

AN  
OCTOGENARIAN'S  
REMINISCENCES

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BY  
W. F. BLAIR

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MR W.F.BLAIR

TRIBUTE

Among the master bakers of Ayrshire, there is no more striking personality than that of W.F. Blair, Mauchline. Born eighty years ago at Duns, in the east country, he came to the west when quite a child, and found a home in the old bakery of his grandfather within the ever beautiful and ever classic town of Mauchline, steeped in the memories of a man who will ever rank as the presiding genius of Scotia's bards. To see Mr Blair, now in his eightieth year, with his straight, energetic figure, and remember his versatile gifts as a cunning craftsman of the baking trade, as an enthusiastic devotee of the mystic tie, as a keen sportsman on the ice on a winter's day, or on velvet green on a summer's eve, or hear his voice, yet rich and strong, sing songs of a social or sacred kind, is to see, remember, and hear the threefold proofs of a personality uniquely uncommon. If more evidence were called for, let us hasten to add that last week, along with his beloved and highly respected wife, he sailed for South Africa on a six months' holiday full of healthy optimism, and carrying his plucky breast a dauntless spirit that one cannot better express than in a phrase of his own coining, viz., "The heart of a lion."

Some time ago I suggested to him the advisability of writing his personal recollections of the classic town and the story of his long and varied life that would have the double charm of Burnsania and Mauchline folk-lore. This I am proud to say, he had done in no mean manner, and now as he and his amiable consort have left dear Mauchline for a time behind, we humbly lay his memories before our readers, and feel sure they will read them with real pleasure, and wish Mr and Mrs Blair Godspeed as they turn their faces to the golden west.

DAVID MACKIE, SEN

AN  
OCTOGENARIAN'S REMINISCENCES

Tho' we may wander far and wide,  
O'er oceans, seas, and lands;  
Succeed in Business, look wi' pride  
On our gifts o' heid an' hands;  
Tho years roll on like ceaseless tides  
This truth remains the same -  
We've aye a warm pairt in oor heart  
For the dear auld place ca'd Hame.  
WFB

Longevity is not always an unmixed blessing, but in the experience of the writer the advantages by far outnumber the disadvantages. Of the latter, the most poignant is the passing of old friends, the departure of each of whom further decreases the fast diminishing circle of "the old brigade," the comrades of youthful days, and the attendant escapades. Compensatory, however, is the readiness of younger generations to be bothered with elderly company in order that they may learn of the good old days and the folks there of, and who has ever heard of this duty of the elderly being shirked? The writer certainly has always had pleasure in discharging it, and evidently often with acceptance, since many friends have urged him to record in writing some at least of his memories of the past. The task – for task it is – to one well past the allotted span is approached with some temerity, but with the best intentions. Though not a native of Mauchline, over seventy years residence in the village must necessarily be reflected by these notes being largely concerning Mauchline and Mauchlinites, and should the connection of our national bard to the district be mentioned somewhat ardently it is with the intention of stirring up more pride locally in such a heritage. Apart from personal residence the writer has had the advantage of his forebears, who were not uncommunicative, having been in Mauchline since 1808, in which and later years many of Burns's contemporaries were still to the fore.

As a "motherless bairn" five years of age, the writer (who now becomes I) arrived in Mauchline by train; the railway had then been opened some two years, and the earliest recollection is of having been "awfu' gled" to have reached the end of the then tedious journey from Dum, Berwickshire, via Edinburgh, to Mauchline. The way up from the Station to the Loudoun Spout was without houses on either side, save for three or four little thatched ones on the side upon which Wilson Place now stands. In one of these houses lived Mrs. Lees, who was the youngest daughter of James Armour and

SISTER OF "BONNIE JEAN"

She was an elderly body, but hale and hearty and of fine appearance. In this last respect I understand she outshone her more illustrious sister, than whom of course she was much younger. Mrs Lees I believe died at the age of 85 about the year 1865.

From The Loudoun down the Ayr road was, when I first came to Mauchline and until recent years known as New Street, but from my first glimpse of it and long after the appearance certainly belied the name, since the buildings on either side were for the main part low, one-storied buildings with thatched roofs. It was in such a building near the foot of this street that the last of the hand-loom weaving was carried on. That had, of course, been at one time the staple industry of the village, but at no time in my remembrance did the number so employed exceed a dozen, and these men unfitted by reason of old age to seek other means of earning their livelihood. Well do I remember a most interesting resident in this street whose fame extended and still extends far beyond the confines of this parish. I refer to Archie McAlpine, widely known as

"BLIN' ARCHIE"

Despite his great infirmity, his work as a maker of fiddles was of the highest standard of excellence, and his productions were, and still are, eagerly sought after, and once acquired, so prized that even now the sweet music of a "McAlpine Fiddle" may, I feel sure, be heard not only in the homeland, but in the most of the colonies. At that time too, no dance or "kirn" - and they were many - was complete without Archie in the role of fiddler, which he could so ably and unwearyingly fill.

