerce in the morning, and across the street at the College of Building & Printing in the afternoon. The morning session consisted of Bookkeeping and Accounts, English, and a project about your workplace. In the afternoon across the road, we worked on modules under the auspices of the National Federation of Builders and Plumbers Merchants, and I still have my certificate to this day.”¹⁴² The training under the tutelage of older workmates often had unexpected bonuses: “The more experienced men took me to the pub at lunchtime and we all had black rum to put a heat in our already frozen bodies.”¹⁴³ So, too, did day-release: “My day release at college also was memorable for me having an under-age pint and a pie at The George public house on North Frederick Street.”¹⁴⁴

4.3 Bosses, Wages and Politics

Working life carries with it a discipline, a discipline imposed by the hierarchy personified by “the boss”. Bosses were the same as even today: good and bad. “I was working under a smashing guy from Springburn called Davie Macfarlane, and he really took me under his wing. He would approve my overtime, and virtually guaranteed my ‘two nights and a Saturday’, with me only doing around half the overtime hours I got paid.”¹⁴⁵ Contrast that boss with someone else’s experience: “The Office Manager at Beattie’s was Mr. Howie. A narrow minded martinet and pillar of his church. What a legacy he has left in the mind of his junior employee. Going round with the internal mail to the rooms of the various directors one had to first knock and then enter and often on entering was met with a blast of hostility from a Director struggling with an overheated conversation on the phone. Hateful experience.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ McClure, Alex

Email reminiscence 19 November 2013

¹⁴¹ McNamee, Norman

Email reminiscence 8 December 2013

¹⁴² Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

¹⁴³ McMillan, Stewart

Written reminiscence 21 November 2013

¹⁴⁴ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

¹⁴⁵ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

¹⁴⁶ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 10 December 2013

The mention above of “pillar of his church” reminds us that a major point of interest is the different religious affiliations at different points in the hierarchy. Conventional wisdom has it that most job hierarchies were dominated by Protestants and Freemasons, a point made very forcibly by Dudgeon¹⁴⁷: "While Protestants had a long-standing and near-total monopoly on skilled employment in Glasgow, discrimination consigned the Irish Catholic labourer to the most arduous and dangerous employment, and life itself was a lottery. 'Catholics need not apply' was a common enough sign or slogan. The attitude persisted long after statutory and anti racial discrimination regulation - for example through the practice of asking at interview or in job application forms about which school the applicant had attended. Attempting to hide one's religion when seeking employment was almost impossible, as schools in Glasgow were - and still often are - segregated along sectarian lines. The Catholic schools were all named after saints, so that was a dead giveaway."

This research has confirmed Dudgeon’s point: “My interview went like this - I gave my name and the two main points I have never forgotten were "What school did you go to?" and “What BB are you in?" I said I wanted to be a draughtsman. I started two weeks later in the template store. I soon realised that their seemed to be a system where Catholics were rarely made draughtsman or template makers: there were some but very few. Shop floor working, platers, welders, machine men were the jobs allocated to Catholics.”¹⁴⁸ We have been told that “The bosses were mostly Masons”¹⁴⁹ and another respondent assures us that “This practice was endemic in the works at that time.”¹⁵⁰

Wages, of course, depended on the type of job being performed. One would think that the following was open and transparent: “As you learned the job, different pay grades were introduced. Some factories had a bonus system, other systems were “piece rates”. That meant you were paid by the amount of work you did. If your job was to sew pockets into coats, your wages were calculated by the number of pockets you could sew in a week. It was head down and sew as fast as you can.”¹⁵¹ However, there is a sense that, where both men and women were employed doing the same sort of job, the women were not treated fairly. “In the cutting room, there were two men and five women. Despite doing the same job, the men were paid a much higher rate than the women. This was because men were seen as the breadwinners and

¹⁴⁷ Dudgeon, P (2009)

¹⁴⁸ McNamee, Norman

¹⁴⁹ Craig, Irene

¹⁵⁰ Mortimer, Peter

¹⁵¹ McMillan, Rosemary

Our Glasgow (Headline), p. 29

Email reminiscence 8 December 2013

Written reminiscence 25 November 2013

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

Email reminiscence 11 November 2013

through no fault of their own, the women were the losers. Strange to think that no one questioned this, as now it seems so unfair. It was accepted, that was how life was.”¹⁵² Sometimes the recollection is rather more brusque: “I did the same job as a boy for a few months and he got double.”¹⁵³

