

JAMES Mc NEILL

A MAN OF HIS TIME

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Synopsis of Thesis

A research project to examine the working, cultural, political, and social life of young working class men and women living in the Glasgow area of Scotland during the period 1881 to 1919.

The aim of the thesis is to provide a brief social history based on a short biography of my father James Mc Neill (1881-1964) and to open a small window into the life and aspirations of the young working class men and women of that time

Authors Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis, including any final revisions as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

I wish to thank the staff of the following organisations for their help and patience in assisting me during the writing of this thesis.

The People's Palace. Glasgow.

The Business Archive of Glasgow University.

The Scottish Labour Archive of Glasgow Caledonian University.

The Glasgow Room. Mitchell Library.

Ayr Carnegie Library. Archive Department.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a research project to examine the working, cultural, political, and social life of young working class men and women living in Glasgow during the period 1895 to 1919.

I have used as a research method a combination of social history with a short biography of my father James McNeill (1881-1964). I believe by using this method of combining a biography of one man who lived during the period I am researching with a general survey of the period I can open a small window into the life of the young working class men and women living then.

I have tried in each chapter to present an aspect of James McNeill's life and illustrate the specific through James McNeill experience and the broader picture.

My major aim will be to prove that young working class socialists in this period (1895-1919) tried to bring about a political change that would create a fairer and more egalitarian society and achieved some of the changes they wanted.

To advance this argument I have presented a picture of their life and times and have used this picture to suggest why many of them were socialists, pacifists, republicans, atheists, nationalists, keen walkers, cyclists, and idealists. I hope to show why they were prepared to take on the might of the British Establishment, an Establishment that ruled an Empire that was the richest and most powerful in the world. It was also an Empire full of injustice and enormous contrasts. I will try to show that these contrasts were one of the driving influences behind their desire for change. I will also show that young men like James McNeill were the foot soldiers in a long running battle to make the world a fairer place to live in. They were the heirs to a long tradition of revolt

against the rich and powerful. They knew from their own experience and the experience of their families how dreadful life was for the working classes. In Scotland the workers continued the fight and in Europe an international solidarity among workers was being established. Many of the Scottish workers were part of that movement. Like Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, and their own hero Keir Hardie they believed:-

That property was theft [...The end of property would conclude with the arrival of communism[...] the reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself.¹

For them the term 'communism' was the ideal state of existence for human kind, a utopia where there was no longer any need for government or laws and all men and women were equal and responsible.

I hope that my research will demonstrate that their beliefs and actions did help to bring about a fairer and better world and that the battle described in their rallying song The Internationale would end in victory for the common man.

Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers
 Arise ye prisoners of want
 For reason in revolt now thunders
 And at last ends the age of cant.
 Away with all your superstitions
 Servile masses arise, arise
 We'll change henceforth the old conditions
 And spurn the dust to win the prize.
 So comrades, come rally
 And the last fight let us face

Sources

I have taken as a starting point an extract from a diary I began to keep fifty four years ago when I started my National Service in September 1955. I was nineteen

¹ Tristram Hunt. *The Frock-Coated Communist. The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels*. Allen Lane and imprint of Penguin Books.2009. Page 103.

and had left home for the very first time. My father was seventy four. From the age of twelve I had spent a great deal of time in his company. I have expanded my 1954 account by research about the period, and by my memory of the stories that he told me. He was a considerable story teller so some of his tales about his life are not necessarily a 100% accurate. What I wrote in 1954 is consistent with my memories of James McNeill now and I think shows that though he embroidered some of his stories most of his tales were factually based. The recent increase in oral history accounts suggests that the personal account now has greater academic value. This account is intended to extend knowledge of the work, life and aspirations of a single young engineer of the early 20th century. His work and his hopes though unique to him were shared by many of his comrades and will give us a glimpse of their lives.

Other sources I have used are the few remaining artifacts in my possession, such as membership cards, photographs, diary fragments, letters and copies of all his teaching qualifications to provide the bones of the account. I have researched the collections of Glasgow University, Glasgow Caledonian University, newspaper reports of the period in the Glasgow Room of The Mitchell Library, and Ayr Carnegie Library, as well as completing extensive reading around the period.

**Extract from The Conscript's Diary of Ruari
McNeill**

15 September 1955. Royal Army Medical Corps
(RAMC) Headquarters, Crookham. Hants.

*(Note. Spelling and grammar has not been
corrected.²*

² My spelling was very bad when I was at school, and still is. It was not until I started at Glasgow University, Crichton Campus, that it was recognised that I was dyslexic.

I had many rows with my father who could not or perhaps did not want to see that I had to live my own life.

My father was born in 1881 and is now an old man of seventy four. He has led a varied life and has embraced many causes. Primarily I would call him a fundamental socialist, for he believes with great sincerity in a final brotherhood of man. He was a member of the ILP, knew the great men, Keir Hardy, Jimmy Maxton. He has stuck by these principals in outside life, though not always in the home. Here Dad tends to be rather autocratic a survival of his Victorian upbringing. He has had a wonderful life and has done many worthwhile acts.

Dad was born in 1881, in a mining village near Glasgow. His father was of highland stock, coming from the island of Barra, in the western Hebrides, the home of the McNeils. His father was an engineer employed in one of the pits. He seems to have held strong views. He was not a churchman, which was unusual in these times. There was a large family. The mother whom I know very little of died when my father was six. The family was then brought up by the second oldest daughter Maggie, the oldest Annie went out to service. I think there were other two brothers and a sister. The family was David, Anne, Maggie, James (my father), Jessie and Billy. Of that family only my Aunts Annie and Jessie and my father survive. When the oldest David was old enough to work in the pits, which was the only source for employment, the father moved the family to Glasgow. He would have no son of his down the mines. Here he found work as an engineer in a large bakery and here from about the age of eight or so my father grew up.

When he was thirteen he left school. He became an apprentice engineer in a constructional engineering works. Here he served his time. His ambition was to be a draughtsman, this he did become; when he completed his practical training he entered the drawing office where he served his time as a draughtsman. He left home when he was eighteen over a disagreement with his father. He had come home late 10.15

instead of 10 from a concert. His father thrashed him. Next morning he left the house. I do not think he saw his father again.

He shifted from job to job, mostly because of his principals. He was a member of a Christian Endeavour society, but seemed to have dropped that. He became a vegetarian after reading an account of the horrors of the slaughterhouse. He was a health culturist, an athlete, a reader and a thinker. He was completely tea total. Finally he became a socialist. This period of his life is blank. I know he had various jobs, that he was good at his work. He loved the open air, something he had all his life, he sailed canoes on Loch Lomond, and cycled and camped all over Scotland. He was the first Secretary of the Glasgow Health Culture Society. Sometime between 1908 and 1911 he decided to break away from the factory life with the long hours, the short holidays. To do this he decided to become a teacher of technical subjects, or a manual instructor. He must have trained in Glasgow, probably at "night school". He certainly has certificates, City and Guilds etc. He went to Sweden to finish his training; there he gained the Sloyd Diploma the highest qualification obtainable. With this he returned to Glasgow, after spending some time on the continent. He taught in Glasgow for a little while. He wanted to get out of Glasgow; he wanted to own a boat. He chose Ayr.

In 1911 he was appointed to a post at Russell Street School. He took lodgings with my grandmother. There he met my mother and in 1929 they were married. He moved to Newton Academy and taught there for 35 years till 1946. My father was a fighter. He stuck to his principals no matter how they might cause suffering or affect his own career. They did affect his career.

In Ayr he owned a series of boats, ending finally with "My Chum" which we still possess. He started a swimming club and a Socialist Sunday School. He had no respect for "his betters" or the church.

This was unwise for a teacher who hoped for promotion.

War 1914 found him a C.O. He did not go to prison, but had to find work of National Importance, outside Ayr. This he did in Glasgow. He again taught from about 1919 to 1946. In 1924 to 1926 he designed and built our house. He employed tradesmen but a great deal of the work he did himself. He served on various committees, attended conferences, was a founder member of the SYHA and did a great deal of work for that body.

In 1929 he married, though he was almost 50, he was a good 10 years younger physically and mentally. In 1931 my sister was born and in 1936 I was born. Dad did a great deal for me in growing up. He took me out, taught me or encouraged me to love the open, the sea, and to wonder, to read and to think for myself, not to be influenced by mass opinions. To try and see things clearly. He had no religion; he was not a Christian in the accepted sense. He did not go to church nor did the family. In this my mother supported him. We were taught to examine and not to accept till we had examined. My sister Sheila revolted against the unconventional life. She wishes to be conventional and is now happily married, a teacher living in Glasgow.

I was much more under the influence of my father. Though I to revolted and hurt my father very much, but father follows son. I want the "theatre" to my father an artificial life.

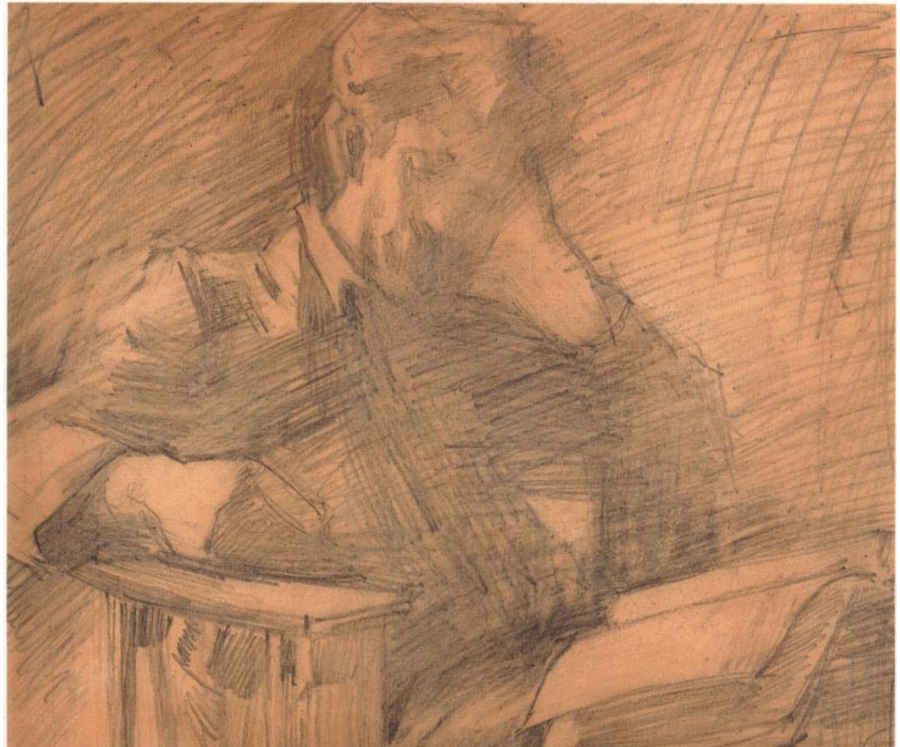
Perhaps that is so, but is not life to a certain extent artificial. What is real, what is fake, be true to oneself? Can one always be true to ourselves? If I had been true to myself I would have gone to prison, for I believe the army wrong. Instead I went to the army. Does that make my present life a lie?

When I wrote the above account I did not possess much of the information that I now have about his life. I did not know that he had been married twice. I did not know that his period working as a draughtsman had been much more stable than he presented it when he talked about it to me when I was a child. What follows has been written with the benefit of more information and is I hope a more accurate picture of his life and times.

Chapter 1

THE MC NEILL FAMILY

The biographical details are in four parts:-



James Mc Neill by Mary Reid Henderson.³

The Private Man. A Son's View .

1. Family History. From Barra to Glasgow.
2. James McNeill in Glasgow. How his life was interwoven with the events of the day.
3. The Ayr Years. 1911 to 1964. .

The extract from my 1954 diary gives a picture of how I saw him 54 years ago. When I left home in 1955 my father was seventy four, the age I am now. I think it is only now, perhaps because I have a very different perspective on life than I had aged nineteen, that I have been able to understand and appreciate his devotion to socialism and to pacificism. I hope I have used this knowledge and my research into his life and times to present a picture of the

³ The chair was designed and made by James McNeill

life of a committed socialist 'warts and all,' in the early years of the 20th century. I believe now that my father's story is a contribution to our knowledge of the thoughts, works and life of socialist 'foot soldiers' of the period that in Scotland produced Keir Hardie, James Maxton, John McLean, Tom Johnston and the movement that led to 'The Red Clyde'.

It has not been an easy task because he left very few documents, except some poetry, and no first hand account of his life. I have very strong memories of him, but these are coloured by a teenager's response to a strict father - rebellion, disagreement, occasional embarrassment, but also admiration.

I am aware of the need to meet academic requirements to produce a critical, dispassionate account of his life. It is hard to achieve this when my father's influence over me has been life-long. I have tried to overcome this problem by research to set his life firmly within the context of the period discussed in this dissertation.