In that remaining portion of Loudoun Street from the Spout up to the Cowgate there has been much damage in my day; the then common one-storied houses which bounded the roadway have given place to the substantial buildings now forming the street. Somewhat earlier than I remember however, I should say that for dilapidation Loudoun Street and Main Street would take some beating. These streets were then formed by a row of tumble-

down houses on either side, for at one time there were houses both immediately above and below where the gate into the churchyard now is. In one of which Blackie Ferguson, a grand-uncle of mine resided. The buildings now occupied by Mr Gilbert, tailor, were until the 30's of one storey and thatched and it was there that a baker's business was carried on by my grandfather from 1808 till 1833, and there also my mother was born. Further down the house known as "Number One", probably because of it being the first building of any pretensions, was occupied as an adjunct to the Grove, while part of the Loudoun Hotel as we now know it was occupied as dwelling houses. Opposite and where the Post Office stands the ruinous condition of the property supplanted is of such recent date as to make more than mention unnecessary. On the site now occupied by Mr Learmont's property the old buildings were of the old thatched type, but from there and up to and including the present Medical Hall the houses were two storied and in one of these lived

#### JOCK JAMIESON

A well-known character who clinched all his remarks with "sae help me Jock Jamieson".

The feu upon which my own property stands was at one time of all the most dilapidated. When bought in 1833 the building thereon stood gable-end to the street, the one next to Mr Jamieson's being partly occupied by one McHaffey Weir, who kept a "beggarall" or lodging house for tramps, for which business the closing of "Poosie Nansie's" as such probably made the opening. At the top end and bounding the avenue to the Abbey Church was another low building used as a joiner's shop by Ivie Meikle, there being a narrow passage or close between the two rows of buildings.

The whole of the next block from the Abbey Church gate to the Cowgate was one feu, and upon it stood "Johnny Doo's" and buildings pertaining to that inn, known in the time of Burns as the Whiteford Arms. 'Twas this public house that the poet frequented most, and it was then a two-storeyed building with attics and much of the same style as was the Market Inn until recently. From the main building there extended down and fronting the street a row of low out-buildings, one of which was the brew house, Farther back and in a line with Horwood Place there was a stable which stood partly on what is now enclosed in the Abbey Church grounds. The upper storey of this building was a dancing hall, very probably the "lichted Ha" of that, to me, most beautiful of all Burns' songs, i.e. Mary Morrison. The Whiteford Arms it must be remembered was in the

#### DAYS OF THE STAGE COACHES

one of the stations at which the horses were changed. In later days it was named the "Cross Keys", and a large sign bearing two crossed keys hung from the front corner next the Cowgate.

Across that narrow street stood "Poosie Nancy's", the front building being in exterior form much the same as now. Known all over the world as the scene of the exploits of "The Jolly Beggars" so realistically depicted in rhyme by our national bard, there is considerable misunderstanding regarding the poet's frequenting the establishment. It was not till long after Burns' time that the place was licensed (the first licensee being Ritchie Gibson), and the occasional visits which may have been made by the poet were when it was a tramp lodging house or (beggarall). Doubtless, and I have been so informed, it was the uproarious conduct of the patrons of the howf which attracted Burns on his way to or from "Johnny Pigeon's" and so led to his unfolding his genius by portraying in his own inimitable way the scene which he there gazed upon. The interior of the premises was altered considerably during Ritchie Gibson's tenancy, and of course the hall and much of the building at the back is of comparatively recent date. On the site on which the hall stands there was a one-storey house with attics, which was occupied by Cork McGaan, who there carried on business as a shoemaker. From this house one looked down Horwood Place, so called from a retired butler who lived there. The house now forming Mr Findlay's garage was in the time of Burns tenanted by James Armour, Bonnie Jean's father, and it was there from a window in the gable that Jean carried on many cracks and doubtless made many

#### TRYSTS WITH THE POET.

who occupied a similarly convenient window in the Whiteford Arms on the opposite side of Horwood Place. The Cowgate in my boyhood days consisted of low thatched houses on either side, and just above the present back door into Poosie Nancy's there was an entrance leading into what was called Tweedly Square, the sides of which were rows of low mean looking houses. There was an outlet from the square into what is now Earl Grey Street, which remained long after that street was opened and was only closed up when the house now tenanted by Mr. Gray, Inspector of Poor was built. The Cowgate was, prior to the making of Earl Grey Street, the main road to Cumnock and as there was then no wall in front of Beechgrove House it was possible to look right out the Cumnock Road while standing in the Cowgate.

