



the **BLACK** *bitch*

Linlithgow's news by Linlithgow's people

LINLITHGOW COMMUNITY MAGAZINE ISSUE 79 JANUARY 2021

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ST MICHAEL WHAT'S THE STORY?

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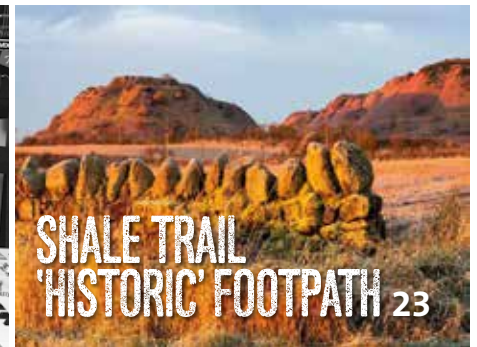
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PLUS

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See our website to download a pdf of this magazine: www.linlithgowcommunitymagazine.co.uk

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PROFILES OF OUR TEAM GLENN MILLER



I moved back to Linlithgow 16 years ago after a brief stay in Inverness.

We had lived in Linlithgow before and thoroughly enjoyed the community spirit and it was an easy choice to come back.

I mainly got involved in the local community through my family activities.

We were involved in many local groups including LAMP, Pipe Bands, Linlithgow Primary School PSA and Academy Hockey and music.

As the children got older it gave me the opportunity to get involved in other

groups such as Transition, Walking Football and Cycling for myself.

After a short illness I heard The Black Bitch magazine were looking for people to deliver it around Linlithgow and I thought this would suit me just fine.

I believe I have the largest run but I have to say it doesn't seem that way as I meet so many characters around Avontoun Park and everyone looks out for the BB mag.

I am very proud to be part of the magazine team and I think people genuinely enjoy reading about their community in this format.



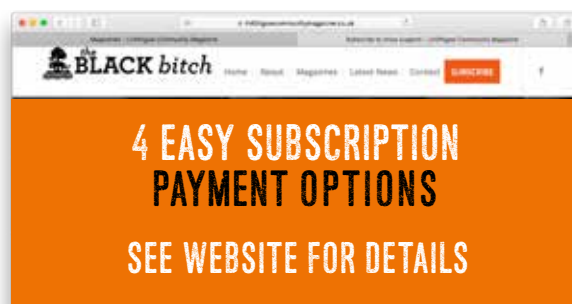
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**DAVID TAIT,
EDITOR**

SUBSCRIBE TO THE BLACK BITCH MAGAZINE



Here we are at the start of 2021, not long past the end of the year that will be remembered as the one to forget, and the Black Bitch magazine finds itself just a couple of issues short of its 10th birthday.

Usually this would be a time for celebration and reflection – what did we get right and what could we do better?

However, for everyone from individuals to community organisations to businesses the times are far from usual.

Our principal source of financial support continues to derive from advertising spend by the business community and various events organisers. As we know only too well, public events have ceased altogether and businesses are having a torrid stop-start time struggling to stay afloat until the pandemic subsides to manageable levels.

We are very pleased to say that the response to our subscription appeal has been very encouraging to date and we thank everyone who has contributed for their generous support.

The magazine is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation raising funds from within the community to meet the basic operating costs of preparing and printing each issue.

The importance of local news generated locally by trustworthy sources has been recognised increasingly both nationally and internationally. It is widely accepted that the connection and mutual understanding between community and government at local level has been lost. The past 10 or 20 years has seen the decimation of local newspapers which social media, despite some useful qualities, has not replaced.

As we complete our 10th year in print we are looking forward to the next ten. As new housing

developments all around the town threaten to overwhelm infrastructure and neglect is evident in the town centre Conservation Area we plan to say more about how local community interests can co-operate to bring influence to bear in developing a vision for Linlithgow's future.

We are therefore asking those who appreciate their great good fortune in being able to call this place their home to consider – if they have a little cash to spare and haven't done so already – making a subscription to help us achieve our aims.

You can do so by one of two methods online by using the links in the magazine or by completing and returning the application form to be found inside this issue.

Meantime, stay safe and well.



PRIZE WINNER

THERE WERE SOME GOOD SUGGESTIONS FOR LINLITHGOW SCENES TO PAINT IN THE ENTRIES FOR OUR PRIZE DRAW.

MEG WALLACE PICKED LORRAINE WADE AS THE WINNER, WHO SUGGESTED THAT SHE PAINT THE DUDLEY THE CAT STATUE.

HERE IS MEG WITH THE GENEROUS PRIZE WHICH WAS DELIVERED IN A SOCIALLY DISTANCED MANNER BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

*Pat Swan's Local Arts feature is on page 18.
Images taken with social distancing applied.*



ARTIST, MEG WALLACE WITH PRIZES FOR WINNER, LORRAINE WADE



LIN GIN 'NOVEMBER COMPETITION' WINNER AMY CORNOCK SEE P 21 FOR JAN COMPETITION

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ST MICHAEL SCULPTURE

Myra Smith, Linlithgow Burgh Trust



The Black Bitch and St Michael – each synonymous with Linlithgow’s heritage, and much loved by its inhabitants, but how many in the town are familiar with the historical background to these two symbolic representations of the town’s civic status?

A desire to educate and inform Linlithgow residents about the town’s history was, in part, the impetus behind **Linlithgow Burgh Trust’s Public Art Project**, which aimed to deliver two sculptures - of the Black Bitch and St Michael - in celebration of these two traditional civic insignias, visible

throughout several centuries on the town’s burgh seal and coats of arms. In the wake of the installation of the Dudley sculpture at the canal basin in July 2018, interest had already been shown by several commentators in a Black Bitch sculpture, and so efforts began later that year to seek the necessary funding that could deliver a sculpture of this well-known emblem of Linlithgow, and it was decided that perhaps sufficient funding could also be secured for a sculpture of St Michael.

The Black Bitch was the first of the sculptures to be delivered. Sculpted by **David Annand**, the town’s famous black hunting dog was officially unveiled in January 2020 and received a very warm

response. Delivery of the Black Bitch had been fairly straightforward, but the St Michael sculpture proved to be a little more complex. The initial public consultation had revealed a preference for a very striking proposal submitted by **Alan Herriot**, but some unease was later expressed by commentators that Alan’s depiction of St Michael slaying the dragon to express good triumphing over evil was perhaps a little too aggressive for its position outside Low Port Primary School. Concern was also expressed that this site was, in itself, inappropriate for such a sculpture. These concerns were not, however, shared by the project’s main funders, who voiced a strong preference for the Low Port site, feeling that what promised to be a prestigious sculpture deserved a prominent position in the town.

Alan Herriot agreed to produce a second design to take into account the concerns expressed. After a second public consultation, the general view



was that Alan’s original proposal should form the basis of the final sculpture, with some changes being made in order to soften slightly the overall impression while maintaining the veracity of the symbolism depicted in the original civic insignia. Alan produced a third size maquette (model) of his proposed sculpture, which was viewed and approved by the clients, and by representatives of the project’s two main funders – **Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge Town Management Group and Linlithgow Town Centre BID (Business Improvement District)**.

Work on the sculpture (and associated works) began, once funding had been secured, in February 2020. Such



an intricate and highly detailed sculpture required more than six months in total for Alan to complete his work and for the Edinburgh foundry of **Powderhall Bronze** to cast the statue in bronze. It will perhaps surprise no-one that complications caused by Coronavirus-related revisions soon began to have an impact, resulting in delays to the envisioned timescale, so that the installation of the concrete foundation stone and the interpretation board by **Fernbrooke Scotland LLP**, planned for the school Easter holidays in April, finally took place in June. Powderhall Bronze, responsible for the casting of the sculpture, was also inconvenienced by the pandemic.

In the meantime, **W L Watson & Sons of St Andrews** had been working on St Michael's granite plinth, which was installed on 13 November, shortly before the main event of the day – the installation of St Michael himself!

The arrival of the sculpture (poor St Michael made a rather ignominious entrance on the back of a lorry!) attracted a lot of attention from onlookers and passers-by, and there was much camera clicking as people attempted to capture the crane manoeuvring our patron saint into position atop his splendid plinth. The whole operation was efficiently executed remarkably quickly by Powderhall Bronze, and, post-installation, there has been a very enthusiastic response from townspeople, with some commenting on how very much at home St Michael looks, almost as if he has always been there, and many others particularly highlighting Alan Herriot's skilled artistry and attention to detail. I noted a perfect illustration of this last point in Alan's comment that a refashioning of some of the dragon's scales had been necessary when he noticed that a section of the dragon's body, coiled as it is around the bottom of the sculpture, had initially been formed with the scales facing the wrong way!

Another unwelcome consequence of Covid-19 has been that, due to the need to avoid large public gatherings, the official unveiling of the sculpture by **Councillor Tom Conn**, chair of the

Linlithgow & Linlithgow Bridge Town Management Group, has had to be postponed until later this year.

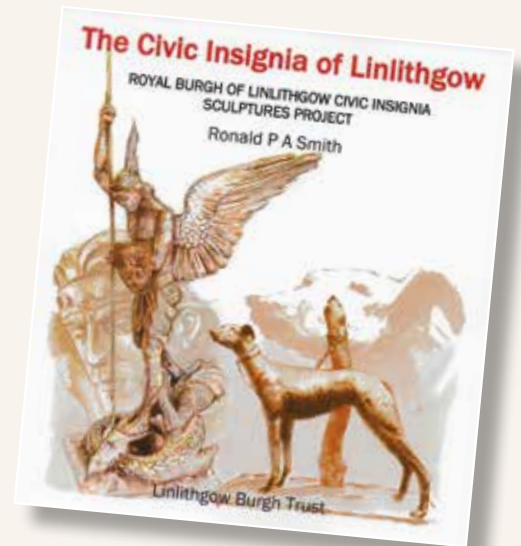
A huge amount of time and effort from members of the **Burgh Trust's Public Art Committee** has been involved in delivering these two iconic and emblematic sculptures with such great significance for the town, and the whole project has required, in no particular order: much careful discussion, many emails (to sculptors, stonemasons, landscape contractors, and funding bodies), numerous progress reports, plans and specifications, many measurements and mathematical calculations, the completion of countless application forms, the posting of press releases and Facebook posts and, sometimes, no small amount of annoyance and frustration when things seemed to be going wrong!

Overall, I think we have been left with a feeling of satisfaction, tempered with relief, at the successful conclusion of the project. The number of appreciative comments received has been very encouraging. It has also been of some satisfaction to hear, from some early readers of our book about the project 'The Civic Insignia of Linlithgow' and of the two interpretation boards near the statues that they now have a deeper awareness of the town's heritage. Our aim of educating and informing townspeople about the history of our town was also achieved through our earlier competition, held to encourage primary school pupils to learn about Linlithgow's civic insignia.

