

Helensburgh Heritage Trust Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

The Other Half of Henry Bell

Henry Bell must surely rank as one of those larger-than-life characters whose vision, energy and enterprise mark him out as a great man. Yet there also exists the perception that as with so many people of genius, he might well have been difficult to live with; so many schemes, so many financial problems. We seldom have gained any insight into Bell's wife, to whom he was married for 36 years. Born Margaret Young, she faithfully supported her husband. For example, she ran the Baths Hotel in Helensburgh, from its construction in 1807 until her own death in 1856.

The following account gives us a brief but charming insight into Margaret's character and her relationship with her husband. It comes from the pen of James Barr, who wrote a series of articles published in 'The Lennox Herald' in 1892. One passage related to a visit to Mrs Bell, probably in the summer of 1831, when Barr would have been aged about 16 or perhaps a little older. Apprenticed to a James Harper, he walked from Balloch with Harper, and a schoolmaster friend of Harpers's.

....."we came to the top of the (*Black*) hill...I was greatly impressed with...the varied outlines and grand general effect. What is called the new road was probably not then made. (*actually built 1832*) At all events, we came down a road which terminated near the Baths Hotel...noticeable then as now with its battlemented walls. It had been built by Henry Bell, here he lately died (*November 1830*) and the house was now managed by his widow.

On entering, we found her to be a quiet, unpretending little woman, modestly attired in black. She recognised James at once, and the cordiality of her greeting was to me sufficient proof that she and her husband had really been intimate friends. Before we left, she showed us models of different kinds which he had mad from time to time, and the saddened expression of her face when referring to him proved that the bereavement had been deeply felt.

Having had something substantial for the inner man, we made our way along the Town, which in size and importance, was insignificant as compared with what it is now. There was only one row of houses fronting the water, with one or two rudimentary offshoots behind. A rickle of stepping stones was designated the quay, at which ferryboats from Greenock, and other small craft, were only what was usually seen there. Henry Bell had indeed tried to erect an iron wharf, but it was swept away by the first high tide, and the wretched old dyke was destined to do duty many years afterwards. Even when steamers came to be numerous, the efforts to get aboard, or get ashore, were attended with danger to the more robust, and were a terror to the weak and timid.

We had a very pleasant walk towards Row, the scenery being new to me, and consequently full of freshness."

Found and Extracted by Alastair McIntyre

End of Season Programme

Wednesday, 26th March 7.30p.m.

**May Montgomery
'Ardarden'**

Wednesday 30th April

**An Evening visit to
Luss Pilgrimage Centre**

A Cancellation

It is with some regret that I have to announce that the Exhibition which we had intended to mount at The Hill House in May will not take place. I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Scottish Museums Council in Edinburgh in December & much was made of 'Show Scotland' a showcase for all Scottish museums on the May Bank Holiday weekend. It seemed an ideal opportunity to introduce 'The Daily Express D-I-Y Television Kit' a reproduction of which we have bought but which is still under construction. Charlotte Rosteck was very enthusiastic and offered us the use of the Day Nursery for a couple of months. However, an application to SMC for grant to cover publicity, transport and the setting up costs was turned down as 'lacking creative events focus.' The Daily Express were not interested - just as when approached by JLB himself! In due course it is now hoped that the Kit can be displayed beside the original Televisor in the Library, and we now have Manuals and documentation to exhibit in support.

Kenneth N Crawford

JUSTIFICATION FOR A MUSEUM

On holiday in Ronda, Andalucia, we visited the 18thC Mondragon Palace. The successor to a Palace going back to at least 1485 it has recently been restored by local craftsmen. Whilst we do not have any building even resembling such beauty and antiquity, we should all be extremely interested in the English language justification for it being used as a Local Museum:-

“A whole series of reasons justify the existence of a museum in Ronda. First of all, the town of Ronda itself with its rank and importance within the context of Andalucia, has such a rich and varied historical, artistic, archaeological, ethnographic and documentary heritage that this alone warrants a museum. Mondragon Palace, recently restored by the Escuela Taller (School Workshop) of Ronda, provides the ideal building.

“Secondly, the museum is the perfect platform for the development and reinvigoration of a range of cultural activities.

“Besides, the museum operates as a cultural showcase for Ronda and the area, and is an essential cultural reference point for visitors.

In the same way, from an educational point of view, the need for a museum has already become apparent, given the large student population in Ronda and the area.

“A series of basic factors make the institution unique, it's regional character, the fact that its not limited to any one topic, and its educational character. Inside the museum we can distinguish different sections in accordance with the various functions they perform. The four areas are:-Exhibition, [which will comprise History, Ethnography and Natural Environment] - Research - Storage & Service

KNC

Cove Pier + F.S.McElroy

An interesting ‘One Name’ study of John McElroy, 1802-1878 Civil Engineer, Railway Contractor, and Iron Founder written by his Great grandson F. S. McElroy has been shown recently by Janet Sanders a Director of the Trust. He built the Pier at Cove in 1852 at his own expense at a time when there were no dwellings, and which may well have been the cause of houses to be built in that area later! However, to get all the rights he had had to do a deal with the Duke of Argyll who retained a right of pre-emption. This was exercised in 1902, and the Duke acquired a valuable income and asset at the original first building cost of £600. John's daughters lost their income and felt this to be unfair. The Courts did not agree, however, and found in favour of the Duke.

Technical Lectures

Two quite spectacular talks were given on successive evenings at the Helensburgh Lawn Tennis Club at the end of January. On Tuesday, the Photographic Club welcomed Andy Green, former Senior Research Associate of Kodak. He wrote the software driving nearly every Kodak Digital Camera! But was also a photographer of an extremely high standard. After retirement and a move to Gourock and now in Glasgow (but with a spell in our town) he and his wife Karen-Clair Voss are AGKC the leading *Giclee* printers of top quality images. He did not play the Lute or Guitar for us! On Wednesday the Trust welcomed back Dr Douglas Brown of Strathclyde University, who gave an updated account of the latest research on the inventiveness of John Logie Baird. Amongst the remarkable exhibits were miniature model Televisors showing images from the 1930's. And concluding with film of JLB himself introducing the Baird Television Service, which preceded that of the BBC.

*Pictures of Cove Pier from the Trust Exhibition held in September 1997 “Comet to Waverley”
Captioned - ‘Opened 1852 Rebuilt 1881 Closed 1946. Views, Looking North and From the Pier’*

