

DOWN MEMORY LANE

" Would you like to go back to the days when you could take a tramcar from Cambuslang to Queen Street, Glasgow, or to Paisley perhaps, for only two pence (old pence, of course) ?

You would? - Then join me as we put the clock back to the turn of the century and rediscover the area of Cambuslang under the guidance of an older citizen.

Before we begin our journey our guide would like to acquaint us with a few background details concerning the district.

He takes pride in telling us that it was around 1903 that the first tramcar travelling from Glasgow went beyond Farme Cross to reach Cambuslang - with open top and coloured lights! - and that the Lanarkshire Tramway Company, formed soon after 1910, is going to be a major influence in the development of commerce and business, not to mention its role in providing a service linking towns and villages within the county.

We now ask our guide about schooling in the area, and we are told that the principal schools are Kirkhill, Bushyhill, Newton, Hallside, Saint Brides and West Coats. It is interesting to hear that although Gateside is to be completed and ready for pupils by 1914, the War delays its function as an "alma mater" until 1918, the building being used as a hospital in the intervening period.

Our guide now turns his thoughts to the places of worship of the period. Saturday night meetings are held in the Baptist Hall. The Co-operative Halls house a meeting on Sunday afternoons, while the Brethern meet in Argyle Hall and the Close Brethern near Saint Pauls at Bushyhill Street. There is a regular meeting at Halfway; and Cambuslang Main Street is as good a place as any for the Reverend James Houston of the Old Parish Church to preach to those who will listen on a Saturday night. (One can just discern a twinkle in our guide's eye!). Trinity Church has the distinguished Reverend Gray as its minister, and an organist of outstanding ability plays at Rosebank Church - one Hunter McMillan by name.

Now what of the main industries of the time? Mining is the principal source of employment. There are nine collieries in the parish, the nearest to the centre of Cambuslang being the Toll Pit (where the buses now stop at the Cambuslang terminus). We are told that the Hallside Pit is among the deepest in Scotland and that Loanend and Newton are the pits furthest from Cambuslang. The renowned ironworks of James Dunlop (the present Clugston site on the road to Tollcross) employ many men and our guide intends to show us at a later date the slag rails running from the works to the River Clyde. We are also informed that it was just before the Great War that slag waggons ceased passing along these slag rails and that it was at this point in time that the steelworks at Clydebridge began to operate - mainly in the function of maintenance rather than production. Indeed the houses at Wellshot, off Dukes Road, are to be built during the war to house the many workers being transferred to Clydebridge from the Dalziel Works at Motherwell.

" There can be few grasslands capable of housing such varying pursuits as golf, cattle showing, curling and horse trotting within the one arena. Such an area was Westburn Green before the Great War, then and now the present site of Cambuslang Golf Club.

It was here that the Cambuslang and District Farmers' Association held their Annual Cattle Show, the afternoon of which was devoted to trotting horses around a ring laid out within the golf course. In the winter curlers used part of the course known as the 'dovecot', the frozen water being that of the Borgia Burn which was one of two burns flowing through the course to the Clyde at that time: the other being the Black Burn, so called because of its use for washing coal mined at the Gateside Pit. This burn is now filled in but in these days it flowed under the main street and across the golf course, the two burns meeting at a bridge near the new clubhouse before entering the Clyde.

Golf was popular in the Cambuslang community even in these days and in 1914 the British Amateur Championship was won by J. L. C. Jenkins who, though a member of Troon, lived and played most of his golf at Cambuslang.

It is surprising and amusing to hear from our guide that on occasions Westburn Green even accommodated football supporters. The site of the Westburn houses of today was the ground of Cambuslang Rangers Football Clubs until they took over the tenancy of Somervell Park in 1905. One game in particular against a certain Glasgow team created such excitement and feeling that spectators spilled on to the golf course fighting and brawling - the pioneers of football hooliganism?

In this area Westburn Farm possessed the last windmill to be seen in Cambuslang and Osborne Terrace marked the most easterly buildings built before the war in the district.

Retail and service outlets in Westburn at this time included Scoular the blacksmith, Struthers the joiner, Hamilton's dairy, and Mattha' Forsyth's public house. Indeed shops stretched along both sides of the main street as far as Westburn on the one side and the Toll Pit on the other. Our guide informs us that the site of the chief house of the Morrison Estate in these days now accommodates our local constabulary and that the properties to the east of Greenless Road on the main street were erected as far back as 1905.