Our grateful thanks are, of course, extended to the many funders of the project, fully listed in the book, without whom the project could never have been undertaken, far less completed. One of our funders, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, required us to complete an evaluation report on the completed project, and one of the final questions posed was 'What lessons have been learnt?' Our response to this had to be that projects of this sort, involving discussions and negotiations among a number of different people, will invariably become more complex than initially envisaged, and thus

take longer to complete. The other truism, as expressed by Alan Herriot, is, of course, that public art is always subjective – one design can never hope to meet with universal approval!

Our book, 'The Civic Insignia of Linlithgow' is available, at £12 per copy, from Far from the Madding Crowd, Lilypond Crafts and Gifts and can also be ordered by contacting publications@lbt.scot



ONE LINLITHGOW



All businesses in Linlithgow have been affected by the pandemic - some severely, others fortunately less so. Many have had to radically adapt to survive.

One Linlithgow, the elected body representing all businesses in the town, is doing all in its power to help them through these unprecedented times.

But decisions are not taken by a faceless organisation with no real understanding of the myriad problems businesses are having to confront. Volunteer Board members are facing the same issues with their own businesses - some more challenging than most.

Here, we give their very personal accounts of the struggle to stay afloat - but stories that are also optimistic, and reflect a wider concern for all businesses in the town - many of them next-door neighbours.

Mark Darragh, owner PlayBugs soft play centre



"Well, 2020, the year that just kept on giving - but not in a good way! When we entered the national lockdown in March, like any responsible business owner, we closed up to ensure the safety of our team and customers. We took out the fresh food to try and reduce waste, and I made up boxes of cakes to drop off on my neighbours' doorsteps.

Everyone probably thought that by following the rules, within a few months life would go back to normal. How wrong we were!

Life in Linlithgow as we know it has been quite different, with no Marches, no Party at the Palace, and no more quiz at Platform 3! I know how tough it is for every business owner in town, having never been allowed to reopen. I feel especially for all the parents, grandparents, carers and child-minders I meet who have missed having a coffee, cake, and a chat whilst they get a little bit of peace while the children play.

Despite all this, and 2021 not getting off in a way we would all like, many businesses are still here in Linlithgow. Thanks to the ongoing financial support provided from the UK Government we all hope to get through it and reopen as soon as it is safe to do so.

As a volunteer member, and vice-chairman for One Linlithgow, I want to see us support the entire business community to grow back stronger, greener, and encourage the local community to continue to support the town. Let's hope we can get back to enjoying everything Linlithgow has to offer as soon as possible. Until then stay safe and well."

Jill Wardrope, owner Network Promotions



My main concern was being able to return to the UK to look after my small business in Linlithgow, which supplies promotional merchandise.

After an experience not dissimilar to those in the film 'Planes, Trains and Automobiles', we eventually made it home and back to work. A few days later, when lockdown was implemented, sales fell off a cliff!

Much of the promotional material that we supply is for events and meetings, none of which are going ahead. So many organisations that would usually purchase promotional merchandise are experiencing their own difficulties. While marketing and promotion is important in times of difficult trading, it's understandable that so many have had different priorities under current circumstances.

With an ever-changing situation resulting in factory shutdowns, we've experienced issues bringing goods from abroad, and delays with manufacturing in the UK. I've had to look at other ways of sustaining my livelihood, and quickly adapted by supplementing our offering with PPE such as hand sanitising stations, face coverings, sanitising gel, hygiene tools and antibacterial products - all branded with our customers' logo or message.

I'm expecting difficult months ahead, and I imagine none of us will emerge unscathed. I feel incredibly lucky, however, that my family remains healthy, and my businesses have survived so far, when so many have suffered both directly and indirectly as a result of Coronavirus. I try to keep a positive mindset as we all work our way through to the other side."

Mike Smith VC, Linlithgow Union Canal Society



"LUCS is an atypical business: not-for-profit, with voluntary staff, to attract crowds of people to enjoy the charming Canal Basin - and to explore the commerces of the Burgh while in town.

'Crowd', however, has been a very bad word since March. Instead of pay, our volunteer members are rewarded by the camaraderie of working together to share the many various joys of making a tourist attraction work: the prize is happy, smiling faces all around.

But now, no visitors, no work parties, no income (apart from generous donations), but the usual ongoing maintenance/repair to be done in a solitary, not social, way.

This interminable-feeling loss of society is very hard on those to whom LUCS is a crucial social lifeline. LUCS decided to try to keep the social aspects going virtually, to help raise spirits and keep people in touch, within and beyond the Society.

We have Zoom coffee-breaks, Zoom Committee Meetings, and Zoom Talks... and a fun video of Santa, sleigh, reindeer and elves all arriving by canal (just search YouTube for "LUCS Linlithgow")! We also used the enforced downtime to digitise our archives (museum.lucs.org.uk).

Having been closed since March last year, we are now trying to unravel the virus-safety complexities, so that the Fleet will be able to sail again, and the fun resume, just as soon as permitted (more volunteers are always welcome)!

As to the farther future, LUCS is very aware that 2022 is the Union Canal's 200th anniversary, and the fires of imagination are already lit to create a major celebration to help LUCS reinvigorate the Burgh.



Diana Kelly, owner SpecSavers Regent Centre



Two things were uppermost in ophthalmologist Diana Kelly's mind when lockdown struck last March: keeping her fledgling Specsavers business going, while doing all she could to help relieve the pressure on local GPs and pharmacies by dealing with eye emergencies in the area.

"I could have gone to work in one of the emergency eye care facilities that had been established, but I wanted to keep a presence in my business, which I had opened only a few months previously. I had to shut my door and furlough the staff. I spent long hours manning the phone and was able to help quite a lot of my patients remotely, as well as some referred by other opticians in town, with whom I developed a good relationship.

I could see emergencies, and I had quite a few of them. Soon after lockdown started, I recall seeing seven emergency cases one day, including a local, who had dangerously high pressure on his eye, and another who had a large corneal abrasion - a scratch on the cornea. I treated all the cases successfully, which meant that the emergencies did not need to be seen by a GP, or at a hospital."

Diana said she had been 'greatly relieved' to fully reopen her businesses in the town's Regent Centre in July, and bring her staff back in. She had also decided to take on a recently-graduated ophthalmologist, who was fully qualified and could see patients, but required to practise for a year for registration.

"We've got all the appropriate safety measures in place, and the staff have all received special training. It's great to be able to see patients again, but where appropriate I'm consulting remotely. And I'm now coming increasingly across an issue brought about by home working: people developing eye problems after spending up to 10 hours a day on their computers."

Added Diana, *"In some ways, we've been affected more by the pandemic than most. It's been exhausting, but I'm just glad we're able to be here to help in such challenging times for everybody."*

DIGITAL MARKETS

One silver lining of the pandemic has been the near-universal recognition of the importance of shopping local. Watching an already-beleaguered retail sector suffer enforced closures has encouraged people away from online retail behemoths and back to local, independent businesses.

Of course, it hasn't been possible lately to head into town and support your favourite shops and services, so One Linlithgow teamed up with those businesses to run the **Linlithgow Digital Christmas Markets**, which were enormously successful. Around 30 businesses took part, making almost £3,500 between them! Almost £1,000 of that total was made in the first three hours of digital trading!

It has been a privilege to provide this kind of direct support to businesses in their hour of need. If 2020 had been a normal year, we may not have had to come up with new ideas to the extent that we have done. Nobody will remember it as a "vintage" year, but we'll be able to take that innovation with us when life begins to return to normal.

Of course, we were never going to watch the Christmas

markets succeed, then call it a day! The post-festive lockdown wasn't exactly a surprise, but is still enormously damaging to independent businesses. So, with the first major retail opportunity approaching us in the form of Valentine's Day, One Linlithgow will once again be collaborating with **MyLinlithgow.com** (Community Development Trust) to bring you...



We'd love to welcome you on the day. Just visit the site and the market will be obvious from the homepage! Why not stick the flyer from this magazine on the fridge to remind you?

Hundreds of products from dozens of local businesses will be available to browse and buy, just as easily as any online retailer, but supporting your friends and neighbours instead of billionaires! Find the perfect gift for Valentine's Day, or just treat yourself, and enjoy the cosy feeling of supporting the local economy!



ONE LINLITHGOW UPDATE

There's plenty of activity lined up for Q1 2021, including supplying more PPE to businesses, promotional activity (including business videos and highlighting travel links, once restrictions allow).

But first, some good news about the town-centre CCTV project: the first camera is now operational at the Vennel, with civil works going ahead at the County Buildings column to get the wireless cameras from the Cross to Regent Centre operational. After that, two small (partial) road closures at either end of the High Street will allow the rest of the high-resolution cameras to be commissioned, completing the original system (more plans in place beyond that... watch this space).

If you live on the High Street and are concerned about privacy, please be assured that private windows are blocked out from the feed (just like the picture shown here - the image is unedited, it's exactly what the feed shows).





Providing both the pleasure of the spectacle of trees in full blossom in spring...

As well as being renowned for soft fruit growing, Scotland's climate can also sustain orchard fruits. In particular apples, pears (with a little shelter from the wind), plums and damsons all thrive and with a little helping hand along the way will yield ample delicious fruit at harvest time. Whilst providing both the pleasure of the spectacle of trees in full blossom in spring and the nutrition of the fruit in autumn, an orchard will also provide habitat for a diverse range of life increasing biodiversity in the area.

Orchards can come in various shapes and sizes. Around Linlithgow three orchards of free standing trees (mostly eating apples, but also some cookers, pears and damsons) were planted by Transition Linlithgow at the Leisure Centre, Beechwood and The Vennel 5-10 years ago. Linlithgow Primary school raised funds and with the help of Burgh Beautiful planted apples and plums against a wall at Learmonth two years ago and St Joseph's Primary add to their orchard of apple and pear

cordons every year.

Burgh Beautiful has taken over the maintenance of the Vennel orchard and hope to run a pruning and general workshop in February/March next year when the apple trees there will next need to be pruned.

Looking after fruit trees is a straightforward job, whether they be one or two trees in a garden or as part of an orchard the principles are the same. Once established, they benefit from being pruned once a year and a little general maintenance. Young trees and those which have not been pruned for a few years need a little more attention, but the overall idea is still the same.

Fruit trees can be attacked by various pests and diseases, but healthy trees are an excellent way of combating these. Keep the general area tidy to reduce competition to young trees for water and the harbouring of pests. Until they are strong enough to withstand the wind on their own, trees are staked and tied. The ties need to be checked two or three times a year to make sure that there is space for the trunk to grow without being restricted. Guarding around the lower trunk is useful as a variety of creatures will eat tender bark (particularly in winter) and

this can harm or ultimately kill the tree, the integrity of this should be checked from time to time.