The only tragedy with any semblance of murder or manslaughter which to my knowledge was ever enacted in Mauchline, occurred in the Cowgate when the village was invaded by navvies engaged on the making of the tunnel and the building of Ballochmyle Bridge. The body of one of these navvies was found on the doorstep of

one of the houses, and while it was certain he had met a violent end, the manner of it is to this day shrouded in mystery.

Earl Grey Street, although in existence all my life was within my memory, not so completely bounded as it is now. It, I understand was named after Earl Grey, the sponsor of the Reform Bill introduced into parliament about ninety years ago.

Mansefield Road was vastly different in my youth from what it is now, as on only one side were there buildings, and these the old Parish Manse, standing back about thirty feet from the roadway. At the bottom end the house still standing gable-on to the road served as the dwelling of "the minister's man", while at the top, and likewise on to the road, there stood a byre.

Farther up and in the house now occupied by Mr. James Walker was

#### THE OLD PARISH SCHOOL

The teacher was Mr. Thomas Mitchell, who had prior to my time occupied that position for many years. He was also an elder in the Parish Church and acted for some time as session clerk. There was then a custom in the school that at New Year time the boys were each given a glass of weak toddy, and my informant had, he told me, often been a recipient. This practice was not confined to Mauchline, however, as I have heard of it having been in vogue elsewhere.

The Loan has to some extent been rebuilt, and there is still it may be observed further room for improvement in that direction, while the erection of the school has made a great difference on the other side of the Green. The houses on the Sorn Road, with the exception of Greenside have all been built during my lifetime. Albert Place is entirely altered in appearance, having been a hive of industry as a box work prior to being converted into dwelling houses. Greenfoot too, once a row of low thatched dwellings. has been vastly improved by the rebuilding. The Market Inn, a very old building is one of the few houses in this portion of the village, which has been unaltered in form within my memory. Where Springfield stands was a vacant space and the lane now known as the back road was known by me when a boy as

#### BELLMAN'S VENNEL

and latterly as Murson's Close, one of the dwellers there being an old blacksmith so named.

The buildings on the west of the Cross and on the south side of High Street are of course long prior to my advent and formed, I have been told, what at one time was a very important as well as imposing establishment frequented by the county gentry. Latterly I remember it as the place of business of John Crawford, grocer, who also held a licence for the sale of ale. Another portion became a lodging house kept by Judy Connelly and frequented by vagrants, and it was in this house I have no doubt that the "Blair's Ham" was finally disposed of, to old Arthur, which was no myth but a very real torment.

The north side of High Street has also been largely rebuilt while round Burnside practically all the old houses, which fronted this one time main road, have been replaced. The burn, or to be proper, the River Chalk, had before my time been at this place and down to the castle quite open, and the gardens sloped down to it on either side. Burnside House stands on the site of a building, which in my youthful days was known as Castle Daffin.

The New Road for the most part has been built or rebuilt within my recollection. The burn now running far below the street level was as already stated open here, and it was only after Earl Grey Street was opened that the roadway was made up by material obtained when Jock Hamilton's brae was cut. Thereafter Castle Street and the Knowe fell from being the main thoroughfares to, as now, unimportant bye-roads. Unimportant as roads, they are historically in the forefront. As a means of ingress or egress to Mauchline Castle, Castle Street was doubtless the avenue through which many gay cavalCADES passed. Grave, too, in at least one well authenticated instance, since it was by this way four of the

#### MAUCLINE MARTYRS

entered the Tollbooth, supposedly for trial and left for the always certain execution. It is however as the street where stands the building in which Burns and Jean Armour first took up house, that Castle Street will remain shall I say, for all time. Here too Nance Tannock's stood, and also the house in which Doctor Mackenzie lived, of these buildings only Nance Tinnock's remains uncared for. Both the Burns and Dr Mackenzie's houses being in a fine state of repair. These houses I might say typify the style of house, which formed the bulk of Mauchline when I first knew it. As already said, the main road to Kilmarnock was at one time by way of the Cowgate, the Cross, Castle Street, The Knowe, past what is now the Walker Memorial Church, and through part of Netherplace and out at Jock Hamilton's gatehouse. There were I understand houses on both sides of Castle Street towards the Castle. At the end next the castle there stood Mr. Hugh Morton's Inn, in which there was a

ballroom. At the end next Castle Street stood the jail it having to be remembered that Mauchline was once a burgh. Regarding the afore said Hugh Morton I have been told that it was his daughter who was referred to by the poet as the Mauchline Belle who was divine.