Jobs were plentiful, and there are many recollections of the “... and then I went on to do ...” variety. “In the 60's business was booming in the steel industry and I was fortunate to gain employment in Ravenscraig. From there I went to Hoover in Cambuslang, Anderson Mavor in Motherwell and finally Cummins Diesel Engines in Shotts. I have enjoyed working life and have been fortunate never to have been without work.”¹⁵⁴ This is paralleled by “I moved from Beatties to work as a Junior Clerk with Roxburgh, Colin Scott & Co. Ltd., (Shipping Agents for Alfred Holt's Blue Funnel Line that traded between Liverpool/Glasgow/Australia and the Far East). My wage rose by 5/- to 30/- a week. I left RCS to fulfil compulsory National Service and after two years with the Royal Air Force was eligible to return to RCS, but since they offered to pay only £3.15/- per week I turned the job down and moved on.”¹⁵⁵ Sometimes, the job trajectory can be a somewhat giddy: “Once I served my time I moved to Clyde Structural, South St, Scotstoun, 1966, back to Mains 1968, then to Bairds of Anniesland 1968, back to Clyde Structural, 1969 after a while I was in the Design and Estimating office, blotted my copybook and managed to move back to the Template Loft, eventually got paid off for making a few mistakes 1973, unemployed for 10 days and got a job with Gilchrists of Barrland St, Builders as a Joiner, moved back to my trade with Lambhill Engineering and in October 1974 started work with Babcock and Wilcox, Renfrew as a Process Engineer, was there till September 1993.”¹⁵⁶

However, a most important aspect of work life, especially for young men, was the way in which it often introduced them to political ideas and theories. This is a topic which is extremely significant, but often glossed over. Dudgeon¹⁵⁷ relates radical political ideas to the tenement: "Tenement life was in many ways the model in the making of the new socialist state to which some extremely militant Glaswegian activists were committed, men like John MacLean, James Maxton and William Gallagher the so called Red Clydesiders from whom the suffragettes, the ILP, the anti-war lobby, and the rent strike leaders all drew inspiration."

¹⁵² McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 11 November 2013

¹⁵³ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 1 December 2013

¹⁵⁴ McMillan, Stewart

Email reminiscence 11 November 2013

¹⁵⁵ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 10 December 2013

¹⁵⁶ McNamee, Norman

Email reminiscence 8 December 2013

¹⁵⁷ Dudgeon, Piers

Op. cit. p. 104

Sometimes, attitudes towards this important aspect of working life can be exceptionally demeaning. Hoggart, for example, writes¹⁵⁸ that “As to politics, therefore, they (the working class) have a limited realism which tells them that, as far as they can see, ‘there’s no future’ in it for them ... There are of course individual exceptions ... But in general most working people are non-political and non-metaphysical in their outlook ... They may appear to have views on general matters – on religion, on politics, and so on – but these views usually prove to be a bundle of unexamined and orally-transmitted tags, enshrining generalizations, prejudices and half-truths...”. This is really appalling and completely ignores the fact that the perpetual situation of poverty, despite hard work, turned many working class men and women to read as much political material as was readily available.

It is therefore not only patronising but actually untrue. Hoggart indicates that there are “individual exceptions”, but the scale of the exceptions in the east end of Glasgow would probably have baffled him. A not untypical recollection¹⁵⁹ runs “My first job out of school was with Thomas Graham & Co., at Kerr Street ... One of my placements was into the Wallpaper and Paint Department, and here I encountered a guy called Arthur who worked in the warehouse. At lunch time, or dinner time as it was known in the early 1970's, all sorts of topics would be discussed, everything from crime to football to sex, and as a young guy on the cusp of manhood, I soaked it all in with great interest. It was conversations with Arthur, however, that gave me my first exposure to politics in the big wide world, as he was always talking about socialism and its benefits, as well as his condemnation of capitalism.”

This exposure to the political aspects of current *Realpolitik* was often a revelation. “In the early 1960s when I started my apprenticeship the discussions during the morning tea break and lunch break would be on topics that we never got at school. (We discussed) the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista by Fidel Castro and the Bay of Pigs military action by the USA. (We asked) was it militarily justified that J.F.K. should threaten Khrushchev on the prospect of World War Three over missile bases in Cuba when the USA had sites in Turkey, Japan, and Germany?”¹⁶⁰

Sometimes the discussions would be on political theory. “There would also be debates on the works of Marx, Engels, Garibaldi, George Bernard Shaw and Kier Hardie where the issues of socio-economics were introduced to 16-year olds for the first time ... At 16 years of age, having just left school, it

¹⁵⁸ Hoggart, Richard

Op. cit., p.102-103

¹⁵⁹ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 18 January 2014

¹⁶⁰ Gibson, Willie

Email reminiscence 25 January 2014

was fascinating to listen to a Sheet Metal Worker explain the principle of 'Surplus Value ' as defined by Karl Marx!"¹⁶¹