In many ways he was a progressive and idealistic man. But he was a Victorian and had grown up dominated by a strict and difficult father who was quick tempered and sometimes violent. His mother died when he was nine and her death may have had a serious effect on how he grew up. He never talked about her. The death of a young mother was an all too common occurrence in Victorian life, so in this way he grew up in similar circumstances to many thousands of other children. He worked very hard from the age of thirteen onwards in factories for up to fifty-five hours a week and in the evenings studied at night school to qualify as a draughtsman. In 1908 he began his City and Guild Courses that would allow him eventually to qualify as a manual instructor in Scottish secondary schools. On top

of his work and studies he also had a very active social, political, and cultural life. In 1910 he qualified as a Manual Instructor and in 1911 he moved to Ayr where he taught Technical Subjects, except for a short break from 1916 to early in 1919 when he was not allowed to teach because he was a C.O,⁴ until he retired in 1946.

A full account of his life in Ayr is given on page 126.

From Barra to Glasgow.

Clan McNeill came originally from Barra, a small island at the southern end of the Outer Hebrides facing on the west to the Atlantic, and to the east the wild waters of the Sea of the Hebrides. They were seamen, fishermen, and sometimes, in the eyes of the English and Scottish Courts, pirates. In history the Clan McNeill were known as quick tempered, argumentative, and sometimes difficult to live with. These traits were well established in this branch of the McNeill family.

Our people left Barra sometime after 1746 though the island remained the property of the Chief of Clan McNeill until 1838 when the then Chief of the Clan McNeill, General Roderick MacNeil⁵ was forced to sell Barra to pay off his gambling debts. His last act as their Chief was to encourage his clansmen to emigrate to Canada.⁶

On James McNeill's father's side the family were coal miners working in Tranent, East Lothian and then in the Lanarkshire coal fields. The family has been traced back to a John McNeill (1801-41) a spirit merchant and grocer living in Edinburgh. His son David (1829 -1904) was the

⁴ C.O. = Conscientious Objector

⁵ The spelling of the surname McNeill is not constant. Sometimes it is MacNeill, or McNeil. James McNeill always spelled his name McNeill.

⁶ Information about the Clan McNeill taken from WWW.Clan McNeill. Updated 31 July 2009.

father of David McNeill who was my grandfather and his two brothers, my grand uncles James and John. James and John converted to the Mormon faith and emigrated to Utah. James decided he did not want to remain in Utah and went to Arizona to farm. He was drowned in 1884 fording a river. The surviving brother John continued to work in the mines. Over the years he became more and more disillusioned by the Mormon Faith. He finally broke completely with the Mormons when he became secretary of the Salt Lake City Socialist Society. He was killed in a mining accident in November 1903. Their father David also emigrated to Utah and died in hospital of tuberculosis on 29 October 1904. He was buried in a paupers grave. There are still relations of the McNeills living in Utah.⁷



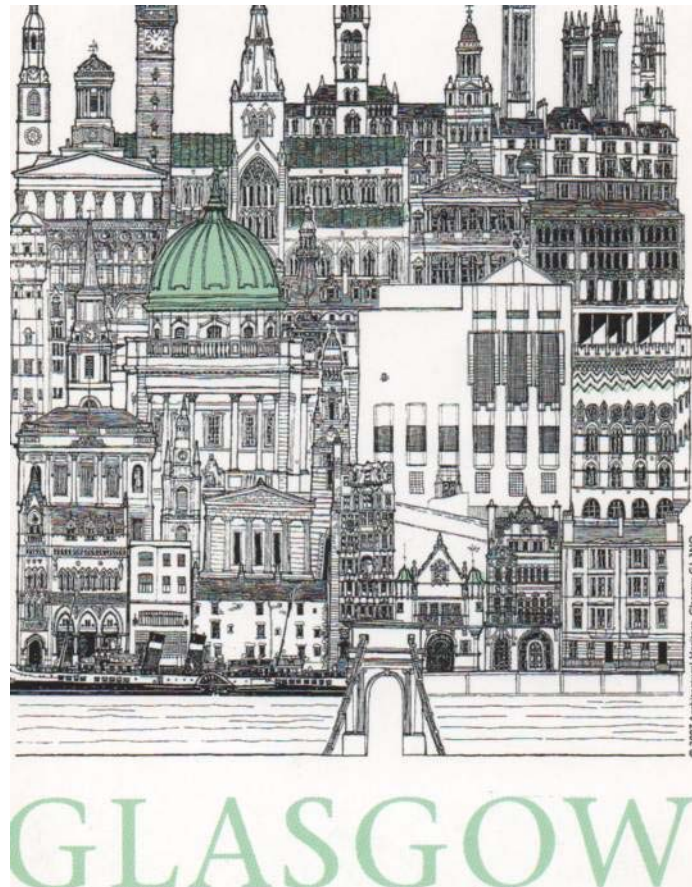
⁷Fredrick Buchanan, Editor. *A Good Time Coming. Mormon Letters to Scotland*. University of Utah Press 1988 This is a collection of family letters discovered after the death of James McNeill in Ayr in 1964. The letters were from the members of the McNeill family who had emigrated to Utah to family members still living in Scotland. The original letters are now in the care of the University of St Andrews.

David McNeill (1850 - 1922) remained in Scotland. At the time of his marriage he was employed as the engineer at a coal pit at Waterside by Kirkintilloch. He was in charge of the pumps that kept the pit from flooding, and the winding gear that operated the cage that was used to take the miners to the coal face and bring up the coal.

He married Mary Murray in 1872. Their eldest son David was born on 15 June 1874. His birth was followed by those of Annie and Maggie (1878)⁸ who both went into service. James was born on the 29 August 1881. Their last two children were Jessie(1885) who worked as a hairdresser until she married and William(1890-1948) who became an engineer and then a Youth Hostel warden. When James was nine in 1890 his mother died in childbirth and Maggie, (Annie was already in service), became 'mother' of the family.

David the eldest son was thirteen in 1887 and had to leave school. The only work available to him in Waterside was as a pit boy. His father was determined that no child of his would work down a coal mine. He had seen too many badly injured men and boys carried out of the cage on to a farm cart to be taken home with blood dripping from the straw. For the majority of these injured men their next journey would be in their coffin to the local grave yard. He left his job at the Waterside Pit and removed the whole family to Glasgow. He rented a flat at 179 Allander Street, Possilpark. He found a job as maintenance engineer in a large wholesale bakery.

⁸ I have not been able to find the date of Annie's birth, or the dates of the deaths of Annie, Maggie, or Jessie. Annie was probably born in 1877. Annie, Maggie and Jessie, all died in their seventies, in the mid 1950s. David is believed to have emigrated to New Zealand but no trace has been found of him.



Chapter 2

THE BIG CITY

The contrast between the small mining village and the huge industrial city must have been extreme for the McNeill family. Waterside was on the edge of the countryside with fields and farms close by. The family lived in a cottage in miner's row close to the pit. They had a garden which produced fresh fruit and vegetables. Their milk came from a nearby farm. The children could play in the fields and the woods. Now they had to adapt to living in a tenement in a long drab street. Fog often blanketed the city. All the houses had coal fires, and the factory chimneys sent vast quantities of smoke and noxious fumes into the atmosphere. There was heavy traffic, the streets

were noisy with the rattle of trams and the sound of horses hooves.

By 1900 the prosperity that the Industrial Revolution brought to Glasgow had transformed the centre of the city and along with the new suburbs being built for the emerging middle class made Glasgow one of the finest Victorian cities in Britain. In the process some important old buildings were destroyed but the Cathedral of St Mungo survived the Reformation and the Victorian improvers almost intact.⁹ There were still many of the handsome town houses built by the Tobacco Lords and the Georgian squares and terraces like Blythswood Square erected as the well off moved to the west. Over Kelvingrove Park, laid out by Joseph Paxton the designer of the Crystal Palace in London, towered the University of Glasgow housed in the vast Victorian Gothic structure designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott.¹⁰ On the other side of the park were the grand terraces of Kelvinside. The new City Chambers, opened by Queen Victoria in 1888, told the world how prosperous and important Glasgow had become.¹¹ On the hill above Sauchiehall Street the first stage of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's great masterpiece the new School of Art. was nearing completion.¹² Even some of Glasgow's

⁹ Elizabeth Williamson, Anne Riches and Malcolm Higgs. *Glasgow The Buildings of Scotland*. (Penguin Books.1990.)Pages 110 &111.

¹⁰ Chambers Biographical Dictionary. Editor Melanie Parry *Sir George Gilbert Scott*. (Chambers 1997) English Architect.1811-1878. The leading practical architect in the Gothic revival style so beloved by the Victorians. Among the buildings, he designed were St Pancras Station and hotel, the Albert Memorial, Glasgow University in 1865.and the McManus Gallery in Dundee.

¹¹ Elizabeth Williamson, Anne Riches and Malcolm Higgs. *Glasgow The Buildings of Scotland*. (Penguin Books.1990.)City Chambers, designed by William Young, and built in George Square between 1883 -1888. pages 159-163.

¹² Mackintosh also designed Scotland Street School and mansion houses like Hill House in Helensburgh. Though, until very recently not appreciated in Glasgow, Mackintosh was the only early 20th Century Scottish architect to gain an international reputation. The 1966 film by Murray Grigor about Mackintosh won five international awards and reestablished the architect's reputation. Visitors now come to Scotland from all over the world to see his surviving work in Glasgow.

factories resembled renaissance palaces the prime example being Templeton's Carpet Works close to Glasgow Green.¹³

In 1901 three young men published *Glasgow in 1901*¹⁴. They used the pen name James Hamilton Muir, which concealed the identity of two brothers Muirhead and James Bone and a close friend Archibald Hamilton Charteris.

They described Glasgow as follows:-

The milieu of a town means very much more than the tale of sun or rain on its stone. It is not the fame of its towers or the beauty of her sunsets that attracts the traveller to Glasgow, and she does not take her stand on these. But wherein her character can best be seen it is a little hard to say. Perhaps our friend came nearest it when, looking in at the open door of a workshop, he was almost blinded by the smoke and iron dust, and deafened by the roar.[...] He may stroll about her streets, admiring them for their openness and height, may lounge in tea shops [...] may know the inside of a few Kelvinside drawing rooms, visit the parks, "do" Great Western Road on a fine Sunday[...] even voyage on penny steamers past the shipyards[...] and yet feel that Glasgow itself has escaped him [...] The greatness of the town is not so much an affair of well built streets and warehouses, or municipal parks, as of creative work that transforms the iron ore brought in at one end into the machinery that throbs out the other. The glory of Glasgow is what the unknown "working class districts" contain; the crazy workshops straggling over acres of outskirts, the gaunt, blind barns that hide the smelting, forging and casting[...] The pride of the place is in its working man-the man manufacturing "in a big way," and the black squad within his gates.

13. Elizabeth Williamson, Anne Riches and Malcolm Higgs. *Glasgow* Page 459. The front of the building was designed by William Leiper (1839-1916) to resemble the Doges' Palace in Venice. Behind it was a functional mill designed by the mill engineers J.B Harvey.

¹⁴ James Hamilton Muir, Illustrated by Muirhead Bone. *Glasgow in 1901* (First published in 1901 William Hodge and Company and reprinted by White Cockade Publishing in 2001). Pages 21 and 22.

As the city grew in size and prosperity emigrants from the Highlands of Scotland, agricultural workers from the Lowlands, Irish workers fleeing the Irish potato famines of 1845 and 1852 arrived desperate to get work. They were followed by other races including Jews and Italians. These immigrants added much to the rich cultural life of the city. The Italians introduced fish and chip shops and Ice Cream Parlours selling pokey hats and sliders. Other immigrants brought fine tailoring, expert furriers, and an injection of great skill into the commercial and professional life of the city. The Irish brought their music and traditions, but also from Northern Ireland their religious differences. Many of the Irish seeking work in Glasgow might have been the descendents of the Scots 'planted' in Northern Ireland in the 17th Century.

It was a city of great contrasts. The upper and middle classes were enjoying the full fruits of Glasgow's rising prosperity. For the workers of the city, the men and women who created the great wealth of the city the story was different. Like all the great industrial cities of Britain that developed during the 19th Century housing for the workers and the factories were built huddled together. No thought was given to any form of town planning. In Glasgow stinking tenements, some of which dated back to the 17th century were still in use to house the working classes. The new tenements thrown up to house an ever expanding workforce were little better. Many of the buildings they lived in were full of rot, had no clean water supplies or sanitation and were often in danger of collapse. The City Council was aware that action had to be taken. They set up Committees to study the problems. In 1859 one committee reported:-

That they had visited the old town and had found that almost every spare inch of ground had been built upon. [...]here were separate families in every room[...]the water supply was still defective and in many cases non-existent[...]a worse state of matters was disclosed by an inspection of some of the more recently erected houses for the working classes[...]Tenements of great height are ranged on either side of narrow lanes with no back yard space[...]The atmosphere of such houses is, to a stranger, oftentimes unbearable, and is rendered more pestilential by the presence of water-closets in the ill ventilated lobbies or staircases of the buildings.¹⁵



Boys play in the sewage contaminated waters of the Molendinar Burn.¹⁶

The result of these reports was that the Town Council obtained the necessary powers under The City of Glasgow Improvement Act in 1866 which empowered the Council to acquire old properties by compulsory purchase,

¹⁵. Frank Worsdall. *The Tenement- A Way of Life* (Chambers. 1979) Page 7.