The Back Holm as now known did not exist for me as a boy, as I well remember there was access to the burn there. There was until about seventy years ago a public road leading straight from Loudoun Street across the burn through Netherplace and out at the house now occupied by Mr Pringle. The portion of ground between the old road and the Back Holm as now, was, I have always been told

#### THE "BLEACHING GREEN"

where Burns saw Jean Armour and she laughingly asked him if he could like a lass as well as he liked his dog. Afterwards the site of a tannery (Mr Jeremiah Dickson's), the bleaching green became a "no-man's land", and was about the time already stated enclosed within Netherplace by the late Colonel Ferrier Campbell.

Mauchline Castle, over six hundred years old, is not as far as I have ever heard, historically important, but is undoubtedly the centre around which the village grew up. Believed to be of monastic origin, it is a fine example of the substantiality, which marked the buildings of these early days. From certain appearances it seems to have been at one time used as a Masonic lodge and some years ago the local brethren made enquiries with a view to establishing their lodge there, but nothing materialised. In the portion adjoining the castle, Burns and Jean Armour were married, the ceremony having been performed by Gavin Hamilton, "the puir man's frien".

The castle from which the title Lord Mauchline arises is now all that remains in possession of the Loudoun family, owners at one time of practically all the land in and around the village and for long the feu superiors of what was know as the "Ten Pound Land of Mauchline" a map of which I have seen. Gradually the

#### LAIRDS OF BALLOCHMYLE AND NETHERPLACE

by purchase in many cases, gained entrance as mid superiors. The feu duties which had not been for many years uplifted, were purchased by an Edinburgh solicitor, and many proprietors in Mauchline thereafter learned quite a lot that they had not known before. Netherplace, Ballochmyle, and Barskimming have all been rebuilt or extended in my lifetime and it is amazing the number of changes in proprietors and occupants of these estates which I can recall. The foremost, for long held by the Campbells, passed into the possession of Colonel Ferrier Hamilton, a scion of the Carnell family, and he, assuming the old family name, established the Hamilton-Campbell branch now so well known and still in possession. Colonel Hamilton did not for some time enter into occupancy and the house was tenanted by Lord Justice Clerk Hope of the Courts of Session, whom I remember being credited, rightly or wrongly, with having married his cook. They had one son, Lieutenant Hope, who for an act of gallantry in front of Sebastopol was awarded the coveted V.C. His homecoming was marked by great rejoicings, the avenue leading from the Loudoun Hotel being the scene of a great display of fireworks, and in front of the house salutes were fired from three small cannon brought from Catrine. Mrs Middleton, the widow of a tea planter was another tenant of Netherplace. She had two sons, who when at home founded and were great assistance to the cricket club. The elder of these two sons was Captain Bay Middleton who met an untimely end by falling from his horse while steeplechasing. He had had the honour, at the time referred locally with great pride and awe, of attending as equerry when she went hunting at the Curragh upon Elizabeth, the unfortunate Empress of Austria, who was many years later assassinated.

Of more recent occupants, the late Mr. Thorneycroft will long be remembered for his princely beneficence and kindly interest in all pertaining to our village. During his tenure, it will be remembered great alterations and additions were made to the residence and otherwise, which while adding to did not detract from the amenities of this little estate in which the beautiful garden and yew trees of great age are worthy features.

Ballochmyle, known the world over as the home of the "Bonnie Lass", has greatly changed during my lifetime. The house as I first remember it was a rough-cast building not half the size of the present edifice. In those early days the proprietor and occupant was Mr. Boyd Alexander, who was later succeeded in both ownership and occupancy by his nephew, then Colonel Claud Alexander, the latter was eventually promoted and honoured in respect, I believe of his services in the Crimean War, and as

#### MAJOR GENERAL SIR CLAUD ALEXANDER

He was representative in Parliament for South Ayrshire for some time. He it was who had the mansion house rebuilt over fifty years ago, and though for the greater part of his later years he suffered considerable infirmity he always maintained a warm interest in our village affairs, and in him all worthy objects found a warm supporter. Since his death the estate has been under trustees and the mansion house and policies have been enjoyed by not a few tenants.

