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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for May 6th, 2016

To see what we've added to the Electric Scotland site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/whatsnew.htm>

To see what we've added to the Electric Canadian site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/whatsnew.htm>

For the latest news from Scotland see our ScotNews feed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/>

Electric Scotland News

Results from the Scotland election will be available from 22:00 on Thursday night at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/live/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-36198068>

I am sorry to say that Ranald McIntyre passed away on 1st May at his hone in Scotland.

I did a wee tribute to him at <http://www.electricscotland.com/friends/ranald/ranald.htm>

Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

Note that this is a selection and more can be read in our ScotNews feed on our index page.

Mountain garden for Tom and Rhona Weir opened

A mountain garden in honour of countryside broadcaster Tom Weir and his widow Rhona has been formally opened on Loch Lomondside.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-36177298>

April winds boost for green energy

Wind turbines produced enough power to meet the needs of more than three-quarters of Scottish households in April, according to new figures.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-36187324>

Norway's relationship with EU held up as post-Brexit model

A relationship with the European Union similar to the one held by Norway is the only viable way for the UK to leave the EU

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/uk/norway-s-relationship-with-eu-held-up-as-post-brexit-model-1-4117011>

Don't patronise us, Scottish teenagers tell politicians

Decision time for 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland allowed to cast their ballot for the first time in parliamentary elections

Read more at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/03/dont-patronise-us-scottish-teenagers-tell-politicians-bidding-for-their-votes>

The personal story of my doubts about Nicola Sturgeon

By Kenneth Roy from the Scottish Review

Read more at:

<http://www.scottishreview.net/KennethRoy49a.html>

Crack central: a walk down the hideous Royal Mile

By Maxwell MacLeod

Read more at:

<http://www.scottishreview.net/MaxwellMacLeod39a.html>

Scottish economy grows far more slowly than UK as a whole

Analysis finds Scottish GDP has grown by 4% in cash terms since 2008, compared with 23% for Britain as a whole

Read more at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/may/04/scottish-economy-grows-far-more-slowly-than-uk-as-a-whole>

Electric Canadian

Peace River Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to Pacific

By Sir George Simpson in 1828 (1872) (pdf)

You can download this from <http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/hudsonbay/hudsonbay.pdf>

Handbook of Information of the Dominion of Canada (pdf)

This can be downloaded from <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/handbook1893.pdf>

Fort McMurray Wildfire

The raging wildfire that has forced the evacuation of Fort McMurray, Alta., and engulfed parts of the community is the kind of blaze that firefighters dread, but could become more common, according to experts. Alternatively described by officials as "catastrophic," a "multi-headed monster" and a "dirty, nasty" fire, the blaze is at least 10,000 hectares in area and has destroyed more than 1,600 structures.

I also note that BC is fighting some 85 wildfires at this time. More information is available at:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-wildfire-fortmcmurray-idUSKCN0XU2D8>

Electric Scotland

The Tommiebeg shootings, or, A moor in Scotland

By Jeans, Thomas; Skelton, Percival, ill (1893)

This is an interesting book over 35 chapters and some 450 pages and can be downloaded at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/books/pdf/shootings.pdf>

Brown's Bookstall

A great collection of wee stories from the 1897 edition.

Despite a good hunt around this is the only edition I was able to find and is well worth a read. You can download this at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/books/pdf/brownsbookstall.pdf>

Brown

Added two books about this Scots-Irish company in the UK and America and individuals which you can get to at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/scotsirish/brown.htm>

Clan Wallace Society

Got in their Spring 2016 newsletter which can be download from

<http://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/newsletters/wallace/index.htm>

Aberdeen Awa'

Sketches of its Men, Manners, and Customs by George Walker (1897). Added a link to this book from our Aberdeen page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/aberdeen/>

Watson

Added a genealogy of this family and an article about John Watson the first Professional Painter in America. You can get to these at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/stoz/watson.html>

Curiosities of A Scots Charta Chest 1600 - 1800

With the Travels and Memoranda of Sir Alexander Dick, Baronet of Prestonfield written by himself (1897)

This volume of letters and Memoranda has been compiled apart from all idea of bookmaking, and solely with the view of bringing the reader directly into contact with the writers, who require but little introduction, the greater number being familiar, not only to historians, but to all those who interest themselves in Scottish family history.