>> *Sharp secateurs (by-pass rather than anvil are better as they should give a cleaner cut) and a pruning saw will generally be sufficient for the job.*

>> *Apples and pears are pruned in the winter while plums and damsons are pruned in the summer.*

>> *Firstly remove dead, dying, diseased or damaged branches.*

>> *Next look at the way the branches are growing, remove the weaker of crossing branches and look to keep the centre of the tree relatively open to promote good airflow. Vertically growing branches should either be removed completely or (if they are in a gap) pruned back to promote the filling of that gap.*

>> *Pruning to a bud will promote growth from that bud and some of the lower buds on the branch.*

>> *Pruning will promote growth and excessive pruning at any one time can promote unproductive growth. Try to limit pruning to around 15% of the tree in any one year.*

>> *Beyond these guidelines it is useful to know your variety as there will be some specifics e.g. tip vs spur bearing trees will be optimised by specific pruning for that type.*

Then there's harvest - from as early as August, through to November different fruits and varieties will come to maturity making a quarter to a third of the year available for eating fresh from the tree. Plums, damsons and cherries can be gauged for ripeness by sight with colour and size giving a clear indication and texture (not too hard or too soft) the next confirmation - the final one being in the taste. Apple (and pear) varieties ripen at times





...and the
nutrition
of the fruit
in autumn

predominantly based on their variety and with extra variation based on the weather over the growing season. Ripeness can be harder to judge as colour is not such a good indicator. If already picked, cutting in half and checking that the pips have darkened indicates ripeness. Otherwise the fruit should not need excessive force to remove from the tree, a gentle twist or upending the fruit should be enough to remove a ripe apple.

Burgh Beautiful Linlithgow

Burgh Beautiful Linlithgow is part of Linlithgow Burgh Trust. Linlithgow Burgh Trust is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation - Scottish Charity Number SC047211

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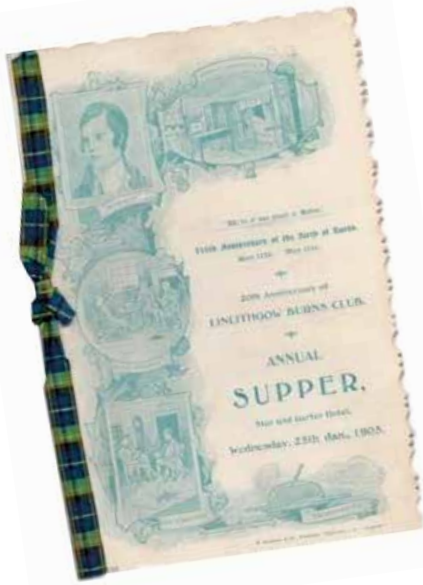
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LINLITHGOW BURNS CLUB 1905

I'm sure that there must be many readers out there who missed the Burns Supper season in 2021 – the period of year I like to call Ramadram! To alleviate my regret, I turned to this document - the programme for the Linlithgow Burns Club Supper on Wednesday 25th January, 1905.

The Linlithgow Burns Club was a relatively late organisation, founded in 1885, perhaps as a response to the creation in that year of the Robert Burns World Federation.



The club's first gathering was 84 years after a group of friends of the bard met to celebrate his life in 1801. They actually met on the anniversary of his death – July 21st – the day Burns had died in Dumfries some five years before. The first recognised club, in Greenock, held their first supper in 1802 – actually on the wrong date (January 29th) due to an error in calculating the exact occasion of Burns' birth.

Linlithgow's 1905 celebration took place in the Star and Garter Hotel where, at 7.00pm, a large gathering of men sat down to a four-course meal beginning with a small "pot of tripe and thairm" washed down with St Magdalene's whisky. Next came the traditional haggis with a "drappie o' the Tippet Hen" (a large, glass container.) The third course is described in the programme as "Sauted nowt and nowt's hurdies", along with "a wee bit o' the lammie's mither, a' weel baked." I assume that this was a steak and mutton pie, and it was served up with "biled and champit tatties, bashed neeps and greens." The last course was one of oatcakes, kebbuck

cheese, "bakes and bannocks an' a hantle o' ither eatables – a' couthie tae the kite" (all friendly to the stomach!)

More whisky was poured as the chairman, **Andrew Wright**, headmaster of Bridgend School, opened proceedings with an adaptation of a Burns verse substituting the name of the proprietor of "The Star".

"Noo, Woodcock, since we've feasted thus,

Which we so little merit,

Let Jenny tak' awa' the flesh

An Jock, bring in the spirit."

After a toast to "The King and Queen, their Bairns and Bairn's Bairns", the company then stood to sing the National Anthem in tribute to George V and Queen Mary. The first (of 15) speeches was delivered by the Croupier, Police Superintendent **Henry Robinson**, who paid tribute to "The Tommies" (British soldiers.) This ended with all present singing a rousing version of "Scots Wha Hae." The reply was given by **Captain A Forbes** of the Linlithgowshire Rifle Volunteers.

And so, the night went on – each speech followed by either a Burns song, sung by one of twelve soloists, or a recitation of a Burns poem (including the **Rev Wallace's** rendition of Tam O' Shanter) or an original poem, written and delivered by the town's master baker and amateur poet, Ebenezer Oliphant.

The honour of providing the principal speech, "The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns", fell to the chairman and **Mr Wright's** 45-minute oration was printed word for word two days later in the Linlithgowshire Gazette whose editor, **Robert Fleming**, described the speech as "able, eloquent, excellently phrased and thoroughly enjoyed." He must have received that news second hand as he himself was not present at the gathering – despite being listed on the programme as delivering the reply to "Scotia's Other Poets" which was given by **J. W. Anderson**. Mr Fleming, as the Club's Bard, sent a poetic offering which was read for him by a stand-in.

The Toast to "The Provost, Magistrates and Town Council" was orated by **William Allan** who, in a lengthy homily, sang the praises of the "progressive, far-sighted and community spirited gentlemen at the helm of our burghal ship." **Provost Robert Jamieson** replied, thanking Mr Allan for his glowing tribute.

In the absence of the Rev Ferguson of St Michael's, the toast to "Burns Clubs a' the World O'er" was given by the

minister of Kingscavil Church, **Rev T. Lugton** – the person chosen by the Rev Ferguson to proof-read his magnus opus "Ecclesia Antiqua" which would be published later that year. Unfortunately, Rev Ferguson was unable to be present as he was proposing The Immortal Memory at a Falkirk Burns Club. His apologies and best wishes were related by the Club's secretary, schoolteacher **Andrew Forrester**. Another local teacher, headmaster **John (Baldie!) Walker**, gave the reply.

Ex Provost **Andrew Gilmour** was also in the company – retired after 18 years as Linlithgow's First Citizen, although he was still practising medicine from his surgery in Cross House. In his broad Irish brogue, he spoke to the theme, "The Agricultural Interests of the District." **Mr A. Addison** replied.

Due to deliver the Toast to the Lassies was local solicitor **James Kidd** – the founder, in 1894, along with **Colonel Edward Peterkin**, of the local solicitors' practice. However, for some reason, the 33-year-old, Mr Kidd, was unavailable and instead tribute was paid to the "Fairer Sex" by Roman Catholic priest, **Father Edward Miley**. Being an all-male gathering, the reply was given by **Mr T. D. Jamieson**.

With the clock looming towards 1-00am, on the morning of the 26th January, the last speech was a sort of Vote of Thanks to "The Officials" conveyed by **James Forbes** and replied to by **Chairman Wright** who ended the long meeting with the words of Burns written for the Brethren of St James's Lodge, Tarbolton:

"A last request, permit me here,

*When yearly ye assemble a',
One round, I ask it with a tear,
To him, the Bard, that's far awa'."*

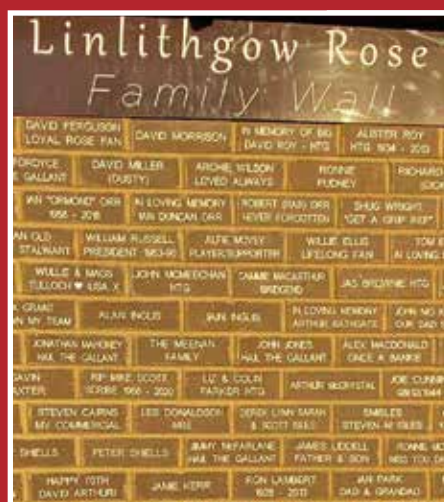
The last toast was duly drunk and so, after a marathon session, those present, "Each took aff his several way, esolved to meet some other day."

Let us hope and pray that Burns Suppers will resume in January 2022!

Bruce Jamieson



ROSE FANS HONoured ON FAMILY WALL



Linlithgow Rose recently launched their new "Family Wall" at Prestonfield and it's been an instant hit with supporters and families across the community and beyond.

This venture is something we've been thinking about for a number of years at the Rose, but we couldn't really identify the best place to position the wall, even though it was staring us in the face all the time! Over the summer we were lucky enough to have some brilliant volunteers helping us to spruce the place up and, with a fresh coat of paint and some new signage, the area around the turnstiles at the social club looked much better than it has for years. Inside the ground, we realised that the walls of the turnstiles were the ideal location for a Family Wall – hundreds come in and out of those turnstiles at every game so this was a fantastic area with great visibility (does not apply during pandemics!).

At the time of writing, we've had orders for 100 bricks and we hope that will increase significantly once people get a chance to see the wall for themselves – so let's get those vaccinations out! Behind every brick there's a story too and that's the best thing about the whole initiative. I could sit for most of an evening recounting some of the memories I have of those names on the wall as well as those which people have shared with me. Here are just a few of them.

It's an absolute privilege to see **Alister** and **David Roy** on the wall. Both were fantastic servants and supporters whose passion and enthusiasm for

the Rose was incredible. One of the lounges in the social club is named after Alister whilst there's a fantastic photo of the long-serving club secretary David in his pomp in the Rose dressing room when we played Queen of the South in the senior Scottish Cup.

Alex Barclay's brick has the caption "still watching" and I'm sure that resonates with many of those who have bought a brick in memory of a loved one who has passed on. Alex followed the Rose from his early primary school days through thick and thin. He was instrumental in helping to harness my passion for the club too. Alex and his crew used to take me all over Scotland to follow the lads when I was just a young boy – we all know people who have helped shape our lives for the better and he was one of those without even knowing it. And we had some great laughs along the way!

Whilst Alex had the good fortune to follow the team for a long number of years, others were less fortunate and the bricks commemorating



Aidan Sutherland and **PJ Cockburn** are testament to that. Aidan was introduced to the Rose by his great friend **Craig Lowrie** during our cup run of 2015/16 and became a regular visitor until he was taken from us just a little bit more than a year later at the age of just 20. PJ also passed away in 2017 at the age of just 12 but he touched so many hearts across the town and beyond. The Cockburn family live a stone's throw from the ground and PJ's sisters have both played at Prestonfield in the George Allan Football Festival for the local Primary schools.

Pauline Kirton-Vaughan bought her dad, **Andrew** (pictured below), a brick as a Christmas present because -

"What else can you buy a dad of 7 when he's 87 and he's a die-hard Rose supporter? He rarely misses a game and can't wait until the supporters are allowed to return to football. He never missed a match of the 2015/16 cup run – including going to Wick twice! His favourite part of following the Rose is getting on the supporters' bus for an away day – irrespective of the result the banter is always brilliant and he loves the company."