In this quest for political knowledge and insight, the library was unbelievably important. "I now realise all these years later that a great many working men were extremely politically aware, and also well read, something perhaps to thank Glasgow Libraries for. Many of us have no doubt seen the old black and white photographs, of library reading rooms full of working men with bunnets, reading and absorbing newspapers."¹⁶² Indeed, "Over the 5 year period of the 'Apprenticeship' in the East End of Glasgow, many of the 'Boys' (apprentices) would have the 'workshop university' where the books of Shaw, ('Everybody's Political What's What'), Marx ('Das Kapital') and many other political and economic observers would be brought to our attention and debated."¹⁶³

The influence of the men who led the discussions and debates stayed throughout life: "(Arthur) spoke with deep commitment and belief in his socialist principles, and the unfairness of the current system, and how a real distribution of wealth could eradicate poverty. He invited me to come along and hear people talking in public, and so I went one Saturday afternoon to meet Arthur at Royal Exchange Square, where people gathered at the Wellington monument, to have their own version of 'Speakers' Corner'. This was a revelation to me as it showed ordinary people, like me, engaging in public debate about politics, and something that's never left me. I'm eternally grateful to Arthur, for raising my fledgling interest in the subject."¹⁶⁴

4.4 Thinking back to Work

There are, of course, mixed emotions when recollecting one's work life. Work, for some, was thrilling, especially at the end of the working day: "I vividly recall the end of the working day, as all the staff poured out of the works. Whilst not quite up there with closing time at the shipyards on the Clyde, Kerr Street would be a beehive of activity at five o'clock and there was even a newspaper boy selling the Evening Times to the hordes heading home for their dinner, or as we often referred to it at that time, their supper."¹⁶⁵ These dramatic images are easily recollected: "I just loved when the big green gates opened at five and all the workers poured out into the street. All

¹⁶¹ Gibson, Willie

Email reminiscence 25 January 2014

¹⁶² Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 18 January 2014

¹⁶³ Gibson, Willie

Email reminiscence 25 January 2014

¹⁶⁴ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 18 January 2014

¹⁶⁵ Mortimer, Peter

Email reminiscence 30 November 2013

these cheery faces after doing a hard day's work... they were glad to get home."¹⁶⁶

For others, reminiscence is tinged with a melancholy, a sense that things could have turned out better if only school or parents had given them a little push. "I wish I had known then AND had the courage to make more of my working years, rather than slave away in a clothing factory for most of my life. To be fair, up until starting work, our world was never any bigger than the few streets we played in. My mother always worked in local sewing factories and hosieries, so perhaps it was a case of, if it was good enough for her, it was good enough for me."¹⁶⁷ Even a very successful career can carry a sense of "perhaps": "I went into office administration and had an easier path than those who went into factories and/or worked on the roads or otherwise did outside manual labour in all sorts of weathers or worked in factories and mills where conditions were deplorable in terms of health and safety. I imagined I might be apprenticed as a printer or press photographer, but that was never discussed and therefore consigned to the world of my dreams."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 1 December 2013

¹⁶⁷ McMillan, Rosemary

Email reminiscence 11 November 2013

¹⁶⁸ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 10 December 2013

5: A Sense of Community

Two major aspects of life in Bridgeton have emerged during the course of this research. The first is the extremely strong sense of communal solidarity, a sense of firm social organisation which held people together in a very powerful way. The second is a sense almost of stasis, where the descriptions and stories could have come from the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s or 1960s. There is no great sense of narrative change until we are in the 1970s and the major decanting of people is taking place.

It is clear that, even with the massive drive by the Corporation, the 1950s and 1960s still experienced awful housing conditions. However, recollections of this period are most often positive, and the elements of communality are considered to be far more significant than the actual housing and working conditions.

“Halloween was great fun, no fancy shops to hire costumes from. You just dressed up with your mother’s clothes, maybe a dress and a hat and of course some high heels. My mother always made me walk down the stairs in my socks and put her shoes on at the bottom, just in case I fell. Neighbours were always kind to the kids and I can’t remember very many doors we were turned away from. Mrs Harvey, our next door neighbour in Ruby Street always had a party. After we had finished guising, we always went in to her house where we “dooked” for apples, had fun with treacle pancakes hanging from her pulley and we all did a party piece”.¹⁶⁹