To have done justice to the material contained in the mass of correspondence collected between 1600 and 1800 would have been a work of many volumes, and a labour which the researches of others render unnecessary.

The earlier letters point to the scant courtesy shewn by the Government to those who gave their substance for the benefit of their country ; and Sir William Dick may be considered fortunate in not losing his head as well as his money.

That matters were not much better at the end of the century than they were at the beginning, is proved by the experience of his descendant Sir James, whose country house of Prestonfield was burnt by a mob while he was in Edinburgh trying to preserve law and order. In a letter to a friend, he mentions his receiving the first news of the fire while at his tavern or club, and that on returning to his town-house, he found it crowded with friends eager for the latest information; and that at a moment when he would fain have been quiet, for every word uttered had to be carefully considered.

From these troublous times we pass on to brighter days, and see something of the life spent within the walls of Prestonfield, which were promptly rebuilt, for there Sir James' only surviving daughter brought up a large family, her third son Sir Alexander being the collector of these letters, now published for the first time.

In perusing these papers we come into contact with Allan Ramsay, the "auld canty carl," whose life and works are so ably described by Mr Oliphant Smeaton, in the "Famous Scots Series." Next, James Boswell makes his presence on the scene very distinctly felt, and his letters have an air of bustle and self importance that is truly diverting. Then Allan Ramsay junr-tells us something of his life while studying art in Italy; and the numerous contretemps that occurred when Sir Alexander Dick and he journeyed there together are graphically described by Sir Alexander in his journal, in which also we get a side view of the Chevalier, and of Prince Charlie in his young days, at Rome, making sport with the Pope and the Cardinals.

Finally, the penmanship is chiefly carried on by the fair sex, and the cousinly letters which passed between Sir Alexander's daughters and the Ladies Lindsay bring us within measurable distance of the present day.

An index of the principal subjects referred to in the text is appended. You can download this from <http://www.electricscotland.com/books/pdf/curiositiesa.pdf>

Robert Burns Lives!

Edited by Frank Shaw

The contest by Scotland's National Trust is over, the results are in, and Robert Burns has won in a runaway! He is our "Great Scot," or Scotland's soul, or whatever superlative you want to use to describe him. While I felt good all along about Burns being the winner, you never know what might happen when it comes to actual results in almost any category. I want to thank the good folks at the National Trust for allowing the readers of Robert Burns Lives! to participate in the contest. Winning makes their efforts worthwhile. Thanks also go to David Hopes for the outstanding job he and his colleagues from the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum undertook in helping push the bard to win this important title! Good people, one and all! (FRS: 5.5.2016).

Read this article at: http://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives237.htm

The Apostle of the North

The Life and Labours of The Rev. Dr. M'Donald By The Rev. J. Kennedy (1868) You can download this book at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/apostleofthenorth.pdf>

THE STORY

Govanhill: a misunderstood tale of everyday Scotland

By Gerry Hassan

A couple of years ago a community arts project in Glasgow designated Albert Drive on the city's southside as 'Scotland's most ethnically diverse street'. It was a good strapline – filled with positivity and pride, but inaccurate. Instead, that byline should be held by

the nearby community of Govanhill, with 53 different languages recorded in its small area.

Govanhill has always been in transition and a place for immigrants: known for a long while as Glasgow's Ellis Island. In the 19th and early 20th centuries it saw Irish immigration; after the second world war, Italian, Polish and Jewish incomers and then from the 70s Asian immigration, mostly from Pakistan, and in the last decade, Roma newcomers. Each, including the most recent, has been met with a degree of welcome, besides some unease and local tensions.

Govanhill is an area of great change, energy and enterprise that buzzes with activities and potential, but does have problems. It has some awful slum housing with terrible living conditions, dampness and over-crowding. There are concerns about crime and policing and parts of the neighbourhood have a sense of decay and neglect, with overgrown backcourts and uncollected piles of rubbish.