It's very fitting that so many of those who travel on our supporters' buses, or who do all the work behind the scenes, have bricks on the wall with **Andrew**. We are so grateful to them for their support and we have missed everyone terribly this season.

Once the restrictions ease, we hope many of you will come and see the wall for yourselves and think about buying your own brick. Like every other business, the club has been hugely impacted by the pandemic and, whilst we've had some government support which is really appreciated, we've lost a lot of income compared to a normal season. I can't finish without saying a big thank you to our players and management team who have been incredibly understanding and have helped us to restructure the club's operations – they've been brilliant and deserve your full support when we get back up and running.

HAIL THE GALLANT!

Jon Mahoney
President
Linlithgow Rose Football Club

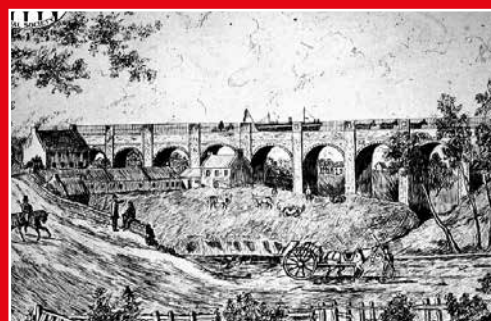
LUCS BACK OVER THE YEARS

Amy Cornock



The first of two articles on the history of the Linlithgow Union Canal Society by Amy Cornock - The Early Years. In the next issue Amy will discuss the community benefits that have arisen as a result of a lot of hard and dedicated volunteer hours over many years.

Images. Above: Very early days, some surprising finds! Horses: Original horse power on display at Almond Aqueduct. Aqueduct: Horse drawn barges on the Slateford Aqueduct. Tam Dalyell: Opening Day 18 June 1977. Aerial view of Avon Aqueduct.

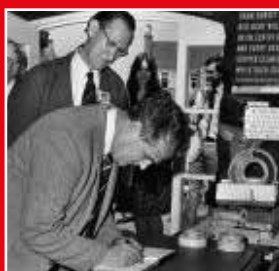


The Union Canal Basin looks nothing like any basin I've ever seen. It's more of a triangle - but geometry was never my strong point so I'll let that one slide. The winter sun shines over the rain-stained stretch of water as I glimpse a swan gliding westwards. Her journey would have been short-lived four decades ago, when there were blockages on the canal. Now she can roam freely along this 31 mile waterway.

Designed by Hugh Baird, with Thomas Telford advising on the construction of three aqueducts: the Avon, the Almond and the Slateford, Scotland's only contour canal opened in 1822. It's a canal which follows the natural contours of the land with no need to have locks. It cost £461,760 (equivalent to £55,055,646 today) and was built to bring coal and other minerals to the capital. It did this successfully until the railways arrived and took over freight transport.

Nowadays, the canal enjoys a more relaxed pace of life. I'm greeted by my old friends, the boats Victoria and Saint Magdalene. Victoria's the elder sister and remains Linlithgow Union Canal

Society's flagship boat. Saint Magdalene is bigger than Victoria and her original yellow and green hues have been replaced with red and white to match her big sister. I think back to the early 90's when I went on my first ever boat trip on Victoria. I channelled my inner adventurer as my black and white school tie bobbed in the wind and my little fingers left a trail in the water.



As I elbow bump the Vice Chairman of LUCS, **Mike Smith**, his eyes light up as he tells me all about what the Society has done since it was founded in 1975. One of the first major tasks was to transform a former stable into Scotland's one and only canal museum. It was opened to the public by Tam Dalyell MP on 18th June 1977. We enter the white stable doors which lead to a display of artefacts and photos explaining the history of the Union Canal.

This society was the brainchild of the late Mel Gray. In 1970, he saw the defunct Union Canal as an asset. With the help of boys from the Polmont Young Offenders Institution and some volunteers the

clean-up began which led to the creation of LUCS. I later met one of its original members, **John Aitken**. He tells me how, as a newcomer to Linlithgow in 1974, he was keen to get involved in his local community. He discovered the derelict canal basin while walking his dog one day. After expressing an interest in its restoration at the Civic Trust Trades of the Town exhibition he and 15 others were invited to a meeting at Mel Gray's house in the Spring of 1975. It was from there that LUCS was born. Mel was appointed as its first Chairman and John was the Technical Convenor.



The initial ideas were converting Slamannan Basin into a canal marina, repairing two derelict canal barges, refurbishing the dry dock to the west of the Avon Aqueduct and providing a slipway at Manse Road Basin. During its first year, work parties continued to remove rubbish from the canal and attempted to clear the weeds.

With the first boat, U66 was acquired by LUCS for the grand sum of £25; you'd be lucky if you got a toy boat for that price nowadays. This is equivalent to just £200 today. The name U66 came from British Waterways who referenced items of interest along the Union Canal as U plus a number. As Queen of the Union, as she was later known, she made several historic horse-drawn trips along the canal. The slipway was built and installed at the basin and the first of many LUCS canal rallies was held there.

Not everything was plain sailing for LUCS. The joint project with Scottish Inland Waterways Association (SIWA) to refurbish the dry dock to the west of the Avon Aqueduct proved a challenge. The owner of the converted keeper's house wasn't happy with the project so he arranged a lease on the land preventing any further work.

Several members joined LUCS for the social aspect which they have certainly relished over the years. Social and fundraising events have also been paramount to funding their projects. In the early years these included a jumble sale, a cheese & wine and a dance. They entered a float in the Marches parade and members **John Aitken** and **Bill Watt** entered the first ever Drambuie Canal Marathon. From 1975 to 1990 the Drambuie Liqueur Company sponsored annual canal marathons from Glasgow to Edinburgh and LUCS had a few wins. They also helped out at several non-canal related events. It was all part of Linlithgow's community spirit.

Bill saw an advert for Victoria and, returning from the Round London Canal Marathon, he and John went to Welford to take a look. They fell in love with her instantly and she was bought for £5,000 (equivalent to £25,031 today) with the help of Lothian Regional Council. Victoria arrived in her new home ready for the season of 1978. This coincided with the Victorian Scotland tourist campaign which the Society got lots of publicity from. Over 40 years later Victoria remains as much a part of Linlithgow as the Black Bitch herself.

In the Spring of 1979, disaster struck when surface erosion under the canal bed caused the canal embankment at Kettilstoun quarry to give way in a major breach. The canal remained dry from Preston Road to Woodcockdale for a long

time due to lack of funding.

One of the biggest achievements of LUCS was the construction of the Preston Road bridge. Prior to this there had been a culvert which blocked the flow of the canal. October 3rd 1992 was a historic day when the first LUCS cruise travelled from Manse Road Basin over the Avon Aqueduct. This became national news when member **Barbara Braithwaite** was interviewed by Sir Harry Secombe for the ITV programme, Highway.

In 1995, Ohmega, an electric powered trip boat based on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, became the latest member of the LUCS family. A competition invited local school children to propose a new name and this is how St Magdalene was born. Victoria looked on in envy as she became the talk of the town hosting a wedding, catered dinner cruises and several school trips.

By 1999, cruises, charters and school trips were very popular despite a poor tourist season for Scotland that year. The society's marketing efforts stepped up a gear with leaflet distribution, improved signage to the basin and the award of 3-star grading to LUCS by the Scottish Tourist Board.

The new millennium marked the 25th anniversary of LUCS. It also saw a significant milestone in the Millennium Link Project with the restoration of navigation under the M8 motorway beyond Broxburn on 7th May. A historic handshake was made between **Ronnie Rusack** and **Mel Gray** as the *Pride of the Union* and *Victoria* met from opposite sides of the M8. This was a momentous step towards LUCS' dream, the complete restoration of the Scottish lowland canals, which was soon to follow.

Mike and I leave the museum and head next door to the tearoom. Situated in former canal workers' cottages, a new

roof had to be placed and the building made watertight before it could be converted. The grand opening was in May 1991 by **Kathleen Dalyell**. Volunteers have worked hard to ensure the successful running of the tearoom ever since. Mike shows me a wooden plaque with the names of the 25 Chairmen who've each made a huge contribution to LUCS over the last 45 years.

All of the successes of LUCS wouldn't have been possible if it weren't for its founder Mel Gray, MBE, who sadly passed away on 11th March 2006. He served Linlithgow in so many capacities and his ambitious plans for the future of the canal were testament to his tenacious and inspirational character. Special mentions should also be given to founding members John Aitken, Barbara Braithwaite, Alex Forsyth, Roger Turnbull and every single member and volunteer throughout the years who have served our community and helped make the Union Canal what it is today.



Ronnie Rusack on the left and Mel Gray on the right.



LUCS founder Mel Gray, MBE.

GARY CLINTON, MUSIC TUTOR



It is fair to say guitar and music is the centre of my life. It's my passion, my hobby and my business. It's how I met my now wife, it's the reason I live in Linlithgow and it's how I support my family.

Since moving here in 2013 our home has always been busy with students, parents and grandparents coming and going so I was devastated to have to close my doors back in March. Suddenly the future was uncertain; however thanks to all of my amazing students, we have adopted Zoom and lessons have continued. The platform is fantastic for music and whilst there is no 'hands on' element there are many benefits to online music tuition.

Using Zoom's 'screenshare' we can analyse bars like never before as I can literally 'zoom' in to show the detail, annotate using the drawing tools and then email over screenshots. Also students have become much better at counting the beat for themselves, tuning and re-stringing their guitars and my business is now completely carbon neutral, plus, I now have a student in New York!

I've also felt very honoured that many parents told me during the first lockdown that their child's guitar lesson was the only regular thing they had on each week during the mania of home-schooling. So when The Black Bitch asked me how my business had been doing my first instinct was to use this article as a platform to publicly thank all of my students for embracing the technology and let the town know their accomplishments.

When I think back to how many mock and real exams have been passed with glowing marks, how many students have massively improved their skills and how many students, some of whom I've never actually met in person and were

complete beginners, can now play guitar or bass and read music – it's amazing. It shows the nice side of social technology and I'd encourage anyone to consider online tuition, even if you are a bit shy of the technology. It could be just about anything from music, to languages, to IT, to fitness and can help keep us social in a time of isolation.

I ran drop-in 'Zoom taster' sessions which allowed my students to log-in and I showed them around the app just to help familiarise everyone with it so it seemed less daunting. Of course now I think we are all quite used to platforms like Zoom and in many ways it feels completely normal.

One aspect of my work that has unfortunately completely disappeared is the live performance element; however it has allowed me time to focus on upgrading my home studio. I compose & produce my own music for film and television so another aspect of my work is helping students with their own compositions, music technology and industry advice which includes marketing and self promotion.