¹⁶ Michael Moss & John Hume. *Glasgow As It Was Vol II* (Fretwell & Brian 1975] Page 48

to demolish them, and realign the streets to control the rebuilding.¹⁷ A new water supply was built which brought clean water into the city from Loch Katrine (1859) and new sewers were built though a great deal of stinking waste still poured into the Clyde and the Kelvin. These measures did very slowly result in better housing but over the years many of the same problems recurred.¹⁸

Who were the people who lived and worked in this great city? Britain in 1900 was a society dominated by class. The upper and middle class Glaswegian was employed in the professions, law, accountancy, banking, financial services, academic work, teaching, journalism, medicine, the arts including architecture, and in industry as managers and designers. The majority of the male population were working class employed in the factories and shipyards. The working class had its own divisions. At the top of the tree were the highly skilled engineers, draughtsmen, and seamen who had served their time as apprentices and were qualified tradesmen proud of their skills. Their work was supported by an army of labourers, dockers, carters, railway and tramway employees, shopkeepers, and ordinary seamen.

Women in 1900 were just beginning to make their way in the professions. Middle class women had been employed as teachers for some time and were beginning to be employed as clerks in offices and operate the new fangled machine the typewriter. Working class women were employed in shops, in large factories such as Templeton's Carpet Works, textile mills and in domestic service. Many working class women had to combine

¹⁷.C.A. Oakley *The Second City*.(Blackie & Sons Ltd. Glasgow 1967) pages 199-200

¹⁸ I worked in the Gorbals in the 1950s and early 1960s and many of the conditions listed in the 19th century reports had returned. No matter how hard many of the families tried to keep a 'decent' home working class tenements and streets were never pleasant places to live in.

motherhood and house keeping with lowly paid manual work to ensure that their families survived. Married women of the upper and middle classes very rarely worked though in the artistic professions they could continue their careers. The place of women in this period is expanded in the chapter The Rights of Women.

The McNeill family had now to integrate themselves into the life of this huge city. In the beginning it was not easy for them. The children had country accents and frequently would have had to put up with the jibes of the Glasgow working class children at school and at play. The death of their mother and her baby in child birth in 1891 changed their life and the life of their father. Maggie the second sister became the 'mother' of the family. There were also aunts and cousins still living in the fruit growing country of the Clyde Valley. They helped their brother and Maggie to look after the family. The children while still at school were able to escape to the fruit farm for their holidays. James was only six when the family moved to Glasgow. When his younger brother and sister joined him at school he often had to protect them from their schoolmates. He also had to defend them from vicious teachers who maintained discipline in their class by the use of the strap. My Uncle Billy, James's younger brother, told me a story about my father throwing a slate at the teacher who was about to belt his wee sister for being late by five minutes on a cold, snowy, foggy morning. The Headmaster gave him six of the belt. His father was so angry that he removed him and his two younger siblings to another school.¹⁹

¹⁹ James McNeill remembered that punishment and when he became a teacher he never used a belt, or any form of physical punishment, on a child.

The family gradually adapted to life in Glasgow though without exception the children all left Glasgow as soon as they could. In 1894 James McNeill was thirteen and left school to begin work in industry.

The Apprentice

James McNeill wanted to be a draughtsman, but his father told him he would have to serve his time first as an engineer. He could not start an apprenticeship until he was fourteen. For a year he worked as a "hammer boy" in the forge of the Springburn railway works. What was it like to be a 'hammer boy' in a large locomotive factory? In 1915 Alfred Williams who worked for twenty two years as a 'hammer man' in the stamping shop of the Great Western Railway's works at Swindon published *Life in a Railway Factory* his recollections of working there.²⁰ The railway works at Swindon would not have been dissimilar to the great railway workshops clustered round Springburn in Glasgow.

The Stamping Shop is square, or nearly so, [...] The whole comprising about a acre and a quarter [...] this is quite small as a part of a railway workshop. The steam hammers which beat the red hot metal into the required shapes were operated by a team of men led by the 'forge master.' It was the 'forge master' who guided the work through the forging process. The 'hammer boy' was the youngest and most inexperienced member of the team. His job was to release the wire holding the hammer above the hot metal when the 'forge master' shouted. Woe betide the young lad if he was slow in reacting.

Working in a forge was dangerous. The only protective clothing the men had was a large leather bib apron and a heavy sack over their shoulders and their

²⁰ Alfred William *Life in a Railway Factory* (Duckworth & Co. 1915, republished by David & Charles with a new Introduction by Leonard Clark. in 1969.) pages 9 to 24

bunnets. The hammer boy only had a sack and his cap. The most common injury was from hot sparks. One such spark entered James McNeill's left eye. If had not been for the action of his father in taking him to an eye specialist, who removed the piece of iron using a magnet young James would have lost the sight of that eye. There was no contribution from his employers towards the cost of the eye operation. His father paid the fee from his own small resources.



Blacksmith Shop. Stamping Hammer at Work.²¹

When he was fourteen he started his three year apprenticeship as a structural engineer. What was life like for an apprentice?

²¹ S.Taylor Duncan. Partick Camera Club. Glasgow Museums Post Card.

Harry McShane (1891-1988) was born into a Catholic family. He then became a socialist, studied Marx, and joined the Communist Party in 1922. He was also a skilled engineer, among the first generation to gain an apprenticeship. In his autobiography *No Mean Fighter* written with Joan Smith he describes how hard apprentices had to work:

As apprentice engineers we had to attend evening lectures twice a week. I went to the Crookston Street School for two years. It meant that I had two long days each week. I got up at 5.30 am and have a cup of tea and a sandwich or porridge before getting to work at 6.00 am. I came home for my breakfast break from nine to nine forty five, when I nearly always had ham and eggs. For lunch I had a sandwich usually at home because we had from 12.30 to 1.30 pm, and then I worked until half past five. For tea I had either cooked meat and potatoes, or fish - we never ate meat on Fridays and in Glasgow generally there was a great deal of fish eaten, as well as a lot of mincemeat and corned beef. Of course you only ate like that when working! And even when eating well, to do evening classes on top of the day was very tiring. But I kept going to Glasgow Green and reading the debates. And of course there was a girl that I had to see. ²²

James McNeill's life as an apprentice would have been similar to that described by Harry McShane. As an apprentice structural engineer he was a tiny cog in 'The Workshop of the World' a title claimed by Glasgow and the surrounding industrial belt. Glasgow at the beginning of the 20th century was one enormous engineering works producing one-half of the railway locomotive and rolling stock, one third of the shipping tonnage and about a fifth of the steel. On the eve of the First World War the Clyde

²² Harry McShane and Joan Smith. *Harry McShane - No Mean Fighter* (Pluto Press. 1978). Page 20. Harry McShane went on to be a prominent figure in the Scottish workers movements and a life long fighter for better working and living conditions for the workers.

built one third of British ships but almost a fifth of the world's tonnage, a record that was greater at the time by a considerable margin than all the German yards combined. Factories in Glasgow produced engines, pumps, hydraulic equipment, railway rolling stock and a host of other products. Three of the four greatest firms building locomotives were in Glasgow. In 1903 they came together to form the North British Locomotive Works, which had had a capacity to produce no fewer than 800 locomotives every year. They were exported all over the world. Some are still pulling trains.²³

On the Clyde from Govan to Greenock every kind of ship was built and supplied to the world's war and merchant fleets. Among the ships built on the Clyde in the 20th century were HMS Hood, the Lusitania, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and the QE.II. The shipyards required a massive support system of other trades ranging from steel workers to cabinet makers. The 'yards' were the engine that drove the economy of Glasgow. If their order books were slim trade across the city suffered.

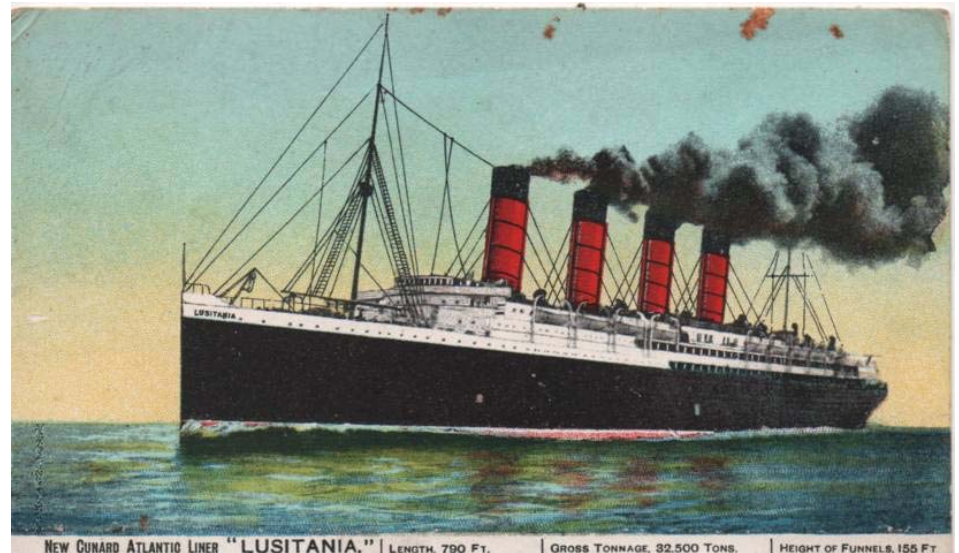
The shipyard workers, and the men in other trades, were very proud of their skills and of the ships, railway engines, and great bridges that they built. George Blake (1893-1961) the Greenock born novelist remembered as a small boy seeing the QSS Lusitania as she came down the River Clyde to her speed trials.

She came at length, however, looming gigantic, as she stood out in the ship-channel opposite the Custom House Quay. Was it the size of her, that great cliff of upper-works bearing down upon him? Was it her majesty, the manifest fitness of her to rule the waves? I think that what brought the lump to the boy's throat was

²³ T.M. Devine *The Scottish Nation. 1700-2000* (Allen Lane. The Penguin Press 1999) Pages 249 - 250.

just her beauty, by which I mean her fitness in every way; for this was a vessel at once large and gracious, elegant and manifestly efficient. That men could fashion such a thing by their hands out of metal and wood was a happy realization. Ships he had seen by the hundred thousand, but this was a ship in a million.

24

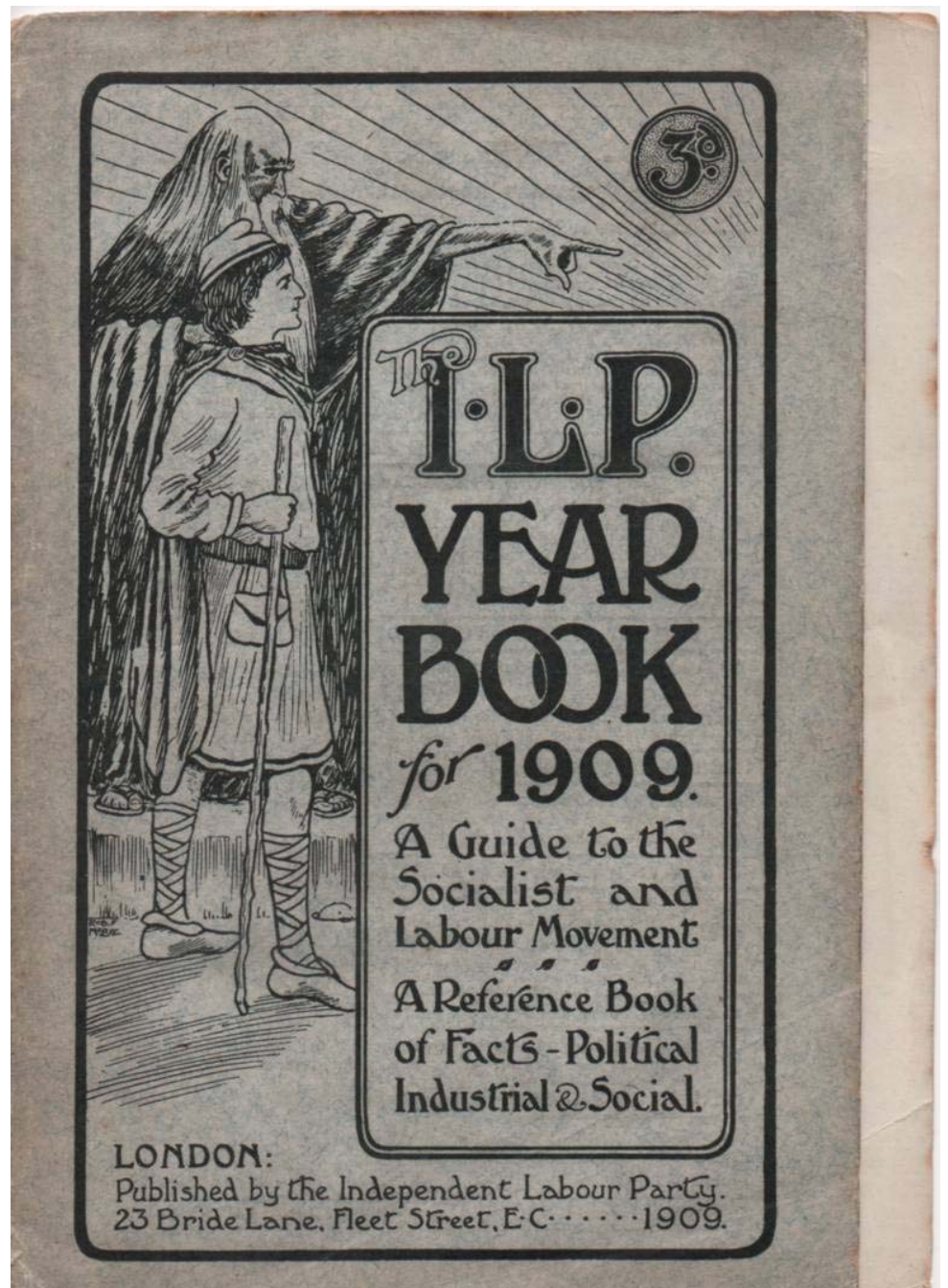


Clyde Built. "Queens of the Atlantic"