Unlike Ballochmyle, the mansion House of Barskimming has decreased in size. In my early days the old house stood on the present site, but had wings on either side, one of which in semi-circular form, overlooked the river. The occupant in those days was Mr. Archibald Buchanan, who had a large interest in the cotton works at Catrine and Neilston. It was during his occupancy that the "Barskimming fire" took place, by which the mansion house was practically gutted. The house was thereafter rebuilt in its present form, and not long afterwards there commenced the long tenancy by the Misses Anderson, which only recently terminated. During this long tenancy the estate at least twice changed hands, the ownership passing from the family of Lord Glenlee to Mr Meikle and from the latter the portion not otherwise disposed of passed to the present owner and occupier, Mr. Dunlop, C.C. Barskimming will however, always be recalled by me as the home of

#### THE MISSES ANDERSON,

ladies in the real sense of the word, who by their warm, kindly, and personal interest endeared themselves not only to the villagers, but also the numerous visitors whom they delight to welcome and conduct round the beautiful grounds and gardens of their beloved home.

Failford House I remember was much smaller than now, and in my boyhood days it was occupied by the then proprietor, Mr. Cooper. I well remember that I had then to take rolls every morning to Failford and the avenue having been re-laid with ashes on one of many occasions when I had taken to the grass to save my bare feet, Mr. Cooper came on the scene and in the high-pitched voice of which he was the possessor, ordered me to come off the grass. Unlike the boys of today I obeyed, but like the boys of all generations, many a time thereafter I took the risk of again treading the sward in preference to the unkind roadway. Since those days there have been several tenants in Failford, and in this respect the experience around Mauchline is the common one that the old landed gentry are being supplanted by the magnates of industry and notables of commercial life. This fact is often regretted, and in a sense rightly so, but in many respects there has been gain, and what loss there has been must be regarded in the light that our "new gentry" do not have the time to spare for local interests that their predecessors had.

To return to the village, let me draw attention to the auld kirk and kirkyard. As will probably have been grasped from previous description, the kirkyard was practically surrounded by houses, the back door of some of which actually opened on to the burial ground. This state I do not remember but that it was actually so is authenticated by the Church records. This, too, it was in Burns' time when it was the scene of the on goings depicted in

#### "THE HOLY FAIR"

that the poet did not in any way exaggerate, since the records of Session bear out that upon one occasion no fewer than one thousand four hundred persons "communicated". Of these, many came from quite distant parishes, and, as told me in my youth by a then old friend - long since dead - they came for a day's outing and to enjoy themselves, decorously at times, but often otherwise. Such happenings, my old friend told me, were by no means confined to Mauchline, but were also of regular occurrence in Auchinleck, the village to which he belonged. To Burns must be credited the cessation of these orgies, a fact worthy of consideration by many unworthy critics of our national bard, whose life to himself was, I feel sure, one great regret - a regret so real and penitent however, as has placed him far beyond human condemnation. The burial ground was of course open for interments for long after I came to Mauchline, and it is needless for me to rename the various notables who sleep their last sleep there. Rather would I make reference to the present church, which was built in 1829 on the site of the old pre-Reformation church made famous in the stirring days of Reformation, and likewise in the days of Burns's tenure of Mossgiel. It is however with the present stately building I would deal, and one interesting fact not generally known is that the sculptor of the four gargoyles above the entrance porch was Mr. Thom, whose eminence in the world of art is amplified by the figures of "Tam o' Shanter" and "Souter Johnny" which are situated in the grounds of Burns's Monument at Ayr. The interior of the building I recollect as very different from now. The centre of the area was occupied by box seats, which were collapsible or adaptable when the communion tables were erected, for it must be remembered that long tables were then used, at which the communicants sat. All the seats were unvarnished, while the walls were just as left by the plasterer. The church was heated by a stove, and there was of course, no gas. There being also neither organ nor choir, I can assure that oftentimes the praise was of the haphazard order. At the then occasional evening services candles were used, these being placed in holders, stuck by means of stout pointed wire into the book boards in the pews. In front of the pulpit was an arch made with two pieces of common paling and bearing about a dozen candles served as light to the extemporised choir, which performed upon these occasions. Invocation and other psalm tunes composed the whole musical service, of which simplicity was the outstanding feature. The

#### COMMUNION SERVICES

were long and tedious then, as compared with now, the delay being occasioned by the fact that all could not be seated at the one time at the tables, there being often three or four sittings as they were called. Those awaiting seats at the table had to do so in the outer porch, and on a cold winter's day it was an ordeal, which

surprisingly few shirked. The present day method of all communicating at once can however, readily be understood to be a great improvement, and is to my mind, more devotional. The Reverend James Fairlie, our then parish minister, often had the assistance of Doctor Rankine of Sorn and the Reverend Mr Walker of Ochiltree. My grandfather told me that the latter, when he first preached in Mauchline, walked over from Ochiltree, and it being a broiling hot day had discarded his shoes and socks. It must indeed have been strange to see the presiding minister walking up through the village with his bare feet and his shoes hanging over his shoulders as being late he apparently had not taken time to again don his footgear. Mr Walker, despite this unconventionality, was a great favourite not only in his own parish, but also in Mauchline and other surrounding districts. Mr Walker was succeeded by Mr. Edgar, afterwards Dr. Edgar, whose father was at one time factor of Ballochmyle Estate. Mr. Edgar was minister of Tongueland before his translation to Mauchline, which latter appointment he received from the then patron, the Earl of Loudoun. This was, I believe, the last appointment under the Patronage Act, and was the cause of much dissension in the congregation, many of whom desired that the appointment should have been delayed for the short time necessary to permit of congregational election. Doctor Edgar was a

