

Helensburgh Heritage Trust

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Newsletter

The Newsletter is edited and published by Kenneth N Crawford 'Ardlamont' 3, Loch Drive, Helensburgh G84 8PY kn.crawford@virgin.net

Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome

Daniel Craig -

Wood Turner ~ one of Helensburgh's minor celebrities

Most people nowadays will connect the name Daniel Craig with James Bond, but those of you who were present at the talk last year on Mauchline Ware may recall reference being made to someone of the same name who, though not one of Helensburgh's Heroes in the strictest sense, was an extremely skilled craftsman of wood, recognised by Royalty, and possibly worthy of inclusion in that particular list of Helensburgh townsfolk.

Daniel Craig Junior was born in the Broomlands area of Paisley in 1793, son of Daniel Craig Senior, himself a skilled wood turner, who passed on this expertise to his offspring. The son's skill came to the attention of Lord John Campbell of Ardencaple Castle (son of the 5th Duke of Argyll, who later succeeded his older brother as 7th Duke) and Daniel Craig was persuaded to move to this area. In 1822 Lord John asked Craig to manufacture a snuff box, to be presented to King George IV during the monarch's visit to Scotland. This snuff box of mixed wood, reputed to have cost £8.00, was duly presented to the King by Sir Walter Scott and naturally led to an increase in interest in the manufacturer, with a subsequent increase in sales.

Daniel Craig and his wife Agnes are recorded as having five children between the years 1823-1832. In the 1834-37 Fowler's Directory of Renfrewshire (which included Helensburgh) he is listed as living at Dumfin, beside the Fruin Water, just off what used to be the main route across the river, down from the Cross Keys Roundabout. The 1841 Census of the Parish of Luss records him as a Charcoal Manufacturer, aged 48, living at Dumfin, Chemical Works, with his wife and four children, one of his daughters having died. The household also consisted of one female servant as well as Thomas Craig aged 60, Charcoal Miller (no relative). The premises were also known as Dumfin Sawmill. Daniel Craig died in 1846 aged 53, one year before his benefactor, who had succeeded to the Dukedom after the death, without issue, of his brother George, the 6th Duke.

Dumfin was still noted as a Chemical Works in the 1851 Census, occupied by Alex Miller, aged 21, Chemist, born in Lanarkshire, and Agnes Smith, aged 50, House Servant, also originally from Lanarkshire. The Street Directories of 1865-1906 list Dumfin as later being occupied by James McLellan, Wood Merchant, with succeeding members of the Taylor family residing there from 1907 onwards, as Saw Miller and Joiner.

It is not known if Craig continued to produce his snuff boxes as well as charcoal at Dumfin, but possibly he was required to diversify to provide for his family, as the manufacture of his boxes would be a slow, as well as a time-consuming, process. Although these snuff boxes were not exactly similar in appearance to what is now called "Mauchline Ware," they were obviously of a high quality, as is illustrated by the decision to have one made to be presented to King George IV. His products were of mixed wood, with "D. Craig Helensburgh" usually stamped on the inside of the lid. Another feature common to a "Craig" box, unlike the usual Mauchline Ware product, was the base which often displayed lines of verse, "Auld Lang Syne" being particularly popular, as well as lines from Sir Walter Scott's works. Perhaps this latter fact is what made Sir John, and maybe also Scott himself, decide to grant Daniel Craig his position in history, but we'll never know! D. Craig Snuff Boxes are apparently still turning up at Auctions, but I am unaware of what value is put on them. Is King George's own snuff box still in the Royal Collection? Unfortunately that fact has not been verified. If visiting premises likely to display such an item, please remember to keep your eyes peeled and report back to Helensburgh Heritage Trust if you come across the self-same box.