Some of my music has been sync'd for television and very recently my band Flux Velociraptor was aired on BBC Radio Scotland and Amazing Radio so I have plenty knowledge, skills and contacts in the music industry I want to pass on. And I'm very pleased to report some of my former students have now launched their own musical careers.

Adam Frame from Livingston (19, Edinburgh College) plays in indie-rock group The Katuns and before lockdown he was videoed playing alongside DMA's frontman Tommy O'Dell in a Glasgow pub. Adam was then mentioned on STV as the video got over 500k views on Twitter! Joshua Chakir (22, Edinburgh College) is part of the very arty group Medicine Cabinet who have received

excellent press and a dedicated following from their unique brand of music and live performance.

Other students I'd like to mention are Euan Millar (20, Heriot Watt University) from Mid Calder who is working on his Grade 8 programme and recently posted excellent covers of AC/DC & Volbeat tracks on his YouTube channel; Nathan Campbell (14, Linlithgow Academy) for excelling in songwriting and music technology; Poppy Jamieson (12) & Sally Moffat (11) who both attend the Academy for excellent mock-exam results; brothers Lewis (12, Linlithgow Academy) and Ben (10, Low Port Primary) Goldfinch for showing incredible natural flair on guitar; Shannon Matthews (14, Linlithgow Academy) for learning every single My Chemical Romance song on Songster and as a result now working on her Grade 6 programme; Calvin Sinclair (13, Linlithgow Academy) for a brilliant attitude to online guitar lessons; Oisín McVeigh (16, Linlithgow Academy) for incredible fingerstyle work with John Williams arrangement of Cavatina; Eve (from Linlithgow) for outstanding work playing along to backing tracks and Florence Bunting (7, Lowport Primary) who displays outstanding music reading and concentration skills, well beyond her young years.

Unfortunately I just have too many students to mention everyone so apologies to those I haven't written about – what's above is the tip of the iceberg in terms of amazing accomplishments. Being able to see how much they have all improved during this time gives me hope that no matter how big the challenge, we all have the potential to adapt and get through it. And one day soon we will.

You can keep up to date with Gary's tuition business through social media

Twitter: @GaryGuitar4
Facebook: garyclintonguitartutor



Constable Andrew Murray is the community officer based in Linlithgow Police station, which is now located within the newly refurbished Tam Dalyell House at Linlithgow Partnership Centre, High Street, Linlithgow.

He is keen to get involved in local community issues and wants to hear your views and opinions on these issues. He will be publishing an article in the magazine every month, covering ongoing community issues which he is keen to address within the ward.

There is also a public assistance desk at the station, which is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

ONLINE SCAMS AND FRAUD

Over the past couple of months reports of online scams and fraud have been on the increase. These are becoming more and more sophisticated. Here are a few examples

- >> Courier Fraud
- >> Identity fraud
- >> Online shopping and auction sites
- >> Romance and dating fraud
- >> Ticketing fraud
- >> Scam mail
- >> Computer software service
- Fraud Banking and Card Fraud

TAKE FIVE is a national campaign that offers straightforward and impartial advice to help everyone protect themselves from preventable financial fraud. This can be found on the Police Scotland website.

**SO WHEN ONLINE BEFORE YOU
MAKE ANY DECISIONS OR
INVESTMENTS... TAKE FIVE**

STOP

Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.

CHALLENGE

Could it be fake? It's ok to reject or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

PROTECT

Contact your bank immediately if you think you've fallen for a scam and report it.



NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH SCOTLAND

This system allows users to receive alerts from Neighbourhood Watch and Police Scotland. The idea being that if there has been a recent crime trend, then officers from Police Scotland can send an alert to all users who may be affected or who may have an interest in the crime.

- >> Crime Trends – recent crimes that have occurred in their area, housebreakings etc.
- >> Missing Persons – Details of High Risk missing persons can be broadcast to specific areas.

We require the public to register online. You can register at www.neighbourhoodwatchscotland.co.uk



BOGUS CALLERS / WORKMEN IN LINLITHGOW AREA

Unfortunately with the coming of bad weather and the festive period we have been receiving a rise in calls regarding doorstep crime in the Linlithgow area. If you feel threatened, unsafe or suspicious of a caller then contact police immediately.

MY MONEY? MY INFO? I DON'T THINK SO!

WINTER ROAD SAFETY

- >> Ensure your car is winter ready – are your tyres, brakes, windscreen wiper blades and windows free from defects and clean?
- >> Make sure all your lights are in working order.
- >> Be aware of changing road conditions. In severe weather increase your stopping distances.
- >> Drive too fast and you'll put yourself and others at risk.
- >> Prepare for longer journeys.

- >> Before setting off check local weather forecasts and heed warnings regarding bad weather.
- >> Don't use a mobile phone or any device which could distract you whilst driving.
- >> Drink driving – don't risk it.
- >> Keep safe while driving, visit – www.scotland.police.uk/festivesafety



KEEP SAFE WHILE DRIVING

TO CONTACT THE POLICE...

101 101 is the new number to contact the police when it's less urgent than 999.

Alternatively you can email westlothiancommunityeast@scotland.pnn.police.uk or pop into the police station at the library (Partnership Centre) and ask to speak to our Community officer, PC Murray.

Your Local Community
Police – Linlithgow
Website: www.scotland.police.uk
Twitter: @policescotland
Facebook: www.facebook.com/policescotland

WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR GARDEN



With the promise of vaccinations against Covid-19 and the fact that they can't take Spring away from us, we are beginning to feel more optimistic about the coming gardening season. From Boxing Day the Scottish government removed our essential retail status which we had enjoyed from the last weekend of May. So we have been back to 'call and collect' from our car park and some home deliveries with many of us furloughed. As you read this we are hoping that the garden centre will soon burst into life, as nature is about to burst forth. Meantime what's going on in your garden and what might you be planning to do this spring?

We hope that you managed to plant some spring flowering bulbs in the autumn, although the huge demand for them created a bit of a shortage. It's too late to plant these bulbs now, but you can buy them already growing in pots.

There are plenty of other plants for your pots available now: winter flowering heathers and seasonal plants like primroses as well as evergreen dwarf shrubs and hardy perennials.



If you are itching to get growing again why not try some indoor edible crops? We have a recipe list (*purple piglet project*) full of suggestions of what to grow as sprouting seeds, cut-and-come-again salad crops in pots or herbs to force into growth.



If it's a bit chilly to venture out for too long why not pick some winter blooms to float in a bowl indoors? Besides picking Oriental Hellebores why not try some of these blooms: camellias, magnolia, fragrant *Viburnum* or *Cherry Blossom*?

Let's hope that times will seem a bit more normal in a few months, but we think many of us will avoid too much travelling and staycations will remain safer options.



Our gardens will continue to be an important part of our daily lives but we hope that soon it will be safe to invite family and friends in to enjoy our gardens with us.

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New Hopetoun Gardens

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than just a
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**HOPEFULLY WE'LL BE ABLE TO OPEN
SO YOU CAN VISIT US THIS MONTH.**

IF NOT WE'LL BE OFFERING 'CALL AND COLLECT'
FROM OUR CARPARK & HOME DELIVERIES
CALL 01506 834433 10AM TO 5PM



A WEE WHILE BACK I PUT MYSELF UP FOR BECOMING A BOG POET...

To avoid any misunderstanding, Bog Poets are not people who can only start scribbling their verses after sinking up to their knees in swampy ground. No, no... Bog Poets have the fruits of their creativity displayed in toilets, ideally public conveniences. There isn't an aspiring Bog Poet anywhere in the country who doesn't dream of having their work framed and displayed on the walls of a cludgie somewhere.

So, I drew up a blank sheet of paper (not supplied by Andrex), unzipped my pencil and decided to compose a short verse about an illustrious fellow-Scot, David Hume, who was father of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Hume, who for reasons not entirely clear, decided to change his name from 'Home', was a sceptic – a rather intimidating figure who refused to accept any view that wasn't backed up with underpinning proof. With this in mind I wrote my poem.

Davie Hume

*When Davie Hume walked
into a room,
He looked more frightening
than enlightening,
For although his clothes were
perfectly respectable,
He wore a look that was
always sceptical,
He changed his name,
but to be perfectly honest,
His pals still knew him as
Doubting Thomas.*

I fired it off then sat back waiting my genius to be recognised. After a few weeks of hearing nothing, I began thinking that maybe no one at the Bog Poets Society had ever heard of David Hume. That's not surprising: even Scots can be ignorant of the giant figures who left their mark on history. So, I decided to submit another short verse this time in a more modern idiom, and foregoing any silly attempt at making it rhyme.

My New Kettle (£39.99)

*Strong as a battleship,
Designed like a trophy,
My new kettle arrived,
Along with an instruction manual,
In eight different languages,
Saying how to pour boiling water,
On a teabag,
Worth less than a penny.*

I'm still waiting for a reply to that one as well. I think maybe the Bog Poets have washed their hands of me. But let me assure them, when it comes to writing stuff for lavatories I won't take it sitting down. I'm seriously thinking of not using a public convenience ever again. And if I do I'll be sure to have a black marker pen with me. There are more ways of writing on lavatory walls than the Bog Poets Society might imagine.

Kirk Gates



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163 HIGH STREET, LINLITHGOW

CALL: 07392 395690 9AM TO 3PM

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HOT-FILLED BREAKFAST ROLLS, HOMEMADE SOUP, TOASTIES,
COLD-FILLED ROLLS, HOME-BAKING, SPECIALITY TEAS AND COFFEE.**

PHONE HALF-AN-HOUR BEFOREHAND TO COLLECT AN ORDER AT DOOR.



Thank You Frontline Workers

The Line Gallery and Lorna Pirrie, an artist from Paisley are involved in an amazing initiative, called the "Frontline Thank You Project". The artist spearheaded this nationwide venture that thanks these workers and volunteers for their devotion and commitment during the Covid pandemic. She was inspired to launch the initiative last year, after learning of a similar project in England, and she approached The Line Gallery, to see if they would be interested in inviting artists who exhibit there to take part.



Many were, and the contributing artists **Elisabet Thorin, Ruth Nicol, Victoria Ross, Emma Boyd, Elaine Woo MacGregor, Lorna Pirrie, Amy Murray and Robert Powell** have been painting free portraits or other artworks, which they gift to those who have delivered care and support throughout this difficult time. Portraits have been commissioned and presented to their subjects, including police workers, NHS staff, care home workers and posties. An artist often has the ability to touch someone's emotions through art, and sharing that ability at this poignant time seemed an appropriate way to thank people for their work during the pandemic. Isn't it heart-warming to



hear of people giving up their time to produce art, and ultimately bringing joy to others?

An exhibition of the collected works is pencilled in for the spring at The Line Gallery, but given the current uncertainty this may be delayed until later in the year. Gail from the Gallery said *"The Line is proud to play its part in saying thank you to all of those who have kept the world turning during lockdown and beyond. An exhibition and the works themselves will allow artists and ourselves to say a big thank you in the language we best understand – through art"*.