As the apprentices became more experienced they began to be proud of their skills and of the great

²⁴ Martin Bellamy. *The Shipbuilders. An Anthology of Scottish Shipyard Life*. (Birlinn 2001) Page 3. Quote from George Blake in *Down to the Sea. The Romance of the Clyde, Its Ships and Ship Builders*. (Collins 1937) pages 19 to 22.

reputation their workmanship had, summed up in the phrase "Clyde Built". One result of the huge concentration of engineering skills in Glasgow and the surrounding districts was the export of highly skilled Clyde trained engineers all over the world.



The workforce had a world wide reputation for producing high quality products. This was in spite of low wages, gaps in employment, dangerous working conditions, and poor living conditions. The Independent Labour Party Handbook for

1909 gives some figures for industrial accidents in 1907 and information on wage rates:-

Industrial Accidents. Page 46.

Deaths in Mines and quarries 1,368, an increase of 7% over 1906.

Deaths of Railway servants 509, and 21,582 were injured.

Wages were poor and hours were long for example the wages paid by the Railway Industry was as follows:-

Railway wages Page 50

29,540 men earned 31/- per week. (2007 value. £113 & £3803)

128,819 men earned between £1-1/- and £1-10/- per week. (2007 £74 & £ 110 £3803 & £ 5705)

100,930 earned a £1 or less per week.

It is not surprising that there were many industrial accidents considering that the average working week was 55 hours made up as follows:-

06.00 to 16.00 plus 1 hour for breaks.
Finish at 17.00 = 10 hours p/d=5 days
@10 hours =50 hours + 5 on the Saturday
= 55 hours per week²⁵

For the apprentices who would become skilled craftsmen their prospects of work, once they served their time, were marginally better. Though the Factory Acts would slowly improve safety factory work still remained dangerous. Accidents were common, and could often be fatal. 63 men were killed and over 500 required medical

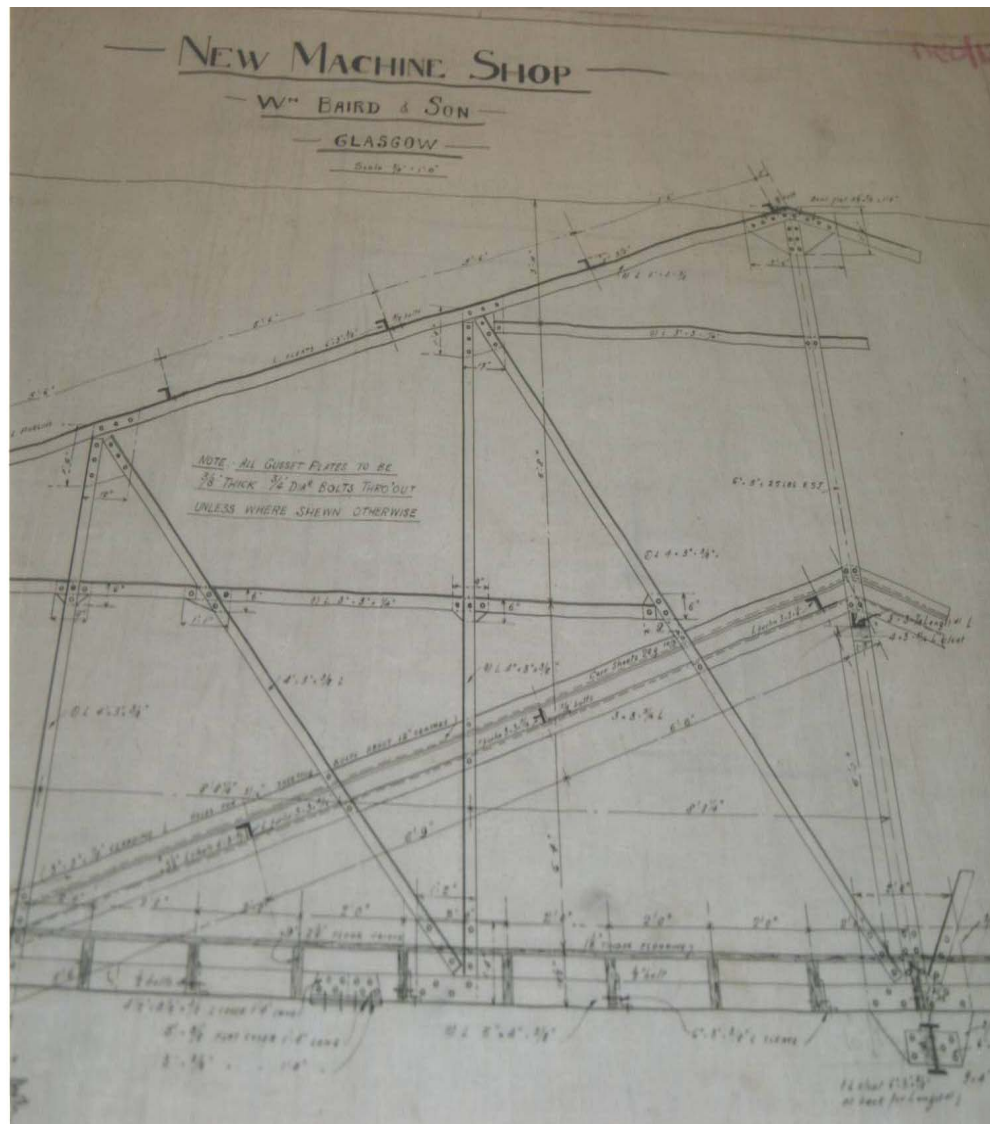
²⁵ The I.L.P. Year Book 1909. A guide to the Socialist & Labour Movement, A Reference Book of Facts, Political, Industrial and Social. Price 3d. Pages 46 & 50.

attention²⁶during the building of the Forth Railway Bridge. Mining disasters were all too common. There was also the long term effects of the exposure to dangerous chemicals and other substances used in the manufacturing processes. The death of, or a serious accident to, the family's main wage earner could quickly plunge a prosperous family into debt from which it could be very difficult to recover.

One result of the long hours were that the workers were exhausted which resulted in the accident rate being high and the quality of the work not always first class. Part of the reason for the failure of the Tay Bridge was the poor quality of the workmanship put into the making of the metal sections of the bridge.²⁷

²⁶ Charles McKean *Battle for the North. The Tay and Forth Bridges and the 19-Century Railway Wars* (Granta London 2007) Page 291.

²⁷ Charles McKean page 295



Drawing of an Elevation for an Iron Roof.

The Journeyman

After he finished his apprenticeship in 1898 James McNeill obtained a post as a draughtsman and template maker with the firm of Ralston, Goodwin and Company at Craighall Iron Works, Saracen Street, Possilpark. He worked for them for 12 years until 1910 when he left to begin his teaching career. From 1904 he was in full charge of the template loft or drawing loft. The company made iron roof beams for large open spaces such as railway stations and workshops, as well as girders for cranes and bridges. In the Template Loft full scale drawing were marked out on the

floor and wooden templates made of each item which were then used to shape the steel used in the construction.²⁸

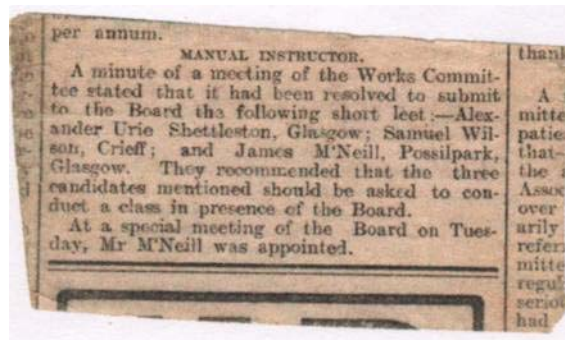
The Student.

Though he now had an excellent job he decided in his very early twenties that he did not want to remain in industry or continue to live in a large city. He found the physical conditions of the city constantly depressing. Though he enjoyed the political battle to try and improve the conditions of the workers it was, as he once told me, "a gie uphill struggle". A struggle that he was to continue for the rest of his life. It was not easy to find a way to escape. His qualifications were as a structural engineer and a structural engineering draughtsman. He could have joined the army, perhaps the Royal Engineers, or gone to sea in the Merchant Navy or Royal Navy. He would have been accepted into the forces because he was very fit. This was not the case for many men from Glasgow who hoped to find a new life in the Army. In the year ending 30 September 1907 of the 2,905 men who tried to join the Army in Glasgow 1,135 were rejected 39% of those who applied.²⁹ He may have seriously considered the possibility of joining the army because in 1900 he won the Walker Cup awarded to members of the volunteer battalions of The Highland Light Infantry. He Instead took advantage of a government scheme to attract qualified tradesmen to train as Manual Instructors to work in secondary schools. He began his studies in 1908. In 1910, aged 29, he qualified as a Manual Instructor. He left industry and began his career as a school teacher with a temporary post as an assistant teacher at Garnock Junior Secondary School, Maryhill, Glasgow. He

²⁸ Wages were not high. A junior draughtsman earned £1 a week (£73.15) which rose to £1.10 p.w. (£109.73) James McNeill earned around £1.10/- p.w. The manager earned £3.10; - per week. (£256.) Taken From the Wage Book of William Baird and Co. now in the Business Archive of Glasgow University

²⁹ ILP Year Book. 1909. Page 45.

left the company with excellent references from the management and W.S. Pairman, the Chief Draughtsman.³⁰



Newspaper cutting announcing James McNeill's success in obtaining his first teaching post in 1910.

He continued his training so that he could obtain further qualifications. The training included attending classes at Glasgow School of Art. The second phase of the building was then being completed. His student designs for furniture and art metal work were much influenced by the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh the architect of the Glasgow School of Art and by the work of other Glasgow furniture designers such as E. A. Taylor³¹.

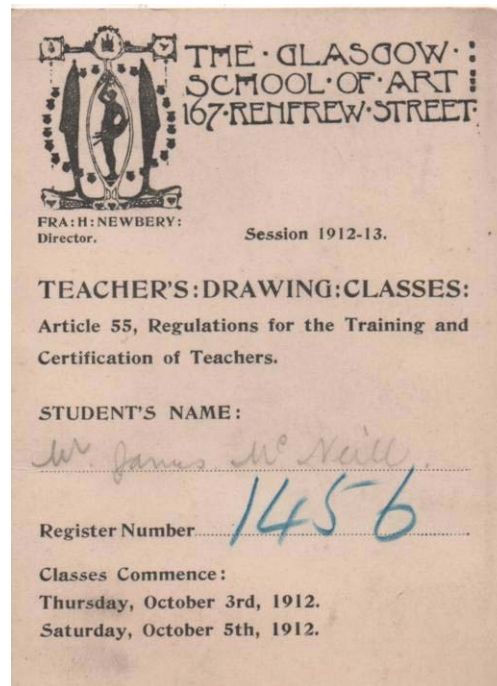
³⁰ James McNeill's references from Craighall Iron Works.:-

Craighall Iron Works, Saracen Street, Possilpark, Glasgow.

The bearer, James McNeill, has been in our employment as a template maker for twelve years, six of which he was in full charge of the template loft. We have pleasure in stating that Mr McNeill is a careful, accurate, and intelligent worker, in whom we always placed the utmost confidence. He is strictly sober and regular in his habits.

(Signed) Ralston, Goodwin and Company)

³¹ Julian Halsby and Paul Harris. *The Dictionary of Scottish Painters. 1600 to the Present* (. Canongate. 1990.) Pages 116, 117, 141, 218, Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) Architect, Designer and Artist. Ernest Archibald Taylor, Furniture and Interior Designer (1874-1951) husband of Jessie M King (1875 1949). They moved to Kirkcudbright at the beginning of WW1 and became leading figures in the artistic life of the town.