Remaining on this side of the street we are told that at the top of Tabernacle Lane, before turning into Johnson Drive, there lived a weaver, Betty Scoular by name, who was related to the blacksmith at Westburn and to the recent ironmonger in Greenless Road. Weaving in Cambuslang, however, died out around 1910.

Turning left at the top of the Lane we approach the ground once used for football by Cambuslang Hibs (now defunct) and by Wilson's Chapel Dairy in the Main Street for grazing their cattle. Walking up Croft Road our guide thinks back to the days before the war when cattle grazed in the fields now given over to dwelling houses. Surprisingly, we are informed that

" Cairns Road has remained relatively unchanged over the past sixty years except of course for the area opposite our church which was the site of the minister's manse until quite recently. Looking down Croft Road from this site our guide tells of the old Kirkhill School opposite the end of Cadoc Street. With nostalgia he reflects on its disappearance during the re-building of Kirkhill. Then, with a touch of impish humour, we are informed by him that next month he is going to take us "up the west-end"!

Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, the area "up the hill" from the Main Street of Cambuslang underwent a complete change. Business men moved from Glasgow to reside in Cambuslang, and villas were built from Greenlees Road (then known as Mason's Brae) to Whitlawburn. Subsequently, Cambuslang became known as the "Villa-village" - and Cambuslang Rangers as the "Villa-villagers" !

Moving westward into Brownside Road we come to West Coats School which, unlike today, provided a higher grade education up to the third year. David Newlands, previously a teacher in Kirkhill School, was the first headmaster and remained so for about twenty years until the end of the Great War. Our guide recalls the high esteem in which he was held and the fervour and passion displayed by him in bringing out the best in his pupils - no matter their academic standard or social background.

Beyond the school, at the point where Chatelherault Avenue meets Richmond Drive today, lay the entrance to a dairy farm owned by Lohoar who later bought Greenlees Farm, the latter farm being formerly owned by one Badger Young. While moving back towards the Kirkhill area our guide reminisces about the hours of enjoyment spent playing in the glen which stretched from Holmhill Farm to the end of Cairns Road. Many happy hours were spent wandering here, especially if there was plenty of water in the burn.

On arriving back at Greenlees Road we turn down towards the Main Street, passing Bushyhill School, St. Bride's R.C. School and St. Bride's R.C. Church, before arriving at Cambuslang Cross. Looking left we see shops of many shapes and forms stretching west towards Station Square. Before 1914 most of the household requirements could be purchased in Cambuslang, the need to travel into town hardly ever arising. The quality of goods on sale in these shops was high, and that, together with the convenience for the shoppers and the reasonable prices, ensured a good living for the many traders in the district.

Moving west down the Main Street from the Cross we approach the famous Station Square. A few yards from the Square was a lane where lay Mitchell's Smiddy. This business eventually moved to Somervell Street and is now Rosebank Engineering Company. The Square started from the present Clydesdale Bank, (in those days a public house.) Any reader interested might have a look at the angle of the Bank and the shop next door. This angle continued until it reached West Coats Road.

" Behind the Bank there were houses known locally as "The Cundy". Behind what is now the chemist's shop there were a few steps down to a white-washed house in which lived "The Hawk" - an old man who was tormented by the boys on their way to school. To the Square came politicians at election times. The Rev. Jamie Houston preached to the "drouths" there on a Saturday night, the faithful "Match Jamie" standing beside his chair. Another favourite Saturday night visitor to the Square was a coloured gentleman whose specialties included "cures sold for all ailments" and the pulling of teeth with his fingers!

Having refreshed ourselves at the fountain in the Square we look with our guide towards Somervell Street, the site of a large four-storey property of high architectural standard and money value (known locally as the "Klondyke"). A few yards east of Somervell Street was Miller Street which led to the Dyework. This was owned by T. P. Miller, who lived at Cairns House. The Dyework provided employment for many women.

The Dyework bell was famous... It rang at 6 a.m. to start the workers' day and at 6 p.m. to finish their labours. Women came from as far afield as Blantyre to work in this establishment.