#### FINE TYPE OF PARISH MINISTER

genial, witty, and very popular, especially among the farmers, all of whom he visited regularly, irrespective of whether they were or were not members of the Parish Church. He gained much distinction as the author of "The Old Church Life", which is still regarded as a standard work

I might mention too, in connection with the church, that originally the clock placed in the tower had one face only, but about sixty years ago the present clock with the three dials was installed, so that is well to remember when disposed to malign the clock for the remarkably few stoppages, that it is "nae chicken" in point of age. In the kirkyard I would recall what was known as

#### "THE KIRK END TREE."

This was an immense tree upon which the bell was at one time hung, and which was blown down by a furious gale in the early morning of 27th February 1861. It fell towards the church, and some of the glass in the big window was broken, but luckily no other damage resulted. Believed to have been six hundred years old, it was over six feet through at the butt, the severance of which from the root, owing to there not being a long enough saw available, presented a problem, only with difficulty satisfactorily solved.

The other two churches in Mauchline are comparatively modern erections, and being fine, handsome buildings are a great asset to the appearance of the village. Both the old churches which these new buildings substituted were very plain erections, the old U.P. having an outside stair leading to the gallery. In the last year or so of its existence occupants of gallery seats had to be very careful as it happened on one or two occasions an unwary step led to the floor and the ceiling underneath being pierced with somewhat ludicrous results. The old Free Church had no gallery, but had the appearance of two long sheds built together, there being a gutter running along between the inner sides of the two roofs. It may not be generally known that this church was many years ago used as a polling booth but such is the case. The candidates were Colonel Alexander and Mr Wedderburn and at that time the suffrage was much more limited, while the ballot box had not then been introduced, but voting was in a sense supposed to be secret. And this election it appeared from the varying receptions extended to the voters coming from the booth that it was well known how each had recorded his (in those days his only) vote. It was afterwards that the authentic information was conveyed to the waiting crown in the following manner. At a previous election there had been some rough play indulged in, and upon this occasion the authorities had engaged twelve men to keep order, these men being supplied with batons to assist them in carrying out their duties. Two of these twelve were posted, one on either side of the entrance to the polling station, and evidently within hearing of the voters when they recorded their votes, as they then did verbally. According to a pre-arranged plan, the information then overheard was conveyed by one or other of these men turning his head to right or left as the case might be, the one direction representing Tory and the opposite representing Radical. The somewhat mysterious leakage had thus after all a very simple solution, but has been as simply counteracted by the method now prevailing.

Change has by no means been confined to stone and lime, but the entire life of the village, both industrially and socially, has been materially altered. Weaving had, of course, been at one time extensively carried on, but the advent of other and cheaper methods resulted in Mauchline, as in other places, in the

#### CESSATION OF HAND LOOM WEAVING.

Some ninety years ago however, the late Mr Andrew Smith, grandfather of our esteemed townsman, Mr William Smith, started a small factory where snuff boxes and other small useful wooden goods were made. The founder having a strong inventive mind introduced the clan tartans as a decoration of the goods made. The idea was popular, and this neat work, originally all hand done, met a ready sale. A case of Mauchline goods having been an exhibit at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London led to there being a demand so far in excess of the supply

that the means of production had to be greatly extended. Eventually there were other two factories opened and for many years all three were kept busy. A great proportion of the work done was boxes for the holding of thread. Each thread firm endeavoured to outshine the others in the method of packing their products for sale, and this competition among the thread firms led to equally keen rivalry between the box works. This trade, however, received a death blow when the big cotton thread firms amalgamated, which led to the closing of two of the three box works and a consequent exodus of many of the box makers to the city of Glasgow. There were many obtained employment in the chair factory of Messrs. H. & A. Alexander, both of whom were at one time

#### MAUCLINE BOXMAKERS.

Despite the great decrease in the number of people employed, the production of well-made and finished goods is still very considerable and yet forms the main industry carried on in the village. The box makers of these olden days were very keen sportsmen and politicians, and included among the number were several outstanding characters.