In 1911 Francis (Fra) Newberry was appointed Director of the Art School and he, strongly supported by his Board of Governors, developed Glasgow School of Art into a major institution with a European and possibly a world reputation.³²

It was to this thrusting institution that James McNeill and his future wife Mary Reid Henderson (1882-1964) were admitted as students. She was a full time student studying painting, etching, embroidery, metal work and enameling, and he was a part time student studying a very similar course.³³ Craft work, often of a high standard, had been for some time an approved activity for middle class young women, allowing them to attend art schools, without being seen to be in any way

³² Hugh Ferguson. *Glasgow School of Art*. (The Foulis Press of Glasgow School of Art 1995) page 48

³³ Mary Henderson gained her diploma and taught in Motherwell, Helensburgh and Stirling. She also exhibited her work. James McNeill left no details of how they met and I have been unable to trace any information about her life after they separated. It was not until after his death in 1964 that my sister and I discovered from the Divorce Certificate that he had been married before he married Jessie Patterson. Their parting must have been bitter, as there was a note in his handwriting that in the event of his death none of his belongings were to be given to Mary Henderson.

'fast' though the more daring were able to study painting and drawing and even by the late 1800's attend life classes. The best known of the young women students at Glasgow School of Art around 1900 became known as The Glasgow Girls. This group included the sisters Margaret and Frances McDonald who later married Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert McNair.³⁴ The sisters came from a comfortable middle class background. Margaret McDonald was said to have had an income around £250 to £300 a year. This was a considerable private income worth to day £14265. The Professors at the Art School earned around £450 pa (worth £25,677 today). It is unlikely that Mary Reid Henderson had this kind of income, but she probably was of a higher social class than the young, but ambitious, engineering draughtsman she fell in love with.

It is not clear why James McNeill decided to study *Design and Execution in Metal Work, Repousse, Silversmithing and Enamels* in 1912-13. He may have been encouraged to do so by Mary Henderson perhaps as a ploy to make sure he returned to Glasgow after their marriage in 1912. Or he may simply have wanted to add another qualification to his portfolio to help him to more senior posts in teaching. As an engineer he would have good industrial metal working skills, and as a draughtsman a good grasp of design. He certainly put these skills to good use and produced art metal work of a standard high enough to win the mark 'Excellent' on the Certificate he was awarded.¹ He was a very serious student reading the available literature on the subject and buying "The Studio" the leading art magazine of the time. He kept his copies. They were still in the loft of his house in Ayr when he died in 1964. From the examples of his work that have survived,

³⁴ Julian Halsby and Paul Harris. *The Dictionary of Scottish Painters. 1600 to the Present* (Canongate.1990.) J. Herbert McNair. Designer and painter, married to Frances MacDonald Page 144.

some of them now in the collection of Glasgow Art Gallery, he was a very expert craftsman. In Repousse work he made several fine mirror frames, silver bowls, and he made beautiful copper and enamel hinges for the cupboards he also built. He made his second wife an engagement and then a wedding ring.



A travelling writing desk and decorative metal work made by James Mc Neill.

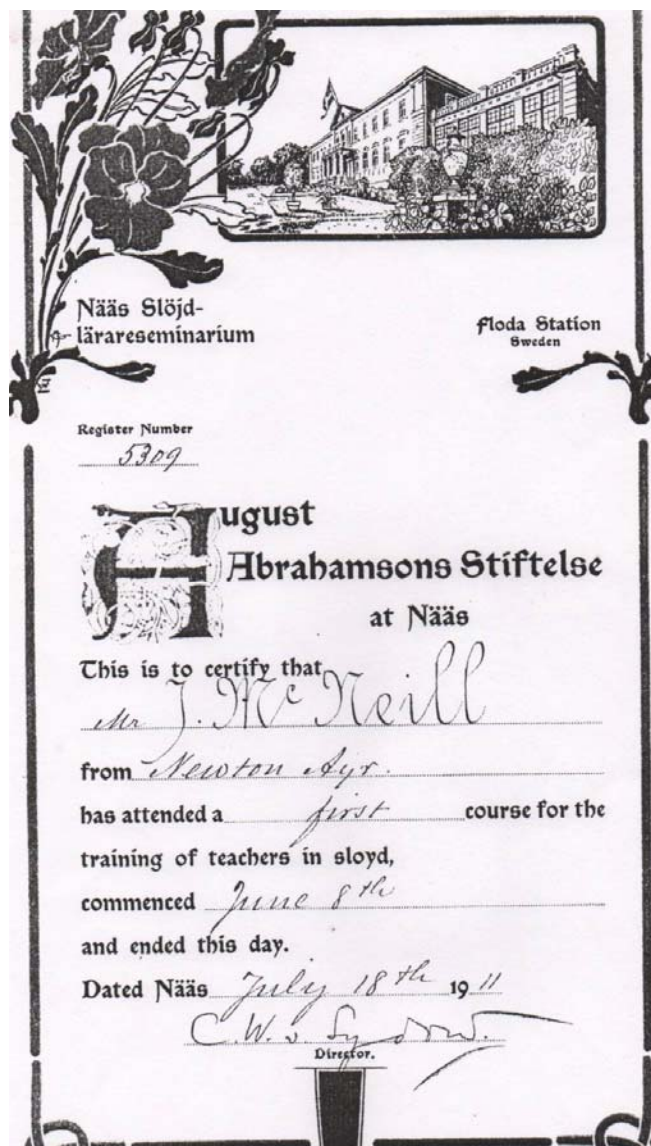


The Writing Desk Open and a Brass Trinket Box made by James Mc Neill.³⁵

An informal part of James McNeill's training, but a very important part, was the contact he was able to make through Mary Reid Henderson with the vibrant artistic life of Glasgow which in the visual arts revolved round the Glasgow School of Art. She introduced him to the beautiful water colours of C.R. Mackintosh, to work by the Macdonald sisters, Jessie M King, and her husband E.A Taylor. He would have seen the work of 'The

³⁵ These objects are all in the Glasgow Museums Collection. (Photos by RMcN)

Glasgow Boys' and the work of S.J Peploe, J.D.Ferguson, F.C.B. Cadell and Leslie Hunter known later as 'The Glasgow Colourists'. Work by the French Impressionists was also to be seen in Glasgow and James McNeill Whistler's Thomas Carlyle was in the Kelvingrove Gallery. Whistler was one of James McNeill's favourite artists, but that may just have been because of his middle name, and the fact that Whistler's mother was a McNeill from Barra.³⁶



Näås Slöjd-
lärarseminarium

Floda Station
Sweden

Register Number
5309

Hugust
Abrahamsöns Stiftelse
at Näås

This is to certify that
Mr. J. McNeill
from Newton Ayr.
has attended a first course for the
training of teachers in sloyd,
commenced June 8th
and ended this day.

Dated Näås July 18th 1911
C. W. S. Lydman
Director.

Attendance Certificate for James McNeill

³⁶ Melanie Parry. Editor. Chambers Biographical Dictionary. *James McNeill Whistler. 1834-1903. American artist who influenced many Scottish painters and who left the contents of his studio to Glasgow University.* Chambers 1997. Page 1940.

Training In Sweden

The most important part of his formal training was that which he received in 1911 when he attended a summer school at the Sloydareseminarium of Naas in Sweden. He travelled to Sweden through Belgium, Germany, and Denmark, cycling and camping. This was the only time he travelled to Europe. He never forgot the trip to Sweden. What he learned there was to influence a great deal of his work as a teacher and a designer. The woodwork of the interior of the house he built in Ayr in 1924 had a distinctly Swedish style. He was also greatly impressed by the standards of Swedish education and by the fact that girls in Sweden could attend Educational Handwork Classes, something he was to advocate on his return to Scotland though he never lived to see it put into practice. He would be very pleased to know that now in British schools girls can study educational handwork, and boys can learn to cook.

James McNeill would have read about Sloyd or Educational Sloyd and may have met during his training and early days of teaching woodwork teachers who had experience of Sloyd. It is a system of handicraft-based education started by Uno Cygnæus in Finland in 1865. It is still taught in Finland and Sweden. Otto Solomon started a school for teachers in Naas (now a part of the Swedish city of Floda) in 1870. The school attracted students from throughout the world and was active until around 1960. Educational Sloyd's purpose was formative in that it was thought that the benefits of handicrafts in general education built the character of the child, encouraging moral behavior, greater intelligence, and industriousness. These aspects would have greatly appealed to James McNeill. The students studied woodwork, 'Paper Sloyd' a system of model making

which trained the eye to see right lines and distances, and aided free hand drawing and writing. The students also studied and took part in gymnastics.³⁷

The importance of the Sloyd Certificate for Woodwork was recognised by the Scottish Education Department by 1900. From 1900 onwards there was a strong interest in the Sloyd System of teaching among educationalists in Scotland. In *The Educational News* (the journal of the Educational Institute of Scotland) issue of 16 September 1910 there is a very full report of the proceedings of the Educational Handwork Association's Summer School where the members are advocating a greater study of the Sloyd System, not only for Educational Handwork but throughout the school system. The reason for the proposal was that the members of the Educational Handwork Association saw the Sloyd System not only as a tool to be used in teaching Educational Handwork but as a vital factor in 'mind development'. He gained his Educational Handwork, Sloyd Association of Scotland Certificate in 1912.

In 1917 when James McNeill was seeking further exemption from military service he, at the request of Colonel Ker the retired officer who was the President of the Tribunal, tried to explain the importance of the work he did as a Teacher of Educational Handwork. His letter is a summary of the Sloyd system. Here is an extract.

Boys start their study of Educational Handwork at the age of 12 and continue for two or three years. In the early stages they are taught the basic use of tools and measurement. They then move on to make simple models in wood or metal and are introduced to the basic elements of design drawing so that they understand the need for a plan, elevation, and end elevation of

³⁷ En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sloyd. Last modified 14 August 2008.

the object they hope to make. They are shown how objects can be made in different materials, and why one material can be better for one job than another. For example it may be easier and more suitable to make a wooden box to store tools in, than a steel box. As the boys gain more knowledge and confidence they are introduced to the more difficult aspects of their work and the need to understand simple mechanics such as the use of a lever and fulcrum, or a block and tackle. The central purpose of this method of teaching is to help the boy to understand the need for practical and intellectual skills so that he can follow a useful career. The boy develops a dexterity of hand, his eye is trained to the sense of form. He receives impressions and is able to express them in action. He learns to translate ideas into practical realization. Thus the development of practical skills so improves his general intelligence that his capacity to solve problems that he will meet in his working life is greatly enhanced. Even to the boy who will not make his living by manual labour, the training in the handwork room fosters a worthy spirit of services, and a sympathetic and appreciative attitude towards those who carry on the manual work of the worlds.³⁸

One of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools shared this view. John Wilson thought so highly of the importance of woodwork that he himself went to Sweden to gain the Sloyd qualification. He was among students from all over the world. There were no fees and all that had to be paid for was board and lodging. The good Inspector found the experience invaluable when he returned to Scotland in that he could now offer advice to the Manual Instructors in the Highland Schools that he inspected

In *From Tales and Travels of A School Inspector*
John Wilson. (1888-1928) writes:-³⁹

³⁸ The full text of James McNeill's letter to Col Ker is given in the appendix.

³⁹ John Wilson. *Tales and Travels of A School Inspector* (First published in 1928 by Jackson, Wylie & Co, Glasgow, and republished

Why be a woodwork teacher?

It brought me much joy when manual exercises in the form of woodwork were introduced into the school curriculum. Rousseau attached much importance to it, and the enlightened Knox (John Knox) who is recognised as the father of Scottish Education, expressed himself in favour of hand and eye training for the embryonic handicraftsman, for whom the niceties of syntax or the study of logic had no fascination. That the making of wooden articles is from many points of view a valuable discipline cannot be denied.

James Mc Neill continued to teach the Sloyd system until he retired in 1946. He taught me any skill I have with tools by that method.

Politics-Leisure-Learning

I have headed this section 'Politics-Leisure-Learning' because for young working class men and women growing up in the last years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the three were intermingled. They worked long hours. They argued about politics and how to change society. In their leisure time, when not arguing or engaged in political activities, they went walking, swimming, dancing, attending the theatre and music halls, or sometimes the new 'picture houses' that were beginning to appear, they attended public lectures on the 'state of society' and they joined clubs to improve their knowledge of the world.

Young people joining a club was not a new practice. Robert Burns was the prime mover in the setting up of a Bachelors' Club in Tarbolton. Regulation 10 sums up the aims of the club:

Every man proper for a member of the Society, must have a frank honest open heart; above anything dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean-spirited worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted. In short, the proper person for this society is a cheerful, honest-hearted lad, who if he has a friend that is true and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteel to make both ends meet - is just as happy as the world can make him.⁴⁰

James McNeill and many of his friends were life long admirers of Robert Burns whom they considered a socialist. The organisations that they joined often had aims very similar to the Bachelors' Club, though perhaps

⁴⁰ Robert Crawford *The Bard* (Jonathan Cape, London 2009) Page 109.

expressed in a much more formal way. The membership also included women.