Patricia Wiseman

Heritage News

The final public meeting of the season will be on Wednesday March 26 when Ian Evans will talk about *Helensburgh's Postal History*

First World War Centenary

The centenary of the first world war will be commemorated in the Heritage Centre by displays organised by the curator of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders' Museum at Stirling Castle. The first display, due to begin in April, will feature the background to the regiment. The second display, planned for later in the year, will focus on the Great War and Helensburgh's contribution. We would be very pleased to hear from anyone who has items suitable for this second display through which a story might be told. Those who feel they might have items appropriate and are willing to lend them please contact Nigel Allan on 01436-671875 or N.Allan@hotmail.co.uk

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Current Displays in the Heritage Centre:-

- Case A-The Original Televisor
- B - Our 2004 working replica of the Daily Express 1936 DIY Televisor
- C - Mauchline Ware
- D - Local glass bottles.
- E- Boer War Presentation Clock and Militaria.
- F - Deborah Kerr.
- G - John Logie Baird
- H - Jack Buchannan
- J - Local Glass Bottles
- K - Friends of Hermitage Park
- L - Andrew Bonar Law
- M - Scale Model of 'Comet'

Paintings of Henry Bell and John Logie Baird are on the walls. The Provost's Lamp is outside the door and on the balcony is the 'Unknown JLB' display.

All Change - in Colquhoun Square

A locally well known urban myth appears to have been completely dismissed as part of the CHORD (Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Oban, Rothesay and Dunoon) Improvement works now being conducted in Colquhoun Square. Many of you will be aware of the tale that Colquhoun Square was formerly a quarry from which Redstone was abstracted for the nearby buildings. And subsequently the holes filled with water and at some time an old woman fell in and was drowned. This myth was published in the standard histories of Helensburgh, dated 1883, 1897 and 2002!

McLay Civil Engineering has found that the substrate at a shallow depth is rock and not a filled-in former quarry! Over 80 m³ of rock had to be removed in order to attain a suitable depth for new drainage and street lighting to be installed. This was a very noisy and dirty process as it coincided with the severe gales which we suffered in January.

Whilst writing, perhaps we should also mourn the passing of the exclusive street lighting standards, designed in the early 1990s by the former Strathclyde Regional Council to be appropriate for the centre of Helensburgh. It seems that they do not provide appropriate illumination to modern standards. Apparently, and hopefully, the columns and lanterns will be saved by Argyll and Bute Council in the hopes that some other site less demanding of illumination can be found in the future. – *Maybe in the refurbishment of Hermitage Park? Or in Kidston Park Car Park?* It seems strange that these historic and artistic items should be no part of a scheme to regenerate the Square with an 'Open-air' museum! We show the detail of the model 'Comet' which encircles the lantern. Around the shoulder of each column are unique ceramic plaques referencing our history. The Green Man Plaque records the work of Alex McGregor, Architect. John Calderwood, Ceramicist. John Page, Engineer. I am sure that these gentlemen would have expected their work to last the usual 50 year life of street lighting columns. Also shown are tributes to JLB and CRM. More in the next issue! Surely we will not gain advantage by destroying them?

K N C



WAR TROPHIES

War decorations and awards come in many forms: typically we bring to mind medals and honours made by a grateful nation, but sometimes these can be of more local provenance, as with the handsome carriage clocks presented by Helensburgh Town Council to townsmen who had fought in the Boer War, and one of which is currently on display in the Heritage Centre.

War trophies, on the other hand, suggest something taken, rather than awarded. I can recall the husband of my primary school teacher showing my parents and me a pistol which he said he had obtained from a German officer. I seem to remember him adding that strictly speaking, this had been against the regulations. Looking back, I'm pretty sure he was referring to the First World War.

Moving up the scale, a large German field gun complete with carriage was put on display in Hermitage Park in 1923. This was a very busy period in the history of the Park, with what was known as the Malig Mill scheme in full swing. How long the gun was kept on site is not known.

Perhaps the most noteworthy war trophy to come to the area was a car which had belonged to Hermann Goering, and which arrived in Helensburgh at the end of June, 1951. Put on display at West End Garage in John Street for a week, the car was huge, filling almost the whole showroom. It was described as one of seven specially built for top Nazis, all of which were recovered by the Allies at the end of the War, bar Hitler's car, which was never found. Russia had two, while Britain, France, Australia and the United States had one each.

Goering's car was scarred with shots fired from a .303 rifle at point-blank range, though none had penetrated the 5 thicknesses of glass which formed the windows. It could cruise comfortably at 100mph; fuel consumption was an impressive 7mpg. With admission set at 6d., the car was being shown all around the country, the aim being to raise funds for the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Families' Association.

Alastair McIntyre

Sawmill Field ?

The council is allocating land for housing and has included the description Sawmill field Cardross Road Helensburgh. Does anyone have a map identifying sawmill field and/or any information as to how it has come by that name?

PW