The Line Gallery

Before the latest lockdown, I visited the Gallery and took the opportunity to have a chat with Gail. We talked about the difficulty of running the gallery with the restrictions in place, but it was clear that they are determined to fill the walls with Art come what may, and exhibitions will always be there when the Gallery can welcome visitors.



Being closed until late July threw their exhibition programme into chaos - they missed three shows which had been scheduled for a long time, and had to juggle to be able to give most artists an opportunity to show the work that had been made for Linlithgow.

Limiting footfall and being unable to hold opening events for each new exhibition has made things noticeably tougher. They have reconfigured the gallery layout to make it more difficult to congregate, and do ask people to 'move along' in a very friendly manner when necessary! They are also grateful that their audience has been very disciplined about wearing masks and social distancing.

Developing and maintaining an online presence became important for everyone and, in The Line's experience, widened the geographic spread of their audience considerably. They were supported by many of their artists in this endeavour, and created a virtual Postcards from The Line exhibition which resulted in sales throughout Scotland, England and mainland Europe.

Those who could provide a 'click and collect' service from their doorways did the whole High Street a great service by encouraging people to keep using the local shops and keeping the place alive.

Lockdown 2 in late November could not have come at a worse time for The Line. It was on the cusp of the end of one show and the beginning of another. Artists could neither pick up their work, nor deliver pieces for the new show. They were however delighted to open on December 11th even if it was only 13 days until December 24th. They were hugely cheered by the numbers of visitors who came to The Line, by their many, many declarations that they were glad to see them back open and by their determination to shop local. Shopping locally was a major feature of Christmas 2020, borne out by the sales from The Line.

Who knows when The Line can open again – they currently have a fantastic exhibition planned, which is being made especially for Linlithgow by Iona Leishman. Not only have they the continuing lockdown to contend with but Iona and her work are in Findhorn, so travel restrictions will impact. The whole programme for 2021 is in the balance – and normally they would be planning at least a year in advance to give artists time to make work.

In summary, Gail would like to say that Linlithgow has a fantastic High Street, each business benefitting from the busyness and activity of the others. She said *"we all need each other, and The Line is very happy to play its part. We will open as soon as we are able, and can assure you that The Line is going to be a feature on Linlithgow High Street for a good while yet"*. Here's hoping we can visit The Line very very soon.

It's continuing to be difficult to find subject matter for the Arts page – if you have any ideas, or you are an artist that would like to feature, please do get in touch - patswan@virginmedia.com. I hope you have time to experience some ART over the next few weeks, albeit it's likely to be online.







QUOTE OF THE MONTH
"painting is silent poetry"

star barber

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IT'S JUST A CUP OF COFFEE ...



How many cups of coffee do you enjoy a day? Or a week? It's easy, isn't it - just put some coffee in a cup, boil a kettle, and there you are. Simple!

But have you thought about the story behind your coffee, or whether you'll find it just as easy to enjoy a cup of coffee in 10 years' time? Because coffee is one of the crops which is particularly affected by climate change.

The coffee plant is very sensitive to rises in temperature. With a 1% rise, coffee quality is affected, while a 2% rise brings a significantly lower yield, and at 3% the plant struggles to even survive. Deforestation is also a factor. Clearing woodland for additional farmland or simply for firewood might seem a good idea in the short term, but longer term it contributes to climate change and robs coffee plants of essential shade and protection from extreme weather.

Zeddy Rotich, a coffee farmer in Kenya, says, *"Climate change is affecting us because the weather patterns have changed. We fear low coffee production in future because of it. But through Fairtrade we have received training on climate change and we are taking action. We need more tree nursery beds, so that we can plant more trees as a way of tackling climate change."* She has also received help to install a biogas stove, which uses fuel from animal dung instead of burning wood. So as well as preserving trees and no longer wasting a lot of her working day collecting firewood, she also has a by-product from the process to use as an organic fertiliser on her farm.

A recent report from the **Climate Institute and Fairtrade Australia** warned that 50% of the world's current coffee producing land will disappear by 2050 as temperatures rise, affecting the quality and ultimately threatening the very

survival of the plant. But it isn't just coffee that's under threat. Cocoa (essential for making chocolate), tea, bananas, and many more of our foodstuffs from the 'global south' are all beginning to be impacted by the effects of climate change. And there's nothing fair about climate change - overall, we in the industrialised north are least affected while the hardest hit are in the global south (South America, Africa, East Asia, etc) where many of our essential foodstuffs are grown. 21 people from Côte d'Ivoire, where cocoa is grown, have the same carbon footprint as one person in the UK. It's a sad fact that these small-scale farmers are among those who have contributed the least to the climate crisis, yet are already feeling the worst effects.

That's why Fairtrade has stepped in to help. Here, in Britain, many of us recognise the Fairtrade Mark and already know that Fairtrade supports small-scale farmers and community cooperatives by guaranteeing a fair minimum price, and giving additional 'cashback' to communities through the Fairtrade premium. But not many people know that for some time now the Fairtrade Foundation has been part of the Climate Coalition, a group of over 130 organisations across the UK, working towards a truly green and sustainable world.

It's because climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing small-scale farmers and producers that this is now a priority for Fairtrade. Fairtrade works alongside farmers and producers to offer practical advice and assistance, both to cope with the effects of climate change - by tackling soil erosion and reducing water usage - and to reduce their own carbon footprint - promoting reforestation to store carbon, encouraging growing trees and crops together, and avoiding

emissions by switching to locally-available green energy fuels.

In addition, they have created the **Fairtrade Carbon Credits Scheme**, in collaboration with Gold Standard, in which fairtrade farmers and producers who undertake initiatives to reduce the level of carbon in the atmosphere, perhaps by planting a new area of trees or changing to solar or wind power, can earn carbon credits. These can then be traded with companies elsewhere in the world who are net carbon producers, with the money received going back to the producer to be used for the benefit of the whole community.

So now, as well as going flat out to promote trade justice globally, Fairtrade is also campaigning and working practically to promote climate justice.



What can I do - here in Linlithgow, in 2021? First of all, continue taking steps to cut your own carbon footprint - conserving fuel, reducing travel, reducing consumption, avoiding waste, etc. People in every part of the world will benefit if we all reduce our impact. Secondly, everyone's lifestyle has been curtailed during the pandemic so, as we come out of it, resolve to make a change for good by buying less but buying better. With the Fairtrade Mark you know you are supporting farmers and workers to protect themselves against climate change. Thirdly, if you want to know more, sign up for regular email updates at <https://action.fairtrade.org.uk/page/55342/subscribe/1>

Fairtrade is more than a Mark on a product. It's a call for change.

Ian Fowell
Linlithgow Fairtrade
Partnership



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into the prize draw.

JANUARY COMPETITION

RIVER KIDS WEST LOTHIAN TOY APPEAL 2020 THANK YOU



In the last edition of the Black Bitch you will have seen that Playbugs was a collection point for River Kids West Lothian Toy Appeal. 2020 was certainly a tough year for many people and one we won't forget in a hurry. Playbugs has had to remain shut since March so it was nice to be able to give up a bit up time to operate a collection point for the town. It was great to get to see so many of our customers again and indeed, many more people in the community pop in to donate. One young child had made items to sell to raise money so he could buy toys to donate for the appeal. My neighbour and her colleagues at a school donated two big boxes full of toys, instead of a Secret Santa, which was a fantastic idea.

I know many people went out and bought new items from our local shops which is really appreciated by them during these difficult times. I also wanted to thank

several local businesses within the town who supported and donated to the cause, Bright Star Toys, Far From The Madding Crowd, Fair Tradewinds, Andy's Bike Clinic and Anne and Ian from Platform 3.

Speaking to Jack from the charity he told me that they had been referred over 600 children more this year. So a massive thank you for every single donation, it really made a difference to ensure they could support every child this Christmas.

Jack Christine from River Kids charity sent me this via email:

"I am writing to personally thank you for your support during this year's West Lothian Toy Appeal. With your help we were able to ensure that almost 2,000 children have a bag of toys to open on Christmas morning. To give you an idea of scale, we estimate that we have given out circa £80,000 of toys. A tremendous achievement by all of those involved!"



Thank you to David and the team behind the Black Bitch for sharing the appeal before Christmas and really great to see the community of Linlithgow giving what they could for others.

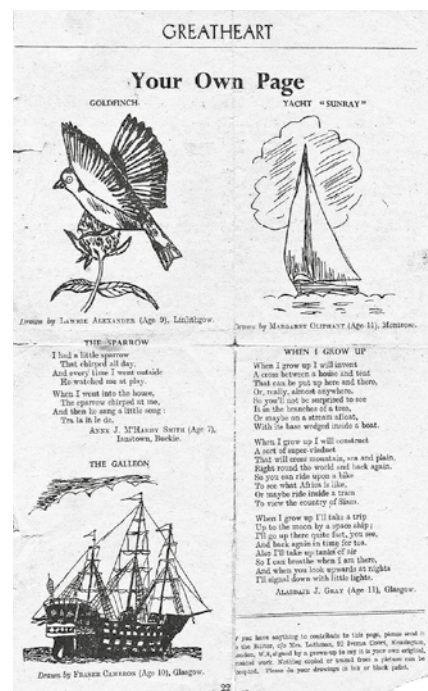
Mark Darragh
Playbugs Softplay
Linlithgow

GREATHEART *Reflections on the Scottish Artist - Alasdair J Gray* by Laurie Alexander



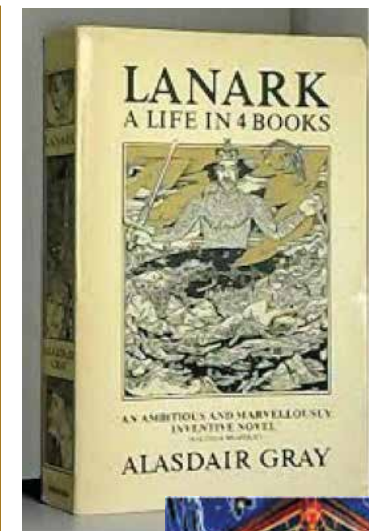
Rummaging through some long forgotten papers, I found the page shown below in an old church magazine which included a drawing I did 74 years ago. I was intrigued to see the poem 'When I grow up', written by 11 year old **Alasdair J Gray**, which, on reading, led me to conclude this was none other than the famous Scottish artist who died a year ago.

Gray was a multi-talented individual also being a successful author (first book was 'Lanark') who combined realism, fantasy and science fiction in his work. These traits are very much in evidence in his poem, even at that early age. He was a respected illustrator and did countless murals in Glasgow, at stations etc.



Included here are a few examples of his work, which can also be seen on the web pages:

https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt/or.thealasdaigrayarchive.org





The Shale Trail is a new 16-mile waymarked trail across West Lothian, linking sites, features and communities relating to the area's rich shale oil heritage.