For years Govanhill has had a palpable feeling of falling between the cracks and has not received council and government regeneration policy and funding. It isn't by any stretch one of the poorest parts of Glasgow or Scotland, but this has meant that it has consistently missed out on funds, priorities and influence.

The area has always been changing. It has an older working-class community which rub alongside people who come often for shorter periods, mostly students and immigrants – with the area sometimes seen as 'a reception centre'. Some of this older constituency feel trapped in their Govanhill tenement flats, with the area changing in ways they don't like and feel threatened by. They believe that their choices have been curtailed; if they own their flat its value and appeal – relative to elsewhere – is falling.

Add to this mix, after European Union expansion eastwards from 2004, several thousand Roma immigrants, first from Slovakia, then Romania, came to Glasgow – settling in Govanhill. This has magnified tensions which already existed. The local group, 'Let's Save Govanhill', was formed in this context, but its anger and frustration has sometimes boiled over. Its language often seems bitter and stark – the banner its supporters carry on marches, underneath 'Let's Save Govanhill', has five words in big print – 'Crime Vermin Filth Overcrowding Squalor'.

The group talks of Govanhill (frequently calling it 'Govanhell' on social media) in dark terms – 'blighted with high levels of crime: rape, assaults, burglaries, pensioners attacked and robbed in broad daylight'. 'Gangs control the streets' and 'Streets and backcourts are covered in piles of rubbish, discarded furniture and filthy stained mattresses'. If that weren't enough, Fiona Jordan of the local group has spoken of the area as 'going to blow' and 'a tinderbox', or as in Tom Gallagher's words 'a ghetto': being both inaccurate and unhelpful.

Gallagher, a former academic in peace studies, observed that 'Perhaps the only good thing the place has got going for it is the local action group, Let's Save Govanhill'. Such are the perils of the brief visit. The area in fact has a rich tapestry of activities, initiatives and successes, from the sterling work of Govanhill Housing Association to the success of Govanhill Baths ('United we will swim'), and Daisy Street Community Centre with its free community meals. There is a Govanhill People's History Project researching the waves of migration the area has experienced, numerous new businesses, art spaces and festivals, such as Southside Studios and Dance Factory Dance Studios, and all sorts of hipster spaces and cafes.

There is the still obvious, but in places, fading glamour of Victoria Road – a street with history and pride – old bars, numerous restaurants and fruit and veg shops. The Bungalow Café has been there since 1949, run by Italian-born George Verrecchia, while the finest ice-cream in Glasgow can be obtained from the Queen's Park Café. At one end of the wide road sits the magnificence of Queen's Park – a park with its own glasshouse, café, pond and some of the most striking panoramic views of the city.

There are numerous Govanhills. There is, in a small concentration of streets east of Victoria Road, a concentration of poor housing; north of that is former Glasgow City Council stock now run by Govanhill Housing Association; and to the south are the once palatial terraces of Queen's Drive facing onto Queen's Park. West of Victoria Road there is a similar mix – with run down areas, newly converted flats, and nearby much sought-after properties in areas such as Niddrie Square. 'Ghetto' does not really encompass the full reality of this complex area.

Housing is one of the biggest live issues. Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government have come together to buy slum housing in four streets – with £9.3m of monies, handing the properties over to Govanhill Housing Association.

The neighbourhood saw one of the most significant and inspiring victories of local people coming together and winning against the council. In 2001 the council closed Govanhill Baths and this became a catalyst about concerns in the area – about being neglected, taken for granted, and decades of council arrogance. But this time local people mobilised, organised, didn't go away after the headlines died away, and finally won.

The council gave the community back Govanhill Baths – now run as a multi-purpose centre – and last year it was awarded £1m from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Environment Scotland to assist in fully re-opening the baths. Every day it is a hive of activity, enterprise, energy and hope, used by every age and part of the community.