There were many topics for the young idealists to investigate. Here is a selection chosen at random from copies of *Forward* the ILP newspaper edited by Tom Johnston.

3 September 1909. Article by Tom Johnston. *A New Forward Policy* which was: - *A National Strike to be led by the Miners Union calling for the nationalization of the coal mines, railways and steel making.*

24 September 1909 Article: - *Horrible Housing of the Glasgow Poor.* Councillor Hamilton Brown. JP

Article: - *Republic or Monarchy. No11. The Wee Wee German Lairdie.*

Adverts for:-

The Clarion Scouts.

Glasgow ILP:-. Open air propaganda meetings at Queens Cross, Toll Cross, and Cathedral Square. Govan, Pollok, Springburn, Wynford Street and Lochburn.

Glasgow Catholic Socialist Society:-Chair John Wheatley. Ramble to Baldernock Lynn, meet at Bisopbrigs. 'Bring Rations.'

Kingston Socialist Sunday School. Naming Ceremony.

Clarion Van. Hutchinson Town.

Thursday 27 October City Hall. *George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb.*⁴¹ *Speaking in support of The New Crusade Against Unemployment and Destitution.* Admission 1/- and 6d.

25 June 1910. *How to Become a Socialist.*

Article by James A. Allan. Chair Glasgow ILP

30 July 1910:- *'Why A Labour Party?'* Article by Tom Johnston A defence of the Labour Party against an attack by John McLean.

⁴¹ Melanie Parry, Editor, *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. (Chambers Sixth edition 1997) George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Irish Dramatist and critic, Nobel Prize Winner. Socialist reformer much influenced by the works of Karl Marx. A member of the Fabian Society. He wrote many well known Socialist tracts and was an excellent and popular public speaker. Page 1684. Sidney Webb. Baron Passfield. 1859-1947. Largely responsible for establishing the London School of Economics in 1895 where he was Professor of Public Administration. He founded the Fabian Society in 1884. page 1924

Advert for a New Cycle. £3.19/6. from Templeton Brothers.

Article *The Vote and the Home* Mrs Jennie Baker of the Woman's Suffrage Movement.

The influence of Robert Burns on the social and religious thought of his time, and the value of his work in the fight for democracy in 1910.

NOTE: - The Forward carried regular articles about books, both current and past.

Example. 3 September 1910 an article about the poetry of Matthew Arnold.

And the need for a refreshing drink on the long country rambles that were very much part of their social life was not forgotten; The Forward carried adverts for Barr's Irn Brew.

Advert for Irn Brew. 5 June. 1909.

James McNeill and his comrades were deeply influenced by what they read, not only in *Forward* and *The Clarion*, but by books like *The People of The Abyss* by the American novelist and journalist Jack London. While London celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 Jack London was exploring the slums of London and in his book exposed the degradation forced by poor wages, chronic unemployment and bad health on the workers who were trying to survive in the richest city in the world.⁴²

Glasgow like London had dreadful slums. In 1888 Dr J.B Russell the Council's Medical Officer of Health reported:-

Of all the children who die in Glasgow before they complete their fifth year, 32% die in a house of one apartment; and not 2% in houses of 5 apartments and upwards. There they die[...]they are on a table or the dresser[...]their brothers and

⁴² James D.Hart. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (Oxford 1995) Jack London *The People of the Abyss* (Mills and Boon 1903) London is now most remembered for his novel *The Call of the Wild* 1903 but he had studied Marx and wrote a number of political books including *The Iron Heel* 1903 which foretells a fascist revolution which would be followed by a socialist Utopia..

sisters (continue) to play and eat in their ghastly company.⁴³

In 1894 his successor Dr Chalmers calculated that out of every 200,000 children born in Old Glasgow, which had a population density of 93 persons per acre, 63,134 (32%) died before they were five years old.⁴⁴ This was worse than the housing conditions in Manchester the city that so shocked Friedrich Engels when he worked there in the 1840's and wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

[...]the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health [...]in one of the courts there stands directly a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can only pass into and out of the court by passing through foul pools of urine and excrement.⁴⁵

The young Socialists were determined to see such conditions change.

James Mc Neill did not yet have unlimited freedom to explore his new world. He was still part of his Victorian father's household. Until he was eighteen he lived in his father's home at 179 Allander Street, Possilpark. David the eldest son had completed his apprenticeship as a marine engineer and left home to serve as a ships engineer in the Merchant Navy. It is believed that he settled in New Zealand, and as often happened, the family in Scotland lost all contact with him. The oldest sister Annie was in service. Maggie the next daughter kept house for her father. James, William (Billy), the youngest of the family, and Jessie the youngest of the girls, all lived at home. David McNeill

44. David Daiches. *Glasgow*. (Andre Deutsch Ltd, London 1977) pages 154.155.

45 Tristram Hunt. *The Frock-Coated Communist. The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels*. (Allen Lane. An Imprint of Penguin Books) quoted by Tristram Hunt, page 105.

senior continued to work as a maintenance engineer for Bislands which was a wholesale bakery, providing large quantities of bread, tea bread, cream cakes, fancy bread and many other delights for the sweet toothed inhabitants of Glasgow and even as far away as Stornoway. He was so horrified by the practice of recruiting men from the nearby "model lodging house" to tramp the dough in their bare feet while they chewed tobacco and spat into the dough, that he forbade the family to buy any bread from that bakery.

James McNeill liked to attend public lectures at the St Andrews Halls where he would have heard speakers like Cunningham Grahame, Bernard Shaw, Edward Carpenter⁴⁶ and many others. Soon after his 18th birthday he had gone to hear a lecture at the St Andrews Halls. He was 15 minutes late getting home. David Mc Neill was a very strict Victorian father with a fearsome temper. The house rules were that the girls could not go out without his permission, and had to be home by 9.00pm. James was allowed to go out without permission from his father, though he had to tell the 'auld man' where he was going and had to be home by 10.00. Part of the reason for these rules was that both father and son had to be awake at 5.00 am to be at their respective work places for 6.00 am. That evening James did not return home until 10.15 pm. His father was waiting for him in the kitchen with his heavy leather belt in his hand. He thrashed his son with the belt until the young man was in tears. Next evening James did not return to the family home.

⁴⁶ Sheila Rowbotham. *Edward Carpenter. A Life of Liberty and Love*. (Verso. 2008). 1844-1929. Socialist and writer.

Michael Holroyd. *Bernard Shaw*. 1856 - 1950(3 volumes Chatto & Windus 1988) Dramatist and socialist propagandist.

Melanie Parry. Editor. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. (Chambers 1997.)

Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham. 1852-1936. Scottish landowner author and socialist/national politician.

He had found 'digs' and from then on broke off all contact with his father, though he kept in close contact with his sisters and younger brother. He became an active member of the Independent Labour Party and remained a member all his life. He made friends with James Maxton and Tom Johnston and many other "stars" of the ILP.⁴⁷ He read William Morris, H. G. Wells, Jack London and English translations of Marx.⁴⁸ He studied Darwin and used the authority he found in Darwin in arguments with Christians about what he considered the false history of the world as presented in the Bible. He became an atheist though he always claimed that Christ was really an early socialist. He saw the organised Church, Catholic or Protestant, as on the 'side of the big battalions' the ruling classes and the bosses. He also saw the harm done to the cause of the working class by the sectarianism rife in Glasgow.

He began to study the history of the working classes in Britain. He discovered there was a long history of revolt by the common people against their rulers. He read about the Peasants Revolt against Richard II in 1381, The Levellers during the Commonwealth, the fight for the Reform of Parliament, the Chartists Movement. He began to understand the great tradition of the ongoing struggle to gain a better life for ordinary people. He learned how

⁴⁷ The Independent Labour Party was founded in Bradford in 1893 with James Keir Hardie as its leader. Its aim was to gain representation, independent of the Liberals, in the House of Commons. It established a firm base among the working class in Scotland and apart from Hardie and Ramsay McDonald, members of the ILP included James Maxton, later to be the much-loved leader of the ILP. John Wheatly, Patrick Dollan, and Tom Johnston who published and edited *Forward* the ILP newspaper.

⁴⁸ James McNeill had a well stocked library. His books included Burns, most of Carlyle, *The Golden Bough*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Walt Whitman and *The Ruba'iyat* of Omar Khayya'm which was one of his favourite books. (He gave me a copy as a New Year present while I was serving in the RAMC in 1956) Nearly all the novels and other works of Jack London, copies of the Everyman Library of English Classics, copies of *The Thinkers Library* and in the 1930s he joined the Left Book Club.

the Industrial Revolution had produced great wealth for the British ruling classes and the rising middle class and produced a terrible exploitation of the workforce many of whom lived on, or below, the poverty line. He began to understand why the working classes had to challenge 'the rights' of the ruling classes and the new 'princes' of the industrial world. He realized that though the Chartist movement did not achieve its aims these aims had not been forgotten.

As Professor T.M. Devine stated in *The Scottish Nation*:-

[...] though Chartism failed, it was far from being a historical irrelevance. It deepened and enlarged the Scottish radical tradition which had become established since the 1790s. The values of justice, fairness, morality, self-help, and the conviction that all men should work together for the common good, which Chartism inherited and refined, profoundly influenced the Labour movement of the later nineteenth century and beyond.[...]After the 1840s, prominent Chartists channeled their energies into a variety of reformist movements, including temperance, trade unionism, co-operation and municipal politics.⁴⁹

The Socialism that the young Glasgow socialists were part of also drew some of its inspiration from Europe where from the 1830's a new stream of political thought was bubbling up.

⁴⁹ T.M.Devine. *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*.Allen Lane. The Penguin Press. 1999. Page 280.

The Preface to the 1872 German Edition of *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by K.Marx and F. Engels written in 1848 states:-

The Communist League, an international association of workers, which could of course be only a secret one under the conditions obtaining at the time, commissioned the undersigned, at the Congress held in London in November 1847 to draw up for publication a detailed theoretical and practical programme of the Party [...] First published in German in 1848 [...]in English in 1850 [...]and in 1871 in at least three different translations in America.

Since then it has been published and read all over the world. The first paragraph of the Manifesto states:

A spectre is haunting Europe- the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of Old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German Police spies.

It ends with the following statements:

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. Finally they labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries. The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.

WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE⁵⁰

50.K.Marx and F.Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. (Progress Publishers. Moscow reprinted 1967). A reproduction of the English translation by Samuel Moore in 1888 from the original German text of 1848 and edited by Frederick Engels. Page 7. 39.96.

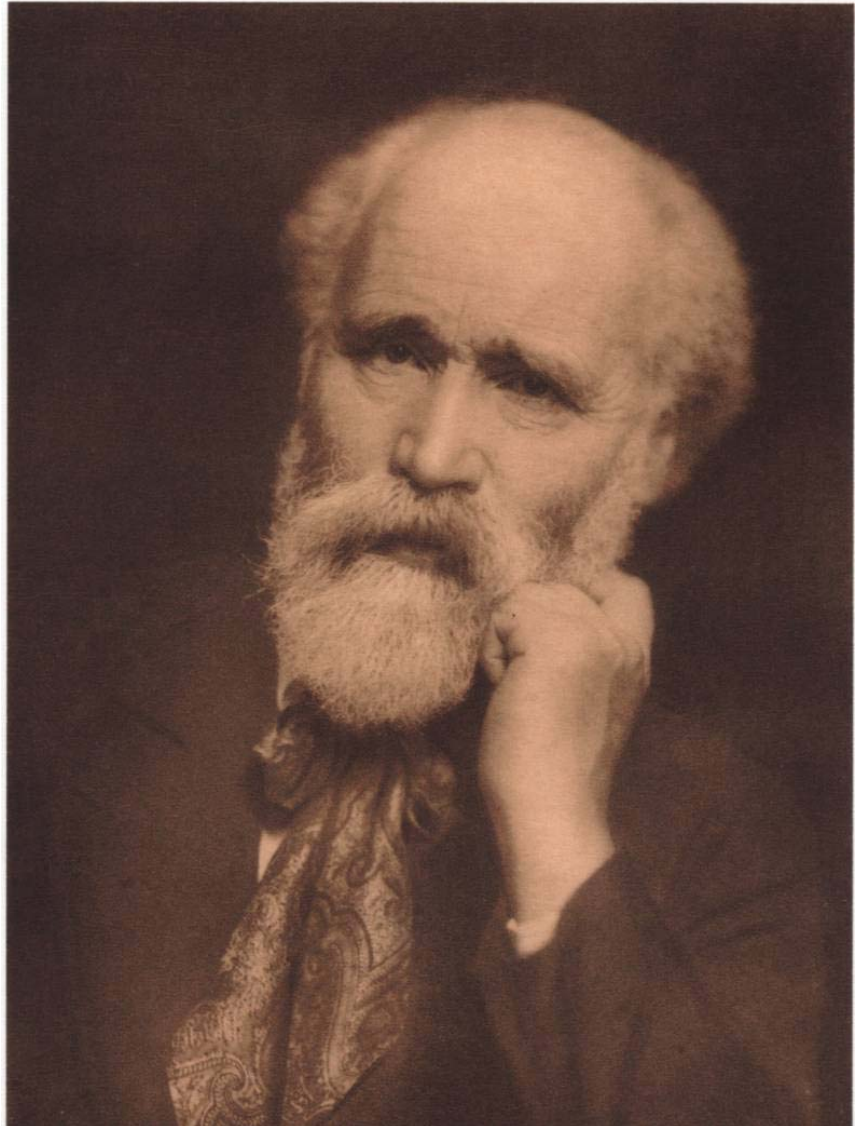
Meetings of workers from the main European countries began to be held regularly. These meetings would end with the singing of The Internationale their 'hymn' of hope for the workers of the world.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was forced to flee to London from Germany in 1849. In London he spent long hours in the British Museum writing his immense book of political thought and economics which would change the world for ever. The 20th Century would see the theories of Karl Marx and *Das Kapital* taught on the streets of Glasgow to the working men and women of the city. Their understanding of Marx united them with their European comrades in the struggle towards a fairer and better world.