The trail stretches from West Calder in the south-west to Winchburgh in the north-east and features new interactive interpretation that digs into the heaps of history which lies under our green footpath network.

At the centre of this history of the shale industry in Scotland is **James Young**, born in Glasgow in 1811, who would become what could be described as the first oil baron in the world. Young, the son of a cabinet maker, grew up in a Scotland yet to be touched by the industrial revolution sweeping through England.

Young was born into a period when the power of water was giving way to steam, and the handlooms spinning in homes throughout Scotland gave way to steam-powered looms.

The bedrock of this all-encompassing change was literally found in the ground. Scotland in the carboniferous period was not like it is today where the air can hurt your face but bathed in tropical sunshine as it was located on the equator. A vast tropical lagoon – LAKE CADELL – stretched through central Scotland. Something very special occurred at this time. The surrounding primitive plants later



became coal deposits, but in the centre of this vast lake, which is now West Lothian, tidal currents deposited fine silt and plant debris, the organic materials creating oil shale which James Young would exploit in the industrial age.

Young patented a method of heating coal in a retort furnace, using a particular type of coal found in Bathgate – CANNEL COAL – to produce oil vapour, which was collected for refining. The Bathgate Chemical Works was one of the first commercial oil works in the world. When the supply of cannel coal ran out, Young moved to using shale, setting up Addiewell Refinery in 1863. To feed the refinery, mining needed to produce a constant supply of oil-bearing shale, as well as coal.

From the first oil works, West Lothian was transformed into a network of mines, railways and villages built to house the people who flooded in to work in the new industry. The oil industry expanded, with refineries being built throughout the area, in places such as Pumpherston and Winchburgh. Grangemouth refinery is the last remnant of the once great industry that slowly declined and all but disappeared by the 1960's.

Today, only a few of the miners' rows still exist, and many villages have disappeared completely. But the industry still dominates the landscape of West Lothian in the Bings that tower

over the landscape built from the smouldering waste shale one truck at a time.



The Shale Trail will be completed in January 2021 and has been supported by West Lothian LEADER Programme and National Lottery Heritage Fund. This is an inspiring project that links local communities to their industrial past and creates a walking history trail that enables people of all ages to explore and learn about how the past shale history in West Lothian has shaped local landscapes, our economy, and today's natural environment.

To find the route and drop into the local history, visit our website <https://shaletrail.co.uk/>.



Heath Brown



The Scottish Government has allowed the property industry to continue operating through both the pre- Christmas and January 2021 lockdowns, subject to adopting covid protection measures.

So the property market is still moving but it is a slightly more muted market this January compared to recent years.

Predictions for house prices in 2021

The property market experienced a small boom in 2020, and we would like to know what might happen to house prices in the coming year. Whilst nobody knows for sure, Rightmove, the country's biggest property portal by far, is predicting that the recent surge in average asking prices will continue into this year, as the nation's housing needs are likely to outweigh any economic uncertainty. They forecast a 4% national average house price growth in 2021, but they think that the price rises will be at a slower pace than in 2020, which finished 6.6% up on 2019.

At Paul Rolfe we think that the latest lockdown has only temporarily subdued the housing market, and once it is lifted by the end of January activity will pick up. New Year is typically a time for resolutions for the year ahead, and many will see it as an opportunity to draw a line under 2020, which may well include a fresh start in a new home for those who have not already acted.

Perhaps a key indicator of this is the fact that the property portal Zoopla reported a rise of 70.5% in traffic to its website on Boxing Day, and that property searches on its website up from 1st December until 26th December were 33% higher than the same period in 2019.

The LBTT Stamp Duty holiday on property purchases up to £250,000, due to end on the 31st March will continue to drive demand.

Short Term Holiday Lets, (AirBNB)

The Scottish Government published its draft legislation for the regulation of the short term holiday let market on the 17th December and aims to make it effective from the 1st April 2021. The key points of the legislation are that all owners of holiday let properties will need to apply for a licence and pass a "fit and proper person" test.

Secondly, local authorities will be given the powers to impose controlled areas, in which planning permission would need to be sought to get permission for a change of use for a property from long term lets to holiday lets. Properties already used for holiday let purposes will not require this permission, but their owners will still need to apply for a licence.



HELLO 2021! IT MAY BE A SLOW START TO THE NEW YEAR, BUT IT IS STILL A NEW START WITH MANY GOOD FUN MILES TO GO.

With full lockdown currently in place for a while yet, it does not mean Skin Happy stops or that your skin care routine or my help goes out the window.

SKIN HAPPY CONTINUES TO WORK VIA OUR ONLINE PLATFORMS:

- **ONLINE SHOP** for purchasing 'At Home products and Kits.'
- **FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM** for information on our treatments along with all the latest up-to-date information regarding COVID-19 re-opening dates.
- **VIRTUAL CONSULTATIONS** have already re-commenced (and will be free during lockdown until 15th Feb). To discuss new treatment options or how you can start a new skin care routine.

INTRODUCING ALUMIER MD.

Also, as we start 2021, we are pleased to formally announce the introduction of our new medical grade skin care products and in-clinic services from Alumier MD. **Medical grade skin care works wonders for problematic skin, maintains good youthful skin, and slows the onset of ageing skin.**

Skin Happy only invests in clinically proven and medical grade equipment and products that work and at the tail end of last we teamed up with Alumier MD.

Alumier MD are an award-winning medical grade skin care line, that believe in clean chemistry. They deliver corrective percentages

(explained in the 'Why' below) of medical grade ingredients which allow us to target skin conditions all whilst maintaining elegant formulations. This means the products are not only corrective but pleasant to use. They also provide a comprehensive chemical peel portfolio which Skin Happy can use to hyper customise protocols to suit your skin type and condition during in clinic treatment.

WHY ARE MEDICAL GRADE PRODUCTS BETTER?

Free from parabens, sulphates, dyes, artificial fragrances and over 1500 other ingredients purposely excluded, **Alumier MD use clean chemistry to produce corrective formulas to restore health and improve the appearance of multifaceted skin conditions such as Rosacea, Acne, Hyperpigmentation, Ageing skin and more.**

Most products that can be bought off the shelf do not contain enough of these corrective/active ingredients to gain a true result. For example, they may have incredibly low percentages, less than 1% or an inactive ingredient. These products will struggle to achieve what they claim. Medical grade products have varying percentages and can have for example 5% or 15% of a corrective ingredient to achieve corrective results. Medical grade products need to be prescribed by a trained professional only. (That's me! Tina at Skin Happy).

The results are amazing and can be life changing for clients with previously problematic skin. Skin Happy can provide medical grade skin care treatments in clinic as well as 'At Home products and Kit's'.

LOCKDOWN SELF-CARE

During lockdown when in-clinic treatments are not available, we are delighted to announce we have 'At Home kits' available to purchase online after a consultation. You can either start your skin care routine or maintain and gain upon results you were achieving in clinic. We can advise on whole kits or 1 product to start with, whilst you finish what you are already using. You can purchase the additional product(s) when you are ready.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

If you really want to kick start your skin care off to a brighter, clearer year - **book a consultation.** We can set you up on the online portal (which is open 24/7). All your prescribed products will be there ready for you to purchase or top up whenever you choose.

ALUMIER MD INTRODUCTORY OFFER. We are launching a special introductory offer for the 1st 10 clients who prebook an in-clinic Alumier MD treatment ready for when we re-open. Keep checking our online platforms. Information on this, coming soon.

COMING UP IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THE BLACK BITCH MAGAZINE:

Skin Awareness, how to self-scan your skin at home, when to seek help and how we are working with **SCREEN CANCER UK** to provide a **SCANNING SERVICE** of your moles/lesions.

Return your skin back to radiance, helping you to feel confident, carefree, and skin happy.

Visit our website to book your consultation and to find out more.

Tina Arnot



FIGHTING FIRE IN LINLITHGOW PART ONE

Bruce Jamieson



*Linlithgow's Fire Station
off the Kirkgate*

Linlithgow has suffered several disastrous fires over the centuries, including the blazes that destroyed or badly damaged the original manor house and the later Palace of the Stewart monarchs, the Burgh Halls, the Grammar School and the Star and Garter Hotel. I thought it would be interesting to have a look at how these blazes were tackled and, in the next article, how the present Fire Brigade - celebrating 50 years in their present HQ - has changed over the last 120 years.

In 1424, King James I arrived back in Linlithgow, after 18 years captivity in England, to find his royal manor house, and indeed much of the burgh, in smouldering ruins following an attack by an English army.

Early buildings, being largely made of timber frames with straw thatching, were forever catching fire and King James passed a law stating that "nae hemp, lint, straw, hay, heather or broom shud be placet near a fire." Further acts insisted that dwellings should be roofed with slate, lead or tile and bakers and brewers should remove "all heather, broom, whins and other fuel in the vennels and closes of the town."

If a building did catch fire, the only available fire-fighting method was the Burgh Bucket Brigade who formed a human chain, passing containers filled with water from the loch or



*The present station celebrating
50 years of service*

a High Street well. To this end, all Linlithgow householders were ordered to keep a leather bucket in a readily accessible position. Later, a kind of large syringe called a squirt was used but it was pretty ineffectual. In many cases, all that could be done if a fire caught hold was to demolish the adjacent properties and create a firebreak.



Early fire-fighting

After the 1652 Great Fire of Glasgow that destroyed one third of the city, further legislation was passed including a banning of indoor bread ovens. Linlithgow still has a 17th century oven, placed outdoors for safety, in the garden of 46 High Street.



*The outdoor baker's oven is
now very overgrown*

Throughout the 18th century, fire-fighting provision in Linlithgow was very limited. Householders were expected to control any fire occurring in their premises through their own efforts and those of their neighbours. Of course, nothing was done to stop the conflagration that occurred in the Palace on February 1st, 1746. Government troops, who had encamped in the building overnight, dashed off to deal with a possible Jacobite incident, leaving their campfires still burning and, despite the protestations of the Keeper, Mrs Glen Gordon, no help was forthcoming when the building caught fire and the result was the ruin we see today.

By the end of the 18th century, some residents were wealthy enough to register with one of the emerging Fire Insurance Companies who, for a fee, would provide fire fighting – as long as the premises they were attending to bore a badge to prove that they had joined the organisation. One of these badges, bearing the Sun Fire Insurance Company logo, is still attached to the wall of 77 High Street.



*A 1975 photo of 77 High Street
(the white building)*



A Sun Insurance plaque. The Linlithgow one is numbered 773984 but has been painted over

Despite their slightly more sophisticated equipment, the Insurance Brigades had obvious deficiencies. The fire fighters were largely untrained and, worse still they would not deal with any fire in an unregistered building.

In the 19th century, local authorities began to take a more proactive interest in fire precautions. Linlithgow Town Council passed legislation to curb the growing incidence of chimney fires by imposing a fine. Householders were encouraged to have their chimneys regularly cleaned and chimney sweeps were employed to do the work. Although there is some evidence of climbing boys being used in Scotland to descend the chimney and remove soot and creosote, the more usual method was to lower a weighted brush on a rope. Regular cleaning was expensive and inconvenient and so the cry often went up across Linlithgow of "Hey Missus, yer lum's up."