Compare this happy description of Hallowe’en with William Barr’s **Glaswegiana** of 1973 where there is this plangent description of Bridgeton: “You are struck by the general sense of decay and neglect that pervades the area. Street after street of tall tenements stand empty, their shattered windows open and gaping to the sky. Broken glass lies in profusion on the streets ... and the unchecked running water floods into the street ... the engineering works, mills and factories have been closed down leaving Brigton with the appearance of a ghost town.”¹⁷⁰

What were the causes of the sense of communality? One major cause of this was genetic communality: “I was born on the top floor flat of number 13 Marquis Street, Bridgeton on 26th April, 1941 in my granny’s kitchen bed-recess or set-in bed. My birth was, in the parlance of the day, a ‘home

¹⁶⁹ McMillan, Rosemary Email communication 25 October 2013

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Mitchell, E R (2005) Op. cit. p.159

confinement'. A few weeks later, my mum and dad moved to number 29 Marquis Street which from then on became the family's home address. Significantly, my dad was also born at 29 Marquis Street where his two sisters (both spinsters) continued to live. These sisters were my Aunts Nelly and Mary, and living next door was their widowed sister (Aunt Agnes) with her daughter (my cousin Rita). My family lived on the next landing (2-up) and on the top floor (3-up) was my dad's other sister (Aunt Annie) and her two sons."¹⁷¹

This was not unusual: "There was a time when my Dad and Mum and me lived at 62 Ardenlea Street in Dalmarnock. At the same time I had an Uncle and Aunt who lived at 17 Ardenlea Street, another Uncle and Aunt who lived at 85 Ardenlea Street and my Father's Mother who lived at 23 Ardenlea Street. You can't get much closer than that!"¹⁷²

Most people were, in fact, surrounded by family. We discovered in Chapter Two that most people found out about vacancies from family (who would know about vacancies near them) and were allocated flats within tenements by family speaking for them to the factor. It therefore makes perfect sense that the main source of solidarity and community was the proximity of members of the same family. Jessie Roxburgh speaks of a "home confinement", being born in the tenement. This was the norm. The final departing after death was usually also from the tenement. The tenement was therefore a very powerful psychological place where major landmarks of life's trajectory occurred. One can therefore understand why, with so little population churn and a strong focus on the tenement, there is a strong sense of the static.



Springfield Road Primary School: early 1950s

¹⁷¹ Roxburgh Jessie

¹⁷² Stewart, Owen

Email communication 28 November 2013

Written communication 25 November 2013

A second cause of communality is undoubtedly school, where cohorts who often lived in the same street were thrust together into school life and the experience of education. There is no doubt that the school is a very powerful factor of cohesion. In old photographs such as this, we have a group being created at probably the most formative part of a child's life. Given the lack of "social churn" mentioned earlier, this school group would probably encounter puberty and adolescence together, start looking for jobs simultaneously, begin the process of finding a mate, settling down and reproducing, all at the same time.

A third cause of the communality was the proximity of work and shops. Bridgeton was completely unplanned, but grew organically with working factories, shops, and domestic tenements cheek-by-jowl. This, allied to the levels of poverty which people experienced, had two major results. There was little need to move outside Bridgeton for any of life's necessities. There was often insufficient wealth for people to travel far beyond the confines of Bridgeton.

If we take these (proximity of family, the coherence of the school cohort, proximity of work, proximity of shops, and poverty keeping one in one's area) we can see a subliminal sense of "going through life together as a group". This is psychologically very powerful, because there is "no sense of something else."¹⁷³

This is, perhaps, too strong. In the previous chapter we encountered the fact that many young men encountered political ideas for the first time at work and became aware that they lived in a far larger world than Bridgeton. "... we need to touch on the fact that many of Bridgeton's tenement dwellers were keen to make their exit from Bridgeton in a bold attempt to improve their chances in life ... some found employment in the new industries that sprung up in East Kilbride. Glenrothes and Irvine in accordance with the New Towns Act of 1947 ... Others became statistics in Glasgow city council's plans for its overspill population ... Others were drawn farther afield as they took advantage of assisted passage to Canada and Australia."¹⁷⁴ Often it would be the most adventurous and capable who left: "In addition to producing the machinery, equipment, and products that would generate the nation's wealth this creative activity would also provide the young people brought up in the area with opportunities to escape the harsh over-crowded, austere environment of their childhood. The training and apprenticeships provided by the industrial work of the east end

¹⁷³ McCann, Thomas

¹⁷⁴ Currie, Robert

Interviewed 28 November 2013

Email reminiscence 22 January 2014

of Glasgow would allow many of these young highly skilled workers to take their knowledge and skills to all 'airts and pairts' of this planet ... where they established their own businesses and made a major contribution to their new environment."¹⁷⁵

This kind of living together produces definite characteristics in people, and despite the normal mixture of human types, there is a general agreement that people in post-industrial Bridgeton were caring, industrious, sharing, strong, proud, steadfast, stoic. The stasis created a kind of uniformity which further deepened the sense of communality. There were shared aspirations, often directed towards survival and getting by, but all acknowledging that the best way to achieve these aspirations was through co-operation and "give-and-take."