In Britain by the mid 1890s there was major industrial unrest. Miners, railway men, dockers, and women employees all staged strikes. The employers, who had formed Trade Associations fought the strikers, imposing lockouts to starve the strikers into surrender. The strikes often did not win better conditions for the workers. The men were forced sometimes to accept lower wages at the end of the strike. They had no option, their families were near starvation and the landlords were evicting them from their homes.

How much did the young socialists know about Marxism? James Mc Neill never in my hearing used the term Marxism, but what he called 'Socialism' was very close to classic Marxism. MacLean and Maxton were certainly Marxists, as was Tom Johnston in his younger days. The young socialists listened to local speakers like MacLean and Maxton who had pitches on Glasgow Green and outside the Glasgow Tramway Office in Renfrew

Street. What they heard at these lectures, the discussions they would have with their comrades afterwards, their reading and their own experiences of the Capitalist System turned them into militant socialists and pacifists.⁵¹



Keir Hardie

⁵¹. Harry McShane and Joan Smith. *Harry McShane - No Mean Fighter* (Pluto Press. 1978.) Page 20.

James Mc Neill took me to join the Mayday March to Glasgow Green in 1946, the first Mayday March since 1939. We marched with the ILP. I carried the Ayr Socialist Sunday School small banner. He introduced me to James Maxton and David Kirkwood and other well known ILP figures and told me how as a young man he regularly came to Glasgow Green to listen to the speakers.

The politicians that my father and a majority of the young Scottish socialists admired were James Keir Hardie, and William Morris. These two very different men became role models for James McNeill and his comrades.

My father kept a signed photograph of Keir Hardie in his bedroom (see above) which I still have. Like Hardie he read Carlyle, he supported the Temperance Movement, he saw himself as an Agitator.

I have included a substantial section in this Dissertation about Hardie because I believe his life clearly illustrates the background of the self educated working class tradition in the socialist movement.

Caroline Benn in her 1992 biography of Hardie describes him as:-

[...]a political crusader who turned his religion into socialism and his socialism into a religion - far beyond the normal connection between church and chapel and political organisation.⁵²

Hardie inspired the young socialists. He was not a middle class intellectual socialist. He came from the Scottish working class. He was illegitimate, brought up by his mother on her own until she married David Hardie a ships carpenter. The family was poor and though he could read and write he did not attend school. At the age of eight years and nine months he started work as a message boy. He then had various jobs but the family could not afford the cost of him becoming an apprentice as he would have been unpaid for the first year of his apprenticeship. David Hardie returned to the sea and his wife and family returned to Newarthill, a Lanarkshire

⁵².Caroline Benn. *Keir Hardie. A Biography.* (Hutchinson 1992) Introduction page xix

mining village. In 1866 at the age of ten he went down the pits of the Monkland Iron Company. His wage was a shilling a day for a shift from 6.00 am to 5.30 pm. (value in 2006 £3.15 a day, or £17.33 a week for a 62 hour week, an hourly wage of 28p). Hardie's parents gave up their religious faith and became free thinkers, readers of the National Secular Society publications. Hardie did not attend Sunday School and ministers were not allowed in the house.⁵³ He began to read more and more and became devoted to the works of Burns whom he learned off by heart. In this he was following in the Scottish working class tradition of self education and improvement. In spite of the hours he spent under ground he still had the energy to attend night school and also to learn Pitman's shorthand. Among the authors he mastered was Thomas Carlyle. Another very strong part of his makeup was his total commitment to temperance. Many workers who were politically active, or active in the church were strong supporters of the temperance movement. He signed the pledge at the age of seventeen.

In the 1870s the miners were beginning to be organised into groups which would eventually form one of the strongest trade unions in Britain. It was almost inevitable that the young Hardie would become involved in this struggle and become one of the leaders. When he was twenty-one he was appointed to the post of Secretary to Hamilton District Branch of the Lanarkshire Miners Union. His actions on behalf of his members quickly came to the notice of his employers and he and his brothers were all sacked from the pit they worked in. He was black listed in all the Lanarkshire pits and from

James McNeill many years later was to follow the same principles, his children were sent to Ayr Socialist Sunday School, and they did not say prayers at school or receive any form of religious instruction.

then on became a full time political Organiser and eventually an MP. He and his family moved to Cumnock. To gain additional income to support his family he became the Cumnock correspondent of the local Liberal newspaper *The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*. The next twenty years was to see the rise of the Labour movement, the founding by Keir Hardie of the Scottish Labour Party in 1888 which was then absorbed into the Independent Labour Party in 1895. During this period Hardie was moving away from his support for the Liberals and was beginning to believe that only way to achieve a fair life for working men and women was through Socialism. His socialism was probably a mix of his own beliefs gained by his own experience as a worker, salted by some knowledge of the teachings of Marx, and perhaps influenced by William Morris. This was a path many of his supporters were to follow. In 1886 he was asked by the Ayrshire Miners to help them bring the union back to strength. He became the Secretary at a salary of £75 pa then £80 when he became secretary of The Scottish Miners Federation.⁵⁴

Addressing a meeting called to discuss Socialism Hardie said:-

[...]legislation must advance on the lines of Socialism until the people are in possession of the land.

Around the saeme time he wrote a preamble about the revived union he subtitled '*The Guild of Comrade Colliers*'

All wealth is created by labour. Capital is part of this stored up and used for assisting labour to produce more wealth[...]Profit is wealth which remains after wages, interest and rent have been

⁵⁴ £5990.67 in 2007.

paid. If all land and capital was owned by those who produce wealth, the wages of labour would be the same as wealth produced by labour[...]Capital which ought to be the servant has become the master of its creator.⁵⁵

Hardie became a national figure, then an international figure. In the election of 1892 he gained the seat for West Ham. He lost this seat in 1895 but was returned to Parliament as MP for Merthyr Tydfil in 1900 and remained an MP until his death in 1915.

He was a legend among socialists in his lifetime. His principles became the foundation of many young socialist men and women's beliefs.

His core beliefs included:-

Separate parliaments for England, Scotland and Ireland.

Britain to be a republic. He had no time for privilege or hereditary rule.

He believed he was as good as any man.⁵⁶

He supported full adult and women's suffrage.

He believed in self Government for India and the abolition of the British Empire.

For Hardie AGITATION was the highest form of political action.

Nothing would ever be done or given because people 'asked' or even demanded. Action was only taken by the rulers when it would be dangerous to them to withhold reforms.⁵⁷

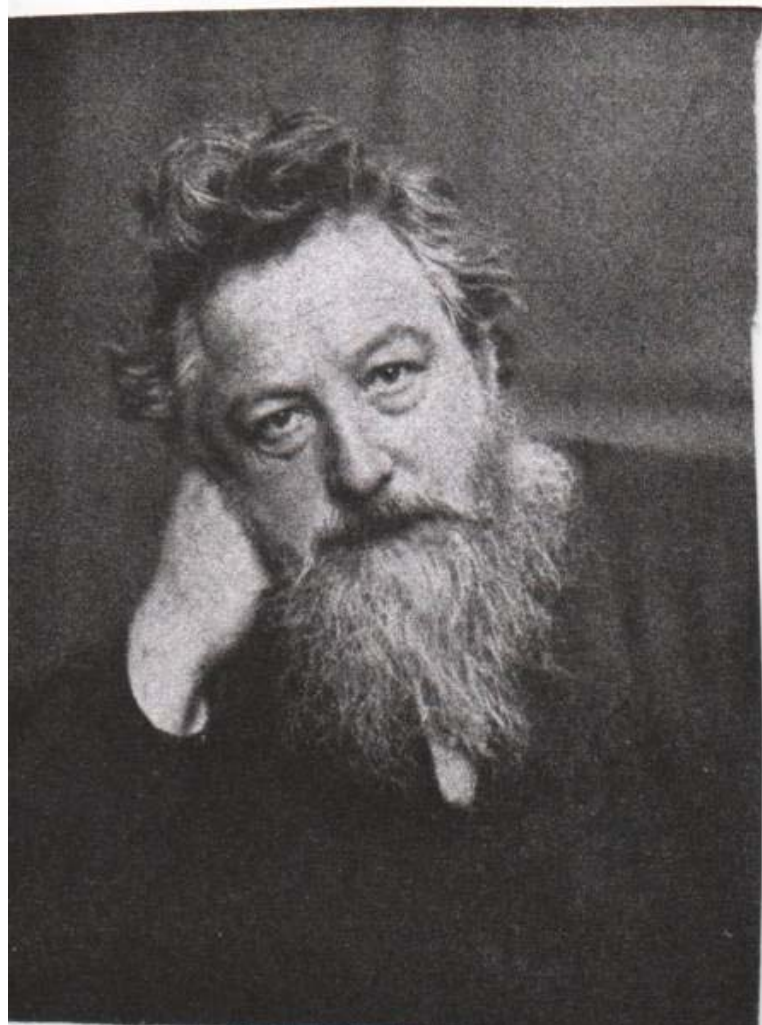
William Morris

⁵⁵ Caroline Benn. *Keir Hardie* Hutchinson. 1992. page 40

⁵⁶ A belief held very strongly by James McNeill,

⁵⁷ These quotes were in a notebook belonging to James McNeill

William Morris the great artist designer and most importantly of all a convert to the Socialist Cause was a great inspiration to the young socialists. He was a 'gentleman socialist' with a private income born in 1834 into a comfortable middle class family. He was educated at Marlborough School and Exeter College, Oxford. There he read for Holy Orders, but renounced the Church and studied architecture. He took up painting and then design. With the help of his artistic friends he founded the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company in 1861 which was to revolutionize the art of interior design and furniture making in England. He became a well respected poet. Like the young workers he was horrified by the living conditions he saw around him.



From a photograph by Frank Holler⁵⁸

He gradually became involved in Socialism, and in 1882 began a serious study of Marxism. He joined The Social Democratic Federation in 1883 and wrote a series of books which attempted to explain *Capital* to a working class audience. These books included *Socialism From the Root Up*, *A Dream of John Bull*, *How I Became A Socialist*. His books had an important influence on the thinking of young socialists.⁵⁹ In 1884 the SDF began to publish the magazine *Justice*. Between 1884 and 1890 Morris wrote over 500 signed articles. Morris's statements on the following subjects must have been a clarion call to these idealistic young men and women:

From How I became a Socialist:-

[...]what I mean by Socialism is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich or poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick workers, nor heart-sick hand workers, in a world in which all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all-the realisation at last the meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH.⁶⁰

On War and Imperialism:-

If war really becomes imminent our duties as socialists are clear enough, and do not differ from those we have to act on ordinarily[...]that the interests of the workmen are all the same in all countries, and they can never really be the enemies of each other; that the men of the labouring classes, therefore, should turn a deaf ear to

⁵⁸ The photograph is reproduced from *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*. Bruce Glasier. (Longman 1921)

⁵⁹ All these books were in James McNeill's library.

⁶⁰ Gillian Naylor, Editor. *William Morris by himself*. (Macdonald Orbis 1988) Page 218

the recruiting sergeant, and refuse to allow themselves to be dressed up in red and be taught to form part of the modern killing machine for the honour and glory of a country in which they only have a dog's share of many kicks and a few halfpence. All wars now waged, under whatever pretences, are really wars for the great prizes in the world market⁶¹

This was a clear statement against war that encouraged Conscientious Objectors when they refused to be conscripted into the armed forces in 1916.