The freestone quarries are well known, many Glasgow buildings having been built with Ballochmyle stone, and at a later date, when the building boom was at its height, Barskimming stone too, was greatly in demand. The original motion, as each scene of quarrying operation is called, was below the railway on the left hand when going down the Haugh Road, and had been started by a Mr. Lambie. Not being a success, it for some time was unworked, but some seventy years ago or so the late Mr. James Gibson recommenced operations there. He was one of four brothers who were builders in Auchinleck, and though at first on a small scale, quarrying operations gradually extended under his management. Mr. Gibson had two sons, the elder of whom, a well educated lad, crowded quite a lot of improvements into the business during his short connection therewith, terminated all too soon by the "Dread Reaper". A new motion was commenced above the railway and a railway siding put in leading to a greatly increased output. The quality of the stone being good and the price cheap, the demand rose greatly, until over a hundred men were employed - a great advance when it is recalled that for many years the whole output was carted to the station and only one horse was so employed. The further extension and the regrettable decline of this trade is of such recent happening as to warrant omission from these notes.

There were in my young day

#### TWO WOOLLEN MILLS AT THE HAUGH,

as well as a grain mill, the latter occupied by Miller Hamilton who was also the dweller in Castle Daffin already mentioned. This grain mill was later used as an ice stone factory, which business, after many years at the Haugh, was recently transferred to one of the old box works in the village.

The old mill at Barskimming was run by Miller Andrew, whose father was, I'm told, one of Burns's greatest rivals among the lasses of the district. The Miller Andrew of my youth was a man of considerable repute as a mill dam builder, while he was also credited with having built the organ which until recently led the praise in the Parish Church, and even now is so doing in Patna Parish Church.

In the village all shopkeepers were in my early days described by the somewhat dignified title of merchants. On some of these ancients I have very good recollection, and of one I might recount the following story. From him, grandfather was in the habit of getting butter for the bakehouse, and many journeys I made between the two establishments. My grandfather upon one occasion at least ordered me back with the butter, as it was short weight. The merchant however, rose to the ordeal and ordered me out of the shop with the injunction to go back and tell wha sent me "that butter was far ower dear to gie richt weicht".

Public houses were then more numerous, and it may be of interest in these days of local option that I remember when there were thirteen

#### LICENSED PLACES

in Mauchline. These were the Market Inn (William Reid), two in High Street (James Gibb and William Glover), three at the Cross (John Crawford, William Ronald and Hugh Wallace), the Black Bull (David Lindsay), another in Earl Grey Street (Francis Boland), two in New Road (Hugh Nisbet and John Wilson), Poosie Nancy's (Richard Gibson), Cross Keys (Reid Brothers) and the Loudoun hotel (Thomas McLelland). Early closing was not known then, and lawful or not some of them were seldom shut until the wee sma' hours, especially when owing to the shortness of the winter days many curling games had to be finished in those places.

Of course the Post Office has always been a constant institution, but during my lifetime has been, so far as situation was concerned, very unsettled. In the early portion of last century it was in James Armour's house at the foot of the Cowgate - at least so I was informed by Rabbie Burns, a post runner in those early days, and of whom more anon. The Post Office was thereafter situated in the house where Mr Connell, hosier, now has his place of business, the postmaster then being Mr Wilson, druggist. Thence it was transferred to the premises of



the Economical Society (forerunner to the present Co-operative Society), then installed where Mr. George Allan now lives. Mr. Bruce Taylor then combined the duties of salesman and postmaster. Later

#### THE POST OFFICE

was in different houses in the New Road, the first of which afterwards was a saddler's shop and the second where Mr. S. Currie now has his business. Mr. Miller, and for many years latterly Miss Miller were in charge of the office. To return to the old post runner, Rabbie Burns, I recall upon one occasion accompanying him a good part of the way from Ballochmyle. During this journey he "blew his horn" about some of his travelling feats, and these were prodigious, and were recounted with only a modicum of modesty. One of his tales, evidently to my way of thinking, required also a grain of salt. Upon telling him I didn't believe him I suffered his strong silence for some seconds, and thereafter was crushed by his dramatically announced "Answer not a fool according to his folly".

Socially too, time has wrought many changes. There was no bowling green or tennis court, no reading room, club or library, and no temperance or church halls. Quoiting was the sport in summer and curling in winter and the Mauchlinites could hold their own at these games is well authenticated by records still extant. The quoiting was then played at Gowkthorn and on the loch and the competition for possession of the Ballochmyle Quoite was then much keener and competitors more numerous than now, despite the added money prizes. The parish curling games were great events, and it was easy then to get up twenty rinks and have weeks of curling as it is now difficult to raise six rinks or get two consecutive days on the ice.