"Thinking about words that epitomise Bridgeton in the old days, I think SURVIVAL is a most appropriate word but there are so many that could be used to describe the strength of character of working folk. In comparison to the people of the west-end those of the east-end were underprivileged in so many ways but didn't realise it. Significantly, individual families were in many cases more underprivileged than others."¹⁷⁶

The advent of GEAR in May, 1976 saw a great push in the redevelopment of Bridgeton and Dalmarnock. Massive demolition took place in the following years. In the whole GEAR area dwellings were reduced from 28,500 in 1971 to 15,049 in 1981, and this was obvious in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock where great open tracts of land were created by the bulldozer. One often-forgotten aspect of this is that, when tenements were demolished, the shops on the ground floor would also be lost – a double fracturing of the community.

"I can remember well when all the cobbles got covered with tar in the 50s. The smell filled our senses of the burning hot tar. We all used to sit on the kerb fascinated with the steam road rollers slowly moving up and down our street ... never thinking about the history being covered forever. (Fordneuk Street) has lost all its purpose in life, after being such a vibrant wee street ... I say vibrant not in the sense of looking great but of the workers who passed up and down there during the week from both Templeton's factories and Lyle carpet work too. The place was buzzing."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Gibson, Willie

Email reminiscence 25 January 2014

¹⁷⁶ Currie, Robert

Email reminiscence 29 November 2013

¹⁷⁷ Robertson, Donna

Email reminiscence 22 November 2013

However, there is the problem that many of today's Bridgeton residents are not qualified for the sort of jobs created in a post-industrial city. The result is that life expectation is lower than in other parts of Glasgow, and the incidence of heart attack and cancer is higher than in other parts of Glasgow. Mitchell is rightly enraged: "... what did these people do to deserve being treated as they have been."¹⁷⁸

Fond memories of the crowded tenements of old and the community that gave them life cannot truly compensate for the hazards they bred.

When people moved (or were moved) away to places such as East Kilbride, they moved to "palaces" with an inside toilet and a bath. Thereafter came the "regrets expressed at the alleged loss of the old close-knit communities caused by mass flittings to the new housing schemes."¹⁷⁹ There was a strong sense that "What you gained in the physical sense, you lost in the social or spiritual sense."¹⁸⁰ People were alienated because the high-rise was unable to maintain their social structure. It was insufficiently flexible to provide the kind of home that encouraged the kind of communal activities which we have seen emanated from tenement living.

In some ways, people realised too late what was happening. The *East End Independent* reported¹⁸¹ in 1999 that "People power has saved the traditional community of Dalmarnock from being wounded beyond repair." Scottish Homes had aimed to gain the approval of the Bridgeton and Dalmarnock Housing Association to bulldoze hundreds of crumbling tenements. This "sparked fury among locals, who said the mass exodus of tenants out of the area would devastate the close-knit community." The local councillor said "We would be failing in our duty if we did not let tenants who have stayed in Dalmarnock for generations remain there."

A bit late, eh?

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell, E R (2005)

Op. cit. p.171

¹⁷⁹ McKenna, J (2006)

Op.cit., p.340

¹⁸⁰ Mortimer, Peter

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¹⁸¹ East End Independent 14 October 1999

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Websites

There are many website sources with photographs from this period of Glasgow and Bridgeton. The following websites are important:

www.glasgowhistory.co.uk

www.glescapals.com

www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell

<http://urbanglasgow.co.uk>

Before the Second World War, Bridgeton was possibly the most highly industrialised few square miles on the planet. However, by the late 1950s, things had begun to change. Economic and social changes can occur slowly and almost imperceptibly, but, in the case of Bridgeton, these changes occurred very quickly and with catastrophic results. It was a period of de-industrialisation without any adequate or properly planned replacement of employment. This would have been bad enough, but it was also a period of forced urban renewal and consequent population dispersal and decline. Those who lived through this period are now of an age such that it is imperative that their recollections of life and work are recorded and set in context. This book is the result of a local history project which began at Bridgeton Library in April 2013. A large number of local residents have been active in the collection of memories of life in post-industrial Bridgeton. These recollections have been edited and grouped into topics. A commentary has set them into a wider social context, bringing out important aspects of working-class life within a much loved part of Glasgow.

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