Socialists were encouraged in their fight by Morris's clear thinking. For example on:-

Capitalism & The Environment:-

It is profit which draws men into enormous unmanageable aggregations called towns, for instance; profit which crowds them up when they are there into quarters without gardens or open spaces; profits which won't take the most ordinary precautions against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke; which turns beautiful rivers into filthy sewers, which condemns all but the rich to live in houses idiotically cramped and confined at the best, and at the worst in houses for whose wretchedness there is no name.⁶²

The above paragraph could be a description of the Glasgow that the James McNeill grew up in and of all the major British cities and towns during, and for a long time after the industrial revolution.

The great craftsman and revolutionary Socialist died from exhaustion on 3 October 1896 aged sixty three.

61.Hassan Mahamdallie. *Crossing the 'river of fire': the socialism of William Morris* (new words 2008) non numbered page in the introduction.

62 Hassan Mahamdallie.non numbered page in the introduction.

James McNeill was only fifteen when Morris died, but there can be no doubt that the life and work of William Morris profoundly influenced him both as a socialist and a craftsman. When he died in 1964 there was still a copy of *News From Nowhere* in his bookcase, a bookcase designed and made by him using the principles of design advocated by William Morris.⁶³

Tom Johnston

Though Morris's writings had a great effect on the young socialists in Scotland it was a book published in 1909 by Tom Johnston (1881-1956) editor of *Forward* that exposed the injustices of the Scottish ruling classes that gave them the ammunition to drive home their attack on the ruling classes.⁶⁴

In the preface to *Our Scots Noble Families*, Ramsay McDonald MP wrote:

I am writing in the midst of Budget debates (1909) and I have to listen day after day to representatives of the class dealt with in these chapters, describing the Budget as exploitation, theft and robbery[...]It is therefore necessary to make clear to the public that we are not on such occasions to stand on the defensive, but to assume the offensive. The origin of the classes must be enquired into. By what manner of means did they acquire their broad acres? How have money lenders become peers, and merchants, princes? [...]What is their title to pose as honest men? Mr. Johnston has supplied part of the answer. The (real) history of the people of Scotland yet remains to be written[...]the story of the people in history is the best handbook for the guidance of the people in politics.⁶⁵

⁶⁴. Melanie Parry, Editor, *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. (Chambers Sixth edition 1997) page 994. Tom Johnston (1881-1966) Scottish Socialist politician Founder and Editor of *Forward* (1906) The ILP newspaper published in Glasgow. Labour MP. Secretary of State for Scotland. 1941-45. First Chair of the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board 1945.
⁶⁵ From the Preface written by Ramsay MacDonald to the first edition of '*Our Scots Noble Families* in 1909.

Tom Johnston started his book with A General Indictment:-

Before proceeding to analyse the methods of which each of our Scots noble families rose to fortune, and before I examine in detail the origin of their various divinities, dignities, and privileges, it is advisable to take our canvas and lay on in primary colors a general and comprehensive indictment of Scots landlords as a class. The histories of our land have been mostly written to serve the political purposes, and flatter the conceits of our aristocracy [...]And that is why the history of Scots mining is wrapped in darkness: that is why we never hear of the two hundred years slavery, and why the collier of today does not know his ancestor of a century ago was a two legged chattel, bought, sold and lashed [...]There are no popular histories of the thefts of Klann⁶⁶ and Abbey lands[...]A democracy ignorant of the past is not qualified either to analyse the present or to shape the future[.]great care has been taken to offer us stories of useless pageantry, chronicles of the birth of Kings[...]and international war, while withheld from us were the real facts and narratives of moment, the loss of our ancient freedom, the rape of our common lands and the shameless and dastardly methods by which a few selected stocks snatched the patrimony (*Tom Johnston's spelling*) of the people.

The book was made up from the articles on the same subject that Johnston had published weekly in *Forward*. The collected edition of the articles became a best seller. This book was possibly even more of an

Ramsay MacDonald. 1866-1937. Scottish Labour Statesman. Leader of the Labour Party (1911-14) and (1921-31) First Labour Prime Minister (January 1924-November 1924) and again in 1929. In 1931 he agreed to be Prime Minister of a 'National Government' with the Conservatives. Socialists felt that he had disgraced them and he was never forgiven. He died in 1936.

⁶⁶ Klann. This is the spelling used by Tom Johnston.

influence on young Scottish socialists than the teaching of Marx. Though idealistic they knew from their own hard experience the reality of the working class struggle. James McNeill was descended from generations of coal miners who had suffered from the outrageous behaviour of the coal owners. James Mc Neill came from a family of coal miners. He remembered it was only a hundred and two years before he was born that his namesake James McNeill had been made to wear an iron collar round his neck to mark him as a serf belonging to the owner of a coalmine near Tranent. If he had tried to escape to find a better employer he would have been dragged back and punished by having a nail put through a hole in the iron collar and then he would have been left nailed to a wooden strut at the bottom of the mine shaft. Children as young as nine worked in the pits, often helping their mothers who carried the coal to the surface on their backs. It was not until 1848 that women and children were prohibited from working below ground in the pits. They continued to work on the surface often for twelve hours a day for very low pay.⁶⁷ It was a constant battle between workers and owners to win even the smallest Improvements in wages and conditions in the 19th century. He saw it as natural justice when the Duke of Hamilton, whose vast fortune was established by his profits as a coal owner, and who did every thing he could to break the miners union discovered that Hamilton Palace would have to be demolished in 1921 because of the coal workings underneath.

The young socialists had a long battle ahead of them before they would become a real force for change,

⁶⁷ Peter McNeill. *Tranent and Its Surroundings. Historical, Ecclesiastical and Traditional.* (First published 1883.) (Remploy reprint Edition 1984) pages 21-22. Peter McNeill also wrote a novel *Blawerie. Mining Life in the Lothians.* (First published 1887. Remploy Edition 1983)

but they were planting the seeds that would grow into the movement for change which contributed so much to the landslide victory for Labour in 1945 and the establishment of the Welfare State.

There were many barriers for them to overcome before they would reach that stage.

As Richard J Finlay states in his essay *Continuity and Change in Scottish Politics 1900-45*⁶⁸ mainstream politics were changing in Scotland in 1900. These changes would fundamentally alter the political landscape of the country. In 1900 in the Khaki Election the Conservatives had a landslide victory. They and their allies the Liberal Unionists won more than half of the parliamentary seats in Scotland. This election result was a freak but the long-term effect was that the major parties had to rethink their strategies. The Conservatives became firmly the party of British imperial patriotism. The Liberals used the Young Scots Society which had been established in 1900 to reestablish the Liberals as a force for change in Scotland. They promoted radical and progressive candidates and took up the issues of poverty, the reform of education and work legislation. These were issues that were of great concern to the socialist movement. Some of the Liberal radicals felt that there was little difference between their aims and the aims of the ILP and the Fabians. Their policies certainly attracted the more senior members of the working classes and this support helped the Liberals to victory in the 1906 General Election when the 'new' Liberal Party won fifty-eight seats, the Liberal Unionists and Conservatives twelve and Labour two. The Liberals were now established as the most serious obstacle to the socialist parties gaining seats at

⁶⁸ T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay editors Scotland *In The 20th Century*. (University of Edinburgh Press. 1996) Pages. 64, 65, 66, 67.

Westminster. It was not until the election of 1922 that the socialist parties gained real representation in Parliament.

Leisure



James Mc Neill looking towards the Socialist Utopia.⁶⁹

There were other leisure activities which did not directly involve politics. There was much to enjoy in the life of Glasgow even if you only had an apprentice's wage. At the weekend you could listen to all manner of speakers on Glasgow Green. You could take your girl to hear the bands playing in Kelvingrove, or sail your model yacht on the big pond in Queens Park. If it was cold you could visit the hothouses of the Botanic Gardens, or the new Kelvingrove Art Gallery. The new century was celebrated by the 1901 Exhibition in Kelvingrove

⁶⁹ James Mc Neill like many vegetarians believed that sun and wind was also good for your health, and clothes should not get in the way. When we were hill walking he would often strip off and plunge into a pool or a loch. I always had to join him.

Park where the centrepiece was the new Art Galleries.⁷⁰ The prosperous families would drive out in their carriages to see the Exhibition. The more daring, or progressive, replaced their carriages with the new exciting motor car.

Glasgow was a splendid shopping centre. The really expensive shops patronised by the well to do were in Buchanan Street and Sauchiehall Street such as Watt Brothers, Copeland and Lye, Wyllie and Locheads, Dally's. After the excitements of shopping ladies could recover with afternoon tea in one of Miss Cranston's beautiful tea rooms, designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The working classes would shop in the small shops close to their tenement homes, or in the Co-operative Stores.⁷¹

Saturday afternoon was their main time for relaxation. The men would watch professional football, or play for amateur teams. Both men and women would go off to explore the surrounding country side by foot or on their bikes.

In the evening people of all classes would go to the theatre, music hall, or the new picture houses. James Mc Neill enjoyed going to the theatre. He kept the programme of the productions he visited and among those that have survived is a programme for The Kings Theatre for 2 December 1912 which was presenting the FAREWELL TOUR OF FORBES ROBERTSON

69. There were large International Exhibitions held in Glasgow in 1888, 1901 and 1911. James McNeill had a season ticket for the 1911 Exhibition and saved the programme for 22 Sept 1911. The exhibition opened at 10.00 am and closed at 10.00 pm. The programme included military bands and a pageant play in four acts *The Bruce* in the Concert Hall.

70. The Co-operative stores were owned by the Co-operative Societies and any profit made was paid back to the members by means of a yearly 'dividend' familiarly known as the 'divvy'. The Societies organised Men and Women's Guilds and had a political wing the Co-operative Party.

AND GERTUDE ELLIOT and THEIR FULL LONDON COMPANY.⁷² There was a repertoire of six plays including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The following week the Kings were presenting The D'Oyly Carte Company with their repertoire of Gilbert and Sullivan. He made a special trip to Glasgow on 13 March 1916 to see Sarah Bernhardt the famous French actress who was top of the bill of a high class music hall programme at the Alhambra Theatre. He went to see the productions of The Scottish Repertory Theatre at the Royalty Theatre. The plays were produced by Lewis Casson who was married to Sybil Thorndike. They were both committed socialists who saw the theatre as another weapon to use against the ruling classes. They went on to form one of the strongest partnerships in 20th century British Theatre. In Ayr he took Jessie Paterson to see a very popular Scots comedy *Buntie Pulls The Strings* by Graham Moffat. Another production of this play became a great success in New York and went on to tour Australia. In a much more serious mode they went to see the B. Iden Payne Company in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. Artists such as Harry Lauder, the great Scots Comic Singer delighted capacity audiences at the Empire and the Alhambra. Pantomime was king at the Royal Princess Theatre in the Gorbals (now the home of the Citizens Theatre Company.) By 1910 there were 15 theatres in Glasgow.⁷³

⁷² Edited by Phyllis Hartnoll. *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. (Oxford second edition 1957) page 271. Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson (1853-1937) English Actor Manager famous for his Hamlet married Gertrude Elliot (1871-1940) an American actress of great charm and talent who then became his leading lady.

⁷³ Bill Findlay (editor) *A History of Scottish Theatre* [Edinburgh University Press 1988] page 206.

The Scottish Sabbath still reigned supreme on the Sunday and a large number of the population would attend some kind of church at least once on the Sabbath. Devout families went to morning and evening service, and the children went to the Sunday School. The children of socialists went to Socialist Sunday Schools. Many of the working class did not attend church and for them it was 'a day of rest' before returning at 6.00 am on the Monday morning to another fifty five hour week in factory or shipyard.

The desire to escape from the horrors of city life to a healthy and happy life in the country go very far back in human experience. The need to escape was increased in the 19th and early 20th century as cities and their populations grew. Many of the working population of Glasgow in the late 19th and early 20th century had personal memories of the countryside, or if they themselves had no experience of the country, certainly their parents and grandparents did

Though my grandfather David McNeill worked at the coal pit in Waterside, Kirkintilloch, the little mining village was in the countryside and his cousins lived and worked in the fruit farms of the Clyde Valley. David and his older children carried their memory of country life with them to Glasgow. James and his brothers and sisters enjoyed their school holidays and escaped from the smoke of Glasgow to the fresh air of the fruit farms. My father had happy memories of spending holidays with his aunts, helping to pick the fruit, breathing in the clear clean air of the fruit fields instead of the polluted air of Glasgow. He was allowed to sit on the back of the giant, but gentle, Clydesdale horse as it pulled the hay cart into the yard. But one day he was on the back of the horse at 'lowseing time' the horse with no load to pull headed for

his stable. The lintel of the door was just high enough to allow the horse to pass under it, but not the little boy, who was swept over the tail of the horse and landed with a great thump on the ground. He was winded but soon recovered when his aunt give him a large freshly baked scone full of butter and home made strawberry jam. It was while staying at his Aunt's fruit farm that he developed a life long taste for 'soor dook' or buttermilk which the farm workers drank as a refreshing drink



A fifty foot yawl sailed with a professional crew.⁷⁴

Another treat was to go with his father and older brother to sail on the estuary of the Clyde. A close friend of his father was the professional skipper of a fifty