Local services have to respond to intense pressures and demands in a climate of financial cuts. This can be seen in the schools in the area with the Annette Street Primary School making national headlines – 222 pupils: 181 Romanian or Slovakian; the rest, of Asian origin, and not one child, 'white' Scottish born. Some of the press coverage stated inaccurately that not one child spoke English, but as headteacher Shirley Taylor explained: 'The children who have been here for a while act as interpreters for the children who are new'. Diversity is a strength, but such a mix raises all sorts of questions which need debate, not ignored. They don't need some of the heated, overblown language used by some local campaigners.

At a recent Glasgow Southside Govanhill and Crosshill hustings of the four parliamentary and three of the Glasgow list candidates, the mood in a packed hall was nearly entirely well-mannered. There was, as is now common custom at many meetings in Glasgow, an opening question from Sean Clerkin (the activist who chased Iain Gray into the Subway Café in 2011). Only at the end did raw emotion emerge, when one person asked: 'Is Govanhill better now than it was in 2011?', Nicola Sturgeon replied: 'I'm not going to reduce this to Yes or No', and the questioner interrupted: 'Why's the place a shite hole then?'.

Govanhill's tale is one of large parts of Scotland. Who champions places which don't tick the boxes as the most poor or disadvantaged communities? What happens when immigration occurs in an area with numerous pressure points and tensions? There is the legacy of decades of Glasgow Labour council rule, with its associated cronyism and questionable decisions. The rise of the SNP nationally has potentially added to frustrations in certain circles, creating a new political class, without many of the fundamental power imbalances being addressed, let alone acknowledged.

This is a story of everyday Scotland. There is a 'left behind' constituency. There are feelings of powerlessness, even helplessness, in parts of Govanhill, which can manifest itself in language which isn't the most appropriate or accurate. But that sometimes is what people do when they feel desperate, and it would be better to understand the underlying causes, than just condemn completely out of hand.

Some of the political anger has been aimed directly and personally at Nicola Sturgeon, rather than Glasgow City Council, which is responsible for regulating landlords, or private landlords. This was explicit in a leaflet distributed days before polling from a group calling itself 'United against Separation' – titled 'Vote Them Out: The SNP isn't working' and talking of 'Govanhill Backcourts Disgrace' and 'Scotland can't take nine more years of the SNP' (when the next parliamentary term is five years).

I have lived in Glasgow's southside for 24 years. When I first moved to Pollokshields all those years ago, the area was becoming more Asian and 'white flight' was happening – an issue which even saw the BNP stand in the 1997 election (winning a mere 149 votes). I have now lived in Strathbungo for 20 years – and there is greater activism, energy and hope across most of the southside than there ever has been.

Glasgow has always been a city with a nervous balancing act between living and tolerating diversity and change, and an unease with elements of such diversity, evident in the potent political, class and ethnic monocultures which have long dominated parts of the city. This legacy defined much of the Labour and left tradition and has not well represented the city. Now it looks like that once dominant and seemingly impregnable political culture is in terminal decline, and this is disorientating for some, leaving a new political environment and in places a vacuum.

Anger is an understandable response to the times we live in. Activism, social change and doing something positive are more constructive. Govanhill is a very human and very modern experience: an area of dramatic change and challenges where one group feel no one really cares, listens or understands them. Meanwhile, others get on with creating as best as they can a better Govanhill, trying to aid local people to have a greater say and influence.

It seems in this we are struggling to find an inclusive, shared language and practice which can describe the complexities and paradoxes of life. That does not happen by calling your area a 'ghetto' or 'tinderbox' – a Scottish 'Selma' this clearly is not. But we are still hesitantly and nervously trying to find words and concepts to capture what is going on in Govanhill and places like it.

At least some of the people are doing inspirational things to improve their area for the better, and won't give up or go away until they succeed.

End

See the site "Welcome to Govanhill" at: <http://govanhillpeopleshistory.com/> where you can get a map and an mp3 of a walking guide to the area. Also visit Govanhill Housing at <http://www.govanhillha.org/> Also visit the community hub "Govanhill Baths" at <http://govanhillbaths.com> See the video "Coffee With Nicola 16th Jan 2016" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNwDR9wnXqU>

And that's it for this week and hope you all enjoy your weekend.

Alastair