

Glens Report for McNabb Laurie 5 June 2023

Voices from the Glens

John Burns

Like many people in The Stewartry I grew up in a Scots-speaking household, something which I just accepted as normal. I knew that if I was speaking to someone like the doctor or the minister I had to tone it down a bit and speak very clearly in a language that was closer to “proper English”. That was just part of normal growing up and entering the world beyond family. When I went to primary school in 1960 this sense of having two languages, the family language and the language used in the grown-up world of learning and “getting on”, was made even more pronounced. We even had a text-book called *The King’s English* from which we learned how to express ourselves in perfectly modulated English. Unlike some who went to school in earlier times I was never belted for using Scots words or pronunciations, but I was certainly corrected on many occasions. For some reason I did not find it difficult to speak Scots at home and write English at school. Like many Scots I would consider myself bilingual. I learned not to write Scots words like “wee” or “hame”, but when it came to speech it was much harder to ignore them.

I well remember once when I was in “the wee room” which faced the local hill Bengairn and I was asked by the teacher if I knew the name of the hill which we saw outside the window every day of our lives. I knew it was called Bengairn . Now, my dad often worked outside in the gairden and I knew that the gairden and the garden were actually the same thing but one was posher than the other, so after a bit of thought as to how to answer I said, “Yes, miss, Ben Garden.” The class erupted in scathing laughter and I realised that in attempting to use what I thought was “correct” pronunciation, I had distorted the name and given a ridiculous answer. This led to a lasting embarrassment.

That kind of embarrassment or cultural cringe is something that many of us have felt and it is based on a lack of confidence in our own language, something that has long been bolstered by our education system. The Scottish Government has now made great strides forward in trying to improve the status of Scots in schools yet many Scots are still haunted by the mistaken idea that Scots is just poor English. Until very recently the use of Scots was really only encouraged in schools around Burns Night in late January. And even then it was often restricted to recitations of poems or songs learned by rote and probably only half-understood. This was a terrible fate for a writer of Robert Burns’s

world stature, and it sold our children short. Many of us took years to come back to Burns, or just forgot all about him. Nowadays, there is a concerted effort to bring Scots back into the classroom, to teach and learn poems, songs, stories that are lively and relevant to the lives of all pupils living in Scotland. Scots can now even be heard on the BBC where programmes like *Chewin' the Fat*, *Still Game*, and *Off the Ball* among others regularly use and encourage the use of Scots vocabulary and accents from aw the airts. Often this is done for comic effect but it has done a lot to help people understand there is nothing wrong with their own language. The important thing is how you use it.

So, Scots is not bad English. It is a language that has produced one of the world's great literatures, and it was once the language of the royal court as well as the language of the law courts. Kings spoke and wrote in Scots. Even famous judges and politicians spoke and wrote in Scots. It had a social status that began to decline seriously after the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. The translation of the Bible into English rather than Scots, and the decision of the great writers of the Scottish Enlightenment choosing to write in English instead of Scots further weakened the status of the language. Indeed, several of those world-renowned Enlightenment philosophers, historians, and economists were so nervous of being ridiculed for their language that they had their works checked for Scotticisms before publication. Nowadays it seems astonishing that writers of the importance of David Hume or Adam Smith were so lacking in confidence in their own mother tongue.

Yet, think about your own attitude to the use of Scots. Think about your own ability confidently to write a letter, an email, or, God forbid, something as extravagant as a poem or a song in Scots. Many of us are happy to sing along with a weel-kent folk song in the pub but many of us would be hesitant to attempt to write in what for many of us is our own language. The simple fact that extended writing in Scots has fallen away over the last three hundred years means that the status of Scots has fallen lower and lower in the eyes of the public. Indeed several people pointed out that they did not recognise the written form of a word on our questionnaire but knew it immediately when they heard it read out. Words are often not recognised because Scots does not have a regular spelling system and every attempt to agree on one descends very quickly into heated arguments.

But ask that same public to discuss, remember, or defend the words they use and you are met with a vehement outpouring in favour of the "old" words. People are genuinely fascinated by language and by the nuances of meaning, social class, and social attitudes enshrined in these words. Scots has been

“dying” for hundreds of years but it still lies at the heart of our speech and many of our ideas of class and status. And it is still being revived by young people today who maybe don’t know the “old” words but are busy making up new ones to fit the world they are growing up in.