At the foot of Bridge Street lay the River Clyde. Spanning the river were two bridges - one a road bridge and alongside it an old bridge across which "pugs" shunted waggons of red hot slag from the local ironworks, for dumping on both sides of the road. In the adjoining Monkcastle Drive McGowan had a dairy farm. His cows grazed in what is now Strathclyde University sports ground. Sixty years ago this area had also a loch into which flood water from the Clyde overflowed. In the depths of winter when the loch had frozen over, the area became a mecca for skaters and curlers. Lights were installed and payment was demanded. There were some who paid and some who didn't!

Mist often hung damply over this icy rink, and our guide recalls with amusement that on one cold grey November evening the mist was so thick that he could not find his way back to the edge of the loch. It was only the smell of cooking sausages from the local "hot-dog" stand of the day which eventually guided the skater back to safety.

As our guide wends his way back to Cambuslang Cross he remembers with nostalgia the names of the tradesmen and shopkeepers of former years. Their names flow readily from his well-stocked memory. The impressions of youth are lasting ones. The plumbers, the joiners, the bakers, the saddlers, the tailors, and the doctors are as fresh in his mind as they were when he wended his way to school past their doorways.

And to end on a seasonal Christmas note he conjures up from the past the picture of Dr MacPherson being driven to his calls by an old cabby named Dick Raphael. Shades of Charles Dickens!

Cambuslang, before the Great War, had a population of some twenty-six thousand rising during the 1930s to become the largest village in Scotland. Early in the century, "the area was part of a parliamentary constituency known as Mid-Lanark, being staunchly Liberal. Perhaps significantly, the Prime Minister between 1905 and 1908 was the Scots Liberal, Campbell-Bannerman. However, in 1929, the new Labour Government found real support in Cambuslang, thus ending the long run of Liberism in the district.

The first alteration to the face of Cambuslang came with the arrival of the Lanarkshire Tramways around 1910. The old Hamilton Road with the bridge over the Borgie Burn disappeared and a new road was built on a higher level to accommodate this "new fangled" transport.

Earlier, in 1900, the Kirkhill Station had been erected as part of the Cathcart Circle line. Trains from Glasgow stopped at Kirkhill, crossing the Clyde at the bridge near Clydesmill, and returning to the city by way of Carmyle and Tollcross. That route has now been altered, the trains carrying on to Motherwell or using Kirkhill as their terminus and returning to Glasgow from there.

The expansion of our village throughout the years resulted in the extinction of most of the farmland in the area. Development of housing schemes began in the late thirties with the construction of houses off the Westburn Road in the field once the home of Cambuslang Rangers. A large estate was then built adjacent to Gathkin Dy-Pass and close to the Guttie Park, so called after its owners, the Dick family, bootmakers, who were said to have made a good deal of money from rubber. Housing projects at Springhall and latterly at Whitlawburn followed at the expense of the dairy farms at Holmhills and Greenless.

It is interesting to hear that in the years immediately following the First World War, many houses were built a few yards to the North of our Church on a field where a local dairyman had grazed his cattle. No more were we to see "the lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea"!

In the west-end Silverbanks was rebuilt, although the railway good station still stands. In days gone by trace horses helped pull the heavy loads from the station up to the level part of the road. At the opposite end of the village, Halfway was completely rebuilt in the time between the two wars and at the end of the last war.

We are told that our village centre, which once housed several thousand inhabitants, has been totally altered by modern shops, walkways and precincts. Not at all hard to believe as we go from supermarket and under the main street to the general store on our weekly shopping sojourn!

What then, we finally ask our guide, has remained unchanged in Cambuslang throughout the years?

The area of "the hill", as it was known to those living down the village, is, in our guide's opinion, almost unchanged - dare we say, unspoilt? Built in the last century and in the years before the First World War, this area, and in particular Cairns Road, has undergone remarkably little re-development (our guide cringes at the word!) in the past half-century. And, lest those down in the village take offence, the same applies to Monkcastle Drive.

"What of the people of Cambuslang?"

Well of course there are a great many Glaswegians among the villagers now. Indeed one has heard that certain members of our community were actually "brung up" in Bearsden!"

Cosmopolitan Cambuslang!, you exclaim? Fortunately no - there are still a great many "auld yins" who well remember the reminiscences contained in our journeys down memory lane. What is possibly more significant is that there are two generations of descendants forming a hard core of villagers proud of Cambuslang, its history, its traditions, its modern growth, and most important of all, its future.

And now we bid farewell to our guide, with gratitude for valuable services rendered in educating the "immigrants", jogging the memories of the worthies, and giving pleasure to us all. Thank you, sir."

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