The opening of the bowling green and the formation of cricket and football clubs were great innovations, the success attending all of which was for many years highly creditable. Professionalism killed the football, however, and the cricket club, too, it is regretted is a thing of the past. The

#### BOWLING CLUB

however still flourishes and as an admirer of many present day players, I must, contrary to the usual "old man's way" give it as my opinion that the play appears to me to be at least as good as in the days of old. There was an incident worthy of note happened many years ago on the green. A party of local players had been having a day at the bowls, and one of their number (a Mauchline merchant with his black apron on) had wined not wisely but too well. The day being hot he was overcome by sleep and lay down on the green to be made more comfortable by his friends, on their departure surrounding him with bowls and resting his head on two or three of the woods. To complete the joke, he was denuded of his apron, which was then attached to the wire for hoisting to the top of the flag pole. This operation however miscarried, as when the apron was half-mast the wire came off the pulley, and neither up nor down could the apron be moved. The feelings of the merchant upon awakening can only be imagined, and these, doubtless, were aggravated by the fact that the "black flag" flying at half-mast for about three weeks (when a boy was got to climb the pole) caused many enquiries to be made by visitors as to what prominent man had died.

The building of the Temperance Hall led to a decrease of the number of kirns, and eventually to a complete cessation of these country sprees, very common in my youth. These took place after the crops were safe under "thack and raip" and the proceedings usually started with tea about 7pm and thereafter dancing commenced in the cleaned out barn. Scots reels, country dances, jigs and square dances were then the bulk of the programme, and right merrily did the fun go on till three or four in the morning. The barn for the most part having stone floors did not lend to fox-trotting or waltzing, but I'm sure that the "kirns" were not on that account less enjoyable, though probably much more strenuous than the present day balls. Orchestras did not then exist, but with Blin' Archie seated on a chair, up on a table in the corner, the purveying of music was in good hands.

Reading and Recreation rooms there were none, but eventually there were summer ice tables introduced into some of the public houses, and later into the Temperance Hall.

A Debating Society too, was for a number of winters carried on in the latter place, while after the introduction of the

#### TONIC SOL- FA MUSIC

into Mauchline by the late Michael Sharcott, sixty years ago, there was a considerable activity amongst the musically inclined. Practices were held in the old school, and eventually a musical society was formed and several very good concerts resulted.

Marriages were functions of much greater publicity in my young days, it being the custom for the happy pair to lead the procession from the place of ceremony to the hall. Sometimes they were headed by a fiddler; always they were pelted with rice. At funerals there was a custom, now long fallen into disuse, this being the

distribution of funeral bread (shortbread) at the house and at the graveside. My grandfather used to tell of a farmer body who, upon paying for shortbread used at his wife's funeral, complimented on the service received by intimating that should he require such a thing again he "kent whaur to come to".

#### SONS OF THE POET

In concluding these notes I might refer to one or two outstanding events not already dealt with. The year 1859 was marked by the visit paid to the village by two sons of the poet Burns. These were Colonel James Glencairn Burns and William Nicol Burns. They visited the castle where their parents were married and other places of particular interest to them. They were later in the day entertained to dinner by the manufacturers and merchants of Mauchline, at which function the late Mr. Andrew Smith, box maker presided. The two guests I remember, were both short in stature but of fine military bearing. They were of course elderly men then, and died shortly afterwards. The welcome they received was a most enthusiastic one and the day in the village was one of great rejoicing.

#### A GREAT FLOOD

In the month of July of the same year there befell the Mauchline flood, when a great volume of water rushed down the hill and through the village, causing much damage and flooding at Bogwood. At Bogwood a young daughter of Mr Drummond was drowned; she when watching the raging burn from an upper window overbalanced and falling into it was carried away by the torrent. Her body was later recovered a considerable distance downstream from the scene of the unfortunate happening.

#### RACES AND FAIRS

Mauchline Races and Mauchline Fairs - what times these were for we boys! The former event with its attendant collection of shows and stalls, the latter with its huge droves of cattle to be herded by us for the sake of getting a "skelp" at some of them. The auction marts put an end to these fairs, but the memory of the crowded Loan Green cannot be effaced. The races still linger on, but to me they are now of little interest compared with the days of old, when, being under the rules of the Racing Association the sport was not only better, but cleaner and straighter than appears to be possible at "flapping meetings" such as Mauchline Races now are.

In conclusion, I express the hope that these notes will be of some interest to the readers, although I am quite sensible of the fact that to some of my old friends they may be something like "cauld kail het again"