We may suffer from a bit of a cultural cringe where language is concerned, but we are fascinated by it all the same. As part of this project I produced a questionnaire asking if certain words were known or unknown to those who filled it in. Another column asked whether those who knew a certain word actually used it, because all of us have active and passive vocabularies. There are many words we know and understand but, for various reasons, are never called upon to use. One of the people I interviewed knew most of the words on the questionnaire but no longer used many of them. When she no longer lived on a farm or spoke to farm workers, she had no need for many of the farm-based words. Words, she was reminding me, do not exist in a vacuum, but exist and are used within specific contexts. The questionnaire was loosely-based on Riach’s *A Galloway Glossary*, published in 1988. That was a fairly comprehensive academic study of our local vocabulary. The Glens questionnaire on the other hand was a more personal affair. Most of the words on it are words I use in my daily life though one or two are a bit more abstruse.

The questionnaire was received with a great deal of interest. Originally I had intended to use it as part of a conversation with people I interviewed, but when word of it got out people contacted the Galloway Glens office to pick up copies, to fill them in and return them, often with annotations and explanations added. Those who filled in the questionnaire then were really a self-selecting group of people who thought the topic was an important one. It was obvious from the discussion about the words on the sheet even just in my own family that people were very interested and heavily invested in what they often described as “the auld Scots words” despite the fact that they were in fact confirming that many of the “auld” words were still very much in use. The questionnaire indeed gave many people a great deal of pleasure as well as food for thought as they discussed exactly what a word meant, remembered it being used by family members now no longer living, or just explained it to younger family members who had never heard it. This kind of engagement within families or groups of friends is a vital and valuable thing. During the Covid pandemic in 2020, several people reported discussing it on Zoom or Face Time when unable to visit family members. It may have been about words and language in this instance but such inter-generational engagement even if only for an hour or two can help alleviate loneliness and isolation and bring people together and remind us how language binds us together.

That said, there were one or two things I wish I had made clearer on the sheet. I had deliberately not given context or definitions in case that led people in a certain direction. This meant, though, that a couple of words caused problems. “Back enn” was taken by some people to mean the rear of something, when in fact it really refers in Scots to Autumn, the back end of the year. And “gully” was sometimes understood as in English to refer to a cleft between rocks or a deep valley. It is the word my granny always used for a big knife, a carving knife. Indeed my sister-in-law came out with it in this sense just last week. And she is younger than me, so it is still in use. Two other words were deliberately put in though I suspected they might be relatively rare: “gaun-body” and “through-bin”. A “gaun-body” is a tramp, someone who wanders the countryside, and a “through-bin” is a long stone that goes through a drystone dyke to help tie it together. We rarely see tramps of that kind nowadays, and only people on farms or working with stone are likely to think about through-bins.

Looking at the data from my self-selecting group it is clear that there has been a decline in the use of Scots vocabulary items over the last century. If we look briefly at the charts for those born in the 1920s and those born after 1970, roughly a fifty year period, the number of words not known goes up considerably. And if they are not known they are not used.

Some words are still very much in use, including:

Blether: to talk/chat informally

Clart: to cover something roughly (generally with mud)

Cowp: to tip over, the Council Recycling Centre

Dreich: dreary

Glaikit: singularly stupid

Oxter: the armpit

Some words which have fallen out of use surprised me because, to me, they are still very present and I hear them all the time as I go about my daily life:

Stravaig: an aimless wander

Dwam: away in a dwam, away in a dream or world of one's own

Fley: a fright

Lowp: to jump

Howk: to dig

Two words that were well known to the older generation but seem to have fallen out of use are “jaup” and “jaw”. Jaup is to spurt, as in the hot fat is “jaupin oot o the fryin pan”. To “jaw” water is to throw it quickly out of a cup or bucket.

Other words that seem to be on the way out are perhaps less surprising:

Peeweet: lapwing. A bird that is no longer common here.

Gaun-body: a tramp

Stankey: a moor-hen

Trauchle: a weary trudge. Trauchled = exhausted

Interestingly one of the words that people marked increasingly as “don’t know” was “stenter”, a clothes pole. This word, which I have always used and which is still used routinely by many of us who hang out our washing to dry, seems to be a fairly recent addition to the vocabulary of Scots according to the dictionary. It is also noted as being a Kirkcudbrightshire word.