A chimney sweep by local photographer Robert Braid

The town did possess a "Water Engine", initially kept in a small building constructed in 1808 adjoining the Kirkgate Arch. This enabled the cumbersome machine with its heavy water tank to be

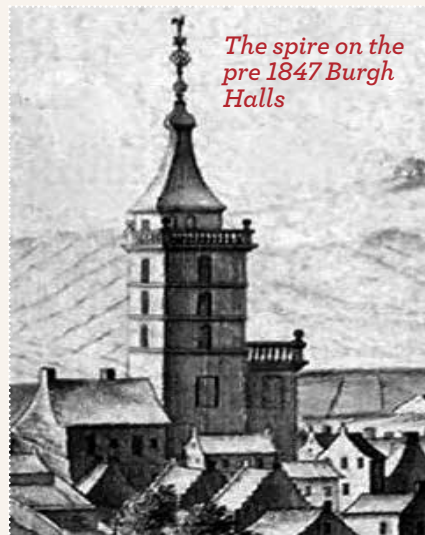
manually propelled downhill by part time firemen and members of the public.



The fire station drawn in 1835

The structure is visible on Woods 1820 map but sixteen years later, following a complaint that the "garage" had been built without the permission of the "King's Architect", the building had to be demolished and the fire fighting appliance moved to a booth in the Flesh Market (in the Masonic Hall area.) It was later moved to the building shown at the top of this article, at the foot of the Kirkgate, under the Burgh Halls.

The lack of an efficient fire brigade was brought home in July 1847 when the Burgh Halls went up in flames. It was thought that a thick pane of bull's eye glass had magnified the sun's rays and ignited "lumber, papers and rags in the garret". For many hours, fairly inadequate fire fighting went on using the town engine (which broke down) and one from Dawson's distillery. To reach the roof of the adjoining County Building, the old method of a bucket-chain had to be employed. The result was considerable damage to several rooms, the loss of the town bell and clock and the complete collapse of the roof and the 17th century spire with its weathercock.



The spire on the pre 1847 Burgh Halls

The fire, the failure of the town engine and the fact that Edinburgh had set up a proper fire brigade, prompted a desire in Linlithgow for a permanent, efficient fire-fighting force. It took several years before one was established and, although better trained than previous "firefighters", the early 20th century firemen were not full time.



LINLITHGOW STREET TREES - PUBLIC CONSULTATION BEING CALLED



As reported previously, in 2019, a grant of £53,300 from the Scottish Government's Town Centre Fund was awarded to Linlithgow Burgh Trust for more trees in the High Street. Owing to various delays, the Government extended the time limit for expenditure to be committed to March 2021 and, working towards this deadline, much work has been done over the past few months. The project is overseen by a committee of Linlithgow Burgh Trust but is managed by West Lothian Council which, in November 2020, appointed DWA Landscape Architects as consultants. Public comment is now being sought regarding locations and species for the trees. This article introduces the project and details how interested individuals can respond.

DWA Landscape Architects have summarised the project's objectives as follows:

"The intention of the project is to further improve the character of the town centre and to promote a green way of living for the townspeople of Linlithgow whilst also helping to encourage a sustainable

townscape. The introduction of further trees within the street will help to reduce CO2 levels in the town centre, reduce the effects of heat retention, encourage bird and wildlife and generally create a more pleasant atmosphere within the town for social congregation and interaction."

An overview plus seven landscape strategy drawings, running from West Port to Low Port, set out draft proposals for 27 trees. Public response will determine their final numbers and locations, taking into account how far the funds will stretch for the necessary construction of tree pits and size of trees to be purchased. In order that an attractive degree of consistency can be achieved, the tree types cover a small range and are mainly of the slender fastigate variety. A montage shows the potential for new trees on the south side of the High Street.

Three broad categories have been identified for opportune locations by Linlithgow Burgh Trust. These include:

Type A - 8 new trees into areas of soft landscape, such as at the Health Centre, Regent Centre and on the raised ground between St Ninian's flats.

Type B - 7 new trees into renovated existing disused tree pits, such as at

West Port, The Vennel and to replace the 'banner pole' by The Cross.

Type C - 12 new trees into newly formed tree pits at various locations along the High Street, including two in front of the Partnership Building, six on the south side east of The Cross and two slightly east of the Star and Garter Hotel.

The public is invited to view the proposals on Linlithgow Burgh Trust's website at www.lbt.scot/consultation where will be found a questionnaire for giving comments plus drawings and information about the tree species. A display will also appear in Linlithgow DIY front window.

Completed Questionnaires can be submitted online as per the guidelines stated on the website or sent to Averil Stewart, Group Leader, Linlithgow Street Trees, 29 Highfield Crescent, Linlithgow EH49 7BG by 14 February 2021.

If everything goes to plan, contracts will be in place by 31 March with planting in autumn 2021.

Averil Stewart

Group Leader/Project Manager,
Linlithgow Street Trees and Vennel
Improvements Committee,
Linlithgow Burgh Trust

The Sarispa Thirteen

C. R. Coen

Written by a local Linlithgow author, The Sarispa Thirteen comes as part one of a young adult dramatic, multi-dimensional trilogy called The Order of the Thirteen. Moving through space, time and interplanetary galaxies, the novel's blurb outlines "it is the unseen, untold story of ancient, intergalactic beings on Earth."

The novel opens with the main protagonist, Dharma, boarding a terrestrial flight from Indira airport, New Delhi, en route to an important rendezvous at the Intergalactic Federation's subterranean Brodgar Counter Intergalactic Terrorist (C.I.T.) base on the Scottish island of Orkney. Dharma is only minutes into her journey when she realises that her identity as a captain in the Intergalactic Federation's pool of elite agents is compromised. Her finely tuned telepathic abilities alert her to the close proximity of her enemies and she senses a threat from an unidentified, concealed – and therefore highly dangerous – member of the ancient Sarispa dinosaur race.

Dharma is forced to make a daring escape from the airplane mid-flight, into the intergalactic matrix, in order to save the lives of the unassuming human passengers on board but it comes at a high cost to the Federation as Dharma inadvertently weakens the protection around the base and the agents concealed inside.

"Dharma's gaze was drawn from Ashtar's golden glow to a female member of the Council. It wasn't the long emerald blue cloak or the exquisite ancient jewel on her forehead, the lady's hologram appeared to be stuck in a time loop, the slightest repeating flinch of her hand... In a heartbeat, a reptilian claw reached out from the matrix and transformed it's cellular shape."

The remainder of the novel follows the stoically intelligent Dharma and her specially selected team of agents on a highly coveted, vitally important mission to banish the deadly Sarispa ancients from Earth and to prevent them from regenerating and rebooting to



wreak increasing havoc on future generations. The failure of the Federation agents would come at too high a price – the continued existence of the Earth depends on their success.

Coen winds global, historical facts, figures and geography from both past and present generations into her novel. She uses these as a foundation and backdrop against the rapid changes experienced in the technology, climate and interpersonal relationships of our current society providing readers with a cautionary tale against commercialism, consumerism and the dangers of monopolies of government, media and finance. More than once, I found myself reflecting and rereading passages from the text and appreciating how events, people and places were interwoven into the complex timeline of the narrative.

"The mesoamerican pyramid, now known as the Pyramid of the Moon, still to this day proudly stands on Earth. The millions of years since their first voyages, roaming the land as dinosaurs, had served the Sarispa well, they were now some of the most advanced beings in the universe."

In broad terms, science fiction is a genre that typically explores imaginative and futuristic concepts such as advanced science and technology, space exploration, time travel, parallel universes, and extraterrestrial life. Taking this as a starting point, C. R. Coen delivers all of this and more through her imaginative, inventive and fast paced first novel which could be enjoyed by young adults and adults alike.

Lisa Nettleton

Lisa Nettleton is a teacher and enjoys reading on her daily rail commute into Edinburgh



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Westport Vet Pet of the Month is Oscar McMeechan, an 8-year-old Maltese.

Oscar's owner describes him as a cute, loving and loyal dog. He is very much a creature of habit, liking his two dinners and walks on time. Following surgery to repair his cruciate he still enjoys a wander to catch up with his neighbours and meeting new friends.

Being a pampered pooch, Oscar likes to drink his water from the bathroom sink standing on his owner's knee! His favourite toys are soft with 'Piggy' and 'Bernie' his most loved. Oscar is a very gentle dog and loves to share nap time with the grandkids who he adores. Other happy places include the cooling hallway or cuddled up on the sofa for the afternoon.

His owner says that Oscar has given him great comfort over lockdown since he lost his wife suddenly in September. Oscar gives him a sense of routine and responsibility, continually proving that dogs really are man's best friend!

With the New Year comes the traditional 'New Year's Resolutions'. Have you considered making some with your pets? Vet checks are required more frequently as pets age and although we may have had restrictions to routine health checks in 2020, there are lots of ways you can check pets at home. If this is not something you do already, it is worth factoring this into 2021 - make it a resolution!

Things for owners to monitor in their pets:

>> **Daily routine** - changes in their toileting, sleeping or eating.

>> **Behaviour** - changes to their anxiety levels, activity levels. Are they more clingy than normal or possibly choose to have more space away from the family? Also consider the way they may behave around people, other animals and the environment.

>> **Body Condition** - changes to their coat, perhaps they are grooming themselves less (started to matt in a particular area), their coat has become dull or hair loss. Body movements - getting stiff in the mornings or after walks, changes where they find comfortable to rest or any changes in movement when they walk or use stairs.

>> **Weight** - ensuring your pet is not overweight can have significant benefits for health and lifespan. Often pets' weight can increase without owners being aware until they have a weight check or a vet check. Check your pets, can you feel their ribs without applying pressure and do they go inwards at the waist? Extra weight puts huge pressure and strain on their joints so can have a passive impact over time to how these joints and skeleton cope.

>> **Diet** - weigh out their food. Is this diet still suitable? Life stage foods are available to best maintain your pet's health.

>> **Physical checks** - a key check is dental checks. Westport Vets can help you with this task, and we have a simple video available online. Dental health can have major implications to physical and mental health for our pets. Major organs can be infected by poor dental health, including the kidneys, heart, lungs and liver.

Environmental enrichment is important for pets at any age but particularly with older pets. Providing play sessions, new



Hello
I'M OSCAR

toys, and even training can help enrich older pets mentally. For example, playing a new game, maybe you could hide a treat somewhere for them to find. This extra interaction benefits both pet and human!

On physically shorter walks allow older dogs plenty of time to sniff or explore. This is beneficial to their sensory function.

The Westport Team is always here to help, offer support, guidance and advise. If you would like to discuss how you can help maintain their best health, please contact us at surgery@westportvets.com

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