People born in the 1940s and 1950s still seem to be strongly attached to many of the words on the questionnaire before usage seems to decline in the active vocabulary of those born in the 1960s and the 1970s. Obviously there are many reasons for this. This was the time when television ownership became gradually more widespread. Television and radio, especially when broadcast by the BBC, favoured Received Pronunciation over regional accents. Cinema and Hollywood glamour also had a huge influence in convincing us that the way we spoke was somehow less socially acceptable. And now, despite many advances in our attitude to local dialects and to Scots in particular, English has become the dominant language on the internet. Many of us will have spent an entertaining hour or two trying to utilise some computer-based voice-recognition system which just cannot deal with a Scottish accent never mind a Scots-inflected vocabulary. Jings!

The cultural cringe, though, seems to be still going strong. We love to see these words printed on a tea-towel or on a mug but because of outmoded social conventions, feel we cannot say them out loud. We need to remember that language is there for communication. We should be able to use appropriate

language in appropriate situations to aid rather than block communication. It was pleasing to receive comments from people who had moved into the Glens area and were fascinated by the language they heard around them. Pleasing because this spoke of an implied inclusivity.

Spoken without embarrassment and delivered honestly any language carries the dignity of its speaker. I hope this is what comes across in the clips I want to share with you from those brave souls who agreed to be interviewed by me. I am indebted to every one of them and would like to thank them for their time, their generosity, and their patience. It was a learning process for them and for myself. As the interviews went on they grew more confident and developed their comments more fully while I learned (I hope) to shut up and stop butting-in. Language is a fluid medium and one thing you will hear very clearly in these clips is the way that every one of us moved seamlessly from Scots to English and back again. Sometimes within one sentence. Sometimes with the same word. In one short exchange, Agnes McQueen referred to her father as “dad”, “faither”, and “fether”. Language is a living thing. It’s about communicating, being connected to others. And those connections are vitally important. None of us nowadays is unconnected, though it is sometimes not easy to gain access to those connections.. Many living in this area have been away for work or education. Some have been abroad in the Services, Many of us have relatives abroad who bring new words to our vocabulary. Again, as Agnes McQueen implied, words do not exist in a vacuum. There is always a human context.

The second aspect of the project was to use the recordings to contribute to a social history of the Galloway Glens. Again, this is not an academic study, but a response to what ordinary people said about their lives. By “ordinary” I do not mean any disrespect but rather to highlight the fact that these particular voices represent a spectrum of experience gained by living in this area. To this end the questions asked ranged from gaining a biographical overview of someone’s life to asking what they remembered about areas such as school, work, holidays, recreation, the changes they have seen. The interviews were set to begin in early 2020 but had to be put on hold for a long time because of the various restrictions and lock-downs associated with the Covid 19 pandemic. When it was safe to visit and record older people the interviews continued.

Now, the oldest person I interviewed was born in 1923, the youngest in 1970, so the history we are looking at is relatively recent, yet it is clear that things were very different back then. Many people had no inside toilets, no running water in their houses, no automatic washing machines, no central heating, no television, no telephone or internet, no mobile phones. It is very likely that they did not

have a car, though they did have quite a good bus service and, until the early 1960s, they had the railway. The pace of life was a bit slower than today, but in many ways it was more physically demanding.

Nowadays we have more and we expect more. Children growing up in the Galloway Glens now are encouraged to think beyond their immediate surroundings much more than they were before. Paradoxically this can give them a greater sense of the value of the place where they grew up so that when they are adults they want to give something back to the place that formed them. Until the social upheaval caused by World War Two, many people were denied the opportunity to develop through education and travel.

Yet no-one I interviewed really complained about the conditions in which they grew up. Indeed, many of them pointed out that “it was juist normal. We didnae ken onything else.”

John “Cubby” McCubbing of New Galloway was very eloquent on the cold, the rigours of bath night, and the perils of the outside toilet. Several people pointed out that there was only one “bath nicht”, none of this modern showering every day business. Many remembered being children and sitting on the draining board being well-scrubbed down in the kitchen sink.

Cubby remembers it like this:

Cubby bath / outside toilet audio clip

One interviewee even remembered how the village boys would wait for someone to head out to the outside toilet before peppering the roof with stones. They made their own entertainment in the good old days right enough. Modern plumbing and sanitation, though, made a huge change to people’s lives in the 1960s and 1970s. And I’m not just saying that because I am the son of a plumber.

The Galloway Glens is largely a rural area. Many people grew up on farms or in farm cottages. Others, like myself, in small villages. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s, many of these villages which are “quiet” now were busy hubs for the local area. My father, who was born in 1931, listed several businesses in the Rhonehouse he grew up in: a blacksmith, a cobbler, a tailor, a builder and a market gardener among others.

Hilda McAdam remembers Dalry as being very well-served by shops and businesses.

Hilda McAdam audio clip on Dalry shops

As well as the shops and a visit to the nearest “toon”, the villages were well-served by vans that sold everything from luxuries like ice-cream to necessities like brushes, dusters and cleaning stuffs. In the 1970s, Iain Murray’s fish and chip van made the rounds. The modern equivalent is a pizza wagon. Culinary taste, as well as plumbing, changes over time. There was a butcher’s van, a baker’s van, a fish van, while a wider selection of foodstuffs could be had from Lipton’s van or Coopers’ van. A fortnightly visit by the library van kept villagers supplied with reading material.

Holidays abroad or at least some distance away from home are now commonplace, but in the past holidays were often a week staying with relatives who might be just a bus ride away. Or much longer bus ride away. Hilda McAdam remembers the excitement of such a trip to Clydebank.

Hilda McAdam audio clip Glasgow/ Clydebank holiday

Most people I spoke to seem to have enjoyed school. This was probably because, as Anne Howie who grew up on a farm near Ringford pointed out, school was where you met your pals who might live some distance from you. Time out of school was mostly spent at home, either working, doing chores, or playing with your siblings. Children generally walked to school. Agnes McQueen remembers walking four miles a day from High Banks to school in Kirkcudbright. “The belt”, applied to a child’s outstretched hands, was a regular feature of school life for most of the last century. Use of a leather strap or “tawse” to encourage students to improve their spelling or help with their “sums” was only made illegal in 1987. Hilda McAdam remembered the good old days when teachers were also adept at throwing wooden-backed blackboard dusters across a classroom to help students pay attention. People remembered lessons in science, in cooking, in “sums”, P.E. or “drill” as it was known. Teachers themselves were recalled, some of them with fondness. Others not quite so much! Kate Kaye, herself now a Nursery teacher, waxed lyrical about the shoes one of her teachers wore. When she described them to me it was if she could still see them in her mind’s eye all those years later. And while you are smiling at that, I bet you can probably remember similar details about your own teachers’ dress-sense just as much as the Maths or English they taught you.

My father remembered the coming of evacuees from Glasgow during his schooldays at the beginning of the war.

Jim Burns audio clip evacuees

Funny in hindsight, but such episodes hint at the anxiety felt by children in a time of war. Sadly, it has echoes in our own time, in a world filled with refugees seeking asylum far from their homes.

School was also where many of us first became aware of medical interventions. People recalled the coming of the nit nurse to check children's hair for wee beasties that might have taken up residence. Perhaps more memorable was the day the school dentist turned up in her caravan. As part of the development of the National Health Service this was a very beneficial thing. Most of us as children, didn't really see it that way though. John McCubbing again:

John McCubbing audio clip school dentist

When “the happiest days of your life” were over, generally at thirteen or fifteen, remember, it was time to enter the world of work. Nowadays many young people stay on at school and study to get into college or university. There are many more opportunities for them and one of the problems in the Glens area is hanging on to its young people who often have to move away for work or further education. When Agnes McQueen left school she was, she said, more or less expected to work on the farm “for nothing” as she put it. She would have loved to have trained as a nurse but that course wasn't open to her in the 1930s. She did, eventually, find work with a local vet where she helped with work around the home and learned how to answer the new-fangled telephone and speak to the public on behalf of the vet. She learned a whole new set of social skills.

Before the increased mechanisation of farming following World War Two, many people worked on the land as people had done here for centuries. In the agricultural economy right up to the 1970s there was a very definite sense of what work happened at a particular time. Anne Howie was very clear about this as it related to her life on the farm, growing up near Ringford in the 1960s. There was a time for lambing, a time for clipping, a time for the “hey” and for the “hairvest”. School holidays still take place in October for the “tattie howkin” as this was the time when traditionally groups of children and some parents were paid to gather potatoes for the local farmer. Many local villagers also helped farmers with taking in the hay or in stooking corn and gathering up the sheaves. Tommy Thomson described how the women of the village provided extra “manpower” to help keep the steam threshing-mill fed with sheaves of corn in scenes reminiscent of Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Tommy Thomson audio clip threshing

It was hard work but the workers were often rewarded later with bags of potatoes and carrots and the like to help them get through the winter. I remember in the early 1960s whole fields of people at the “hey” or the “hairvest” after their own day at work as joiners, plumbers, shop workers. Tattie-howkin itself was hard, back-breaking work. Anne Howie also remembers as a child how she spent hours clearing stones from her father’s fields which was also hard physical work. The stones were heaped in “binges” and were later used for mending dykes.

Anne Howie audio clips stane bings

David Wallace, hill farmer at The Shiel of Castlemaddy in former times, gave pretty much the same outline of the year. He was emphatic in pointing out that “sheep work doesnae change”: lambing, marking, clipping first the hogs then the ewes, then dipping. He then pushed the timing back a bit to beginning at the end of November when the tups were put out thus beginning the cycle again. And “cycle” was David’s word. Now retired and living in the village of Carsphairn he keeps track of his year by thinking often of this cyclical pattern. Despite that he does recognise that some things have actually changed; dipping is now completely different from his own day when, after clipping, the sheep were pushed through the dip then out into a cement-floored stone bucht before being released into freedom while any excess dip flowed back out of the “dreeper” into the dipping bath.

David Wallace audio clip sheep work

The job would have been carried out by several people. Now his son does it by himself. The other great change, of course, concerns the economic viability of small hill farms. David himself thinks that when his son retires most of the land will become forested as the forestry industry expands more and more into this century. For Tommy Thomson, the biggest changes in farming have come as a result of BSE then the Foot and Mouth epidemic of the early 2000s. Despite these changes and shifts in land-use, opened up work opportunities for others. John McCubbing worked in the forestry for many years and enjoyed the hard but rewarding work.

But work, as we know, is not everything, and many people described leisure activities that were common in the Glens over the years. Some of these are still around, some have disappeared.

Kate Kaye remembers playing skipping games at school, with rhymes she can’t now remember, but they were chanted as one or maybe two girls skipped while

two others “caa’d the rope”. She also remembers playing at “wee hooses”, building shelters in and around bushes. The hooses were divided into rooms and swept out regularly. Woe betide anyone who went into the wrong hoose uninvited. She also mentioned using blankets thrown over washing lines to make makeshift “tents”.

Kate Kaye audio clips skipping/ wee hooses

I can remember building tunnels and walls with newly-cut grass on the Rhonis Hill when I was a boy. So it wasn’t just the girls who made wee hooses and dens though I don’t know if there was that much interaction between the sexes. We also built wooden huts from cast-off bits of wood and sacking. The Rhonis boys, the big boys, had a famous tree hut in the early 1960s in the Knackery Wuid. The nailed-on ladder for climbing up deliberately, and frustratingly, started beyond the reach of us smaller boys.

Hilda McAdam remembered that in the summer time, “parents came out at night” and there would be games of rounders, something that Kate Kaye also remembered from Crossmichael. Football was a great sport for boys especially. It might be a rowdy kick-a-bout with ever-changing personnel as various players were called in for their tea or because it was their bed-time. Teams could be well over the official eleven a side and the game would be played until darkness made it impossible to continue. There might be goalposts or there might just be jerseys laid down as goalposts. Adults, though, also played, and many villages had their own official teams who competed against each other. During the war there were several women’s teams too, and nowadays many girls also play football.

Games would be watched by most of the villagers who would gather for a blether even if they weren’t all that bothered about the sport itself. These were great times for children who could stay up late and basically have fun listening in to adult conversations they weren’t supposed to hear, or just having a good “cairry-on”. The same was true of quoiting matches though both football and quoiting seem to have died out in the early 1960s, at least in terms of whole-village participation .

In Rhonehouse the quoiting green, which is now a car park, was a great hub of activity for children and adults alike during the long light nights of summer. For the adults (men) the game consisted of throwing heavy iron rings or quoits for twenty-two yards to land on or near an iron pin in a clay bed. Tournaments went on for hours and it was not uncommon for scraps of paper to be placed beside the pin so the whiteness of the paper might help the quoiter’s aim in the failing

light. If the light got really bad these scraps of paper were sometimes set alight. Children delighted in being party to these adult goings-on.

Kick-the-can and rounders were also favourite games with parents sometimes joining in with the children, Hilda McAdam remembers. John McCubbing also remembers inter-village sports. Andy Campbell from Kirkcudbright remembers cycling to various village sports days with a tent for overnight stays.

Andy Campbell audio clip village sports

He pointed out that many of the games were seasonal, something also pointed out by John McCubbing who remembers people curling on a pond in New Galloway. The odd thing about many of these activities is that no-one seemed to organise them. Children knew it was the time of the year for playing beds (hopscotch) or skating or skipping just as the adults knew it was time for green bowling on the long summer nights while indoor carpet-bowling took place in village halls in the winter, as did badminton. Or setting fire to the dry grass in summer to allow new growth to come through, a highly dangerous and irresponsible thing to do of course but one that children, especially boys, seemed driven to do. This seems to have been a general practice all over Scotland as the novelist Neil Gunn describes the same thing happening in Caithness in the 1890s.

Tommy Thomson remembers the pipe that spanned the Dee or spanned it as far as the island near Dildawn farm. It was about a foot in diameter but with a bit of care and a bit of luck it was possible to cross this pipe, which was quite a height above the water, to play on the island before making the perilous journey back. He also recalls, in the days of the steam trains, running to stand on the railway bridge at Bridge of Dee station in the smoke as the train went below. It was exciting to see and hear the train so close and, he says, left a pleasing amount of soot on a white school shirt. He does not go on to say what his mother thought of this when he got home and needed a clean shirt for school the next day.

Alan McFadyen remembers games of hide-and-seek which were great fun but they also led to him becoming a keen bird-watcher through the encouragement of his grandfather. The skills he learned as a wee boy playing hide and seek and building dens in the woods around Kirkcudbright stood him in good stead and he now runs a business building and setting up bird hides as well as being a prize-winning photographer of birds and small mammals. Alan described cycling for miles around Kirkcudbright in search of nests or bird-sightings. When his water bottle was empty he said he could always get a drink from a

“coo troch”, one of those stone troughs that were once very common in the fields around here.

Alan McFadyen audio clip coo trochs

John McCubbing also remembers a lot of tree climbing and playing in the burn. In winter he remembered a curling pond. In Rhonehouse a small hollow in a field froze over each winter, and “Meekie’s Pond” became a skating rink for a few days. Not everyone had skates but we could all skate across the ice, hoping it wasn’t going to give way. Even if it had, it wasn’t very deep so it was a safe place for children to play. Years later, reading the skating episode in Wordsworth’s great autobiographical poem *The Prelude* at Edinburgh University I was assailed by memories of Meekie’s Pond, and the icy slides we made on the hill behind the village school. These were simple, almost visceral pleasures which helped children develop balance, strength and confidence. John McCubbing commented that the games he played outside were very different from the indoor computer games children play now. He is not decrying the computer, which was a great boon to him during the Covid pandemic, but simply pointing out that as a child his reality was physical rather than virtual.

The “boolin” (bowls) was also a popular game for adults, outside on the boolin green in the summer then indoors as carpet bowls in the winter, a tradition that still continues in many places. Village halls were hotbeds of badminton too until very recently though with the advent of gyms and games halls and modern facilities (including showers for instance) that tradition is perhaps dying out. The women of the villages and surrounding areas also went to “the Rural”, or the Women’s Rural Institute, once a month. In many communities institutions like The Rural or the Church Guild provided places where people could meet, chat, and discuss local and national issues. The community aspect of these gatherings was important in countering that social isolation which is now being recognised as a very serious social problem. Following the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions around people meeting together many such organisations have either ceased to exist or are having difficulty finding members as people are less inclined to gather socially in halls or meeting rooms.

Andy Campbell remembers the beginnings of the Stewartry Rugby Club in the early 1970s. He was a keen player himself, having played while studying at Loughborough College then as a much-travelled player for Langholm. In helping to get the Stewartry club going he remembers the hard work and input of local farmer Mungo Bryson and many members of the local Young Farmers’ Club. The club has now become part of the fabric of Stewartry life and while in

the early days it was very much a male preserve, it now boasts women's and girls' teams.

As children grew older their minds turned to other things and many of my interviewees spoke of the excitement of going to dances where they could meet other young people and possibly life partners. The bicycle was a great help in this as before people had cars transport was limited to buses which might not always run at the right time for the dances. So many of them, male and female, took to their bikes. In my own day there was a lot of walking and hitching lifts to get to dances in different towns and village halls in the Stewartry. Hilda McAdam remembers riding as a pillion passenger on a motor bike to dances in places like Moniaive, over the hill from Dalry. David Wallace used his Norton Dominator motor bike to travel from the Glenkens to Cumnock to see his girlfriend, Frances, who later became his wife.

Hilda McAdam audio clip: concerts and dances

It was all go to the music of The Starry Nights Band, Bert Rae, Hughie Calder and many others, sometimes even Jimmy Shand. The dances at The Whinnieliggate seem to have been very popular and Knockvennie Hall was mentioned too. "Coortin", though, was a topic many of my interviewees were reticent about but I did discover that there is a "kissing tree" in New Galloway. Going to "the pictures" was a favourite outing for courting couples. Sitting side by side in the double seats at the back of the cinema was much more comfortable and much warmer than trysting outside.

Scottish country dance band music was all the rage until replaced by jiving, twisting and less structured modern styles. Agnes McQueen remembered dancing eightsome reels and other. She looked back with genuine pleasure on those dances and shook her head at the way people dance nowadays.

Agnes McQueen audio clip country dancing

In the seventies the music at the Toon Hall dance in CD was generally heavy rock music. John McCubbing remembers dances in the Bowlers' Hall in Castle Douglas too, and pointed out that he had to add a new word to his vocabulary, "discotheque", which was soon shortened to "disco". The disco was a dance where the music was played on records or "discs" rather than by a live band. Several of the local dj's, or disc jockeys, who played the records built up quite a following because of their choice of music and their antics and patter between records.

Kate Kaye recalls her family singing round the piano and listening to the radio too to hear favourite Irish singers and songs which were important in her family because of Irish connections.

Kate Kaye audio clip family entertainment

Personally I don't remember singing in my own family but I do remember visitors and relatives telling stories round the fire at night. Sometimes there might even be some poetry. The stories would often be reminiscences of people long gone or daft things people in the family or village had done. This habit gradually declined after the coming of television. It still exists though in a much simpler fashion. The habit of "comin in for a bit crack" was very common here before it became a buzz-word which now has to spelled the Irish way as "craic". Michty me, how things have changed.

Several people made it very clear that the changing of the seasons made a big difference to people's recreational activities. Andy Campbell even pointed out that there were seasonal changes in the games children played. Extra cover of darkness made it ideal for certain activities requiring one not to be seen, eg. by those whose doors you had" chapped" before running away. It seems an obvious point but I think it is worth recording because it shows that, as we might expect, rural people tend to be more aware of the passing of the seasons than city-dwellers but it also shows that this awareness gave an underlying framework to their lives. For better or for worse, there was a pattern to the way people lived. And in a new time of automated working, travelling to another town or even country to work, and now with a great number of people working from home with the help of the internet and the mobile phone this pattern is much less obvious. Changes in farming methods and the effects of climate change have also blurred the outlines of this pattern.

The recorded interviews will be archived by Galloway Glens and include : "potted biographies" of people from different walks of life; information about changes in land-use and farming; comments on environmental change, and comments on our changing way of life in the area covered by the Galloway Glens project. They include different speakers speaking in their own unique voices, revealing the humour and humanity that is a striking feature of these voices from the glen.

I'd like to leave you with two very different clips that might suggest something of the variety of voices and subject matter in the recordings. First, Andy Campbell of Kirkcudbright on a moment he shared just as I was about to press

the “stop” button. He is describing a moment in his primary school days when he saw a tanker coming in to Kirkcudbright harbour:

Andy Campbell audio clip boat

Blessings on that primary teacher who gave that wee boy such a moment of wonder.

And, finally, a short clip of David Wallace reciting the names of the farms he remembers from his youth. I was very struck by the sheer humanity in David’s voice and the way he delivered those names as if conjuring up each one in his mind in turn and paying respect to that place and the people who lived and worked there. Those people live on in David’s mind and in his remembering he has made sure something of them will stay in our minds too.

David Wallace audio clip litany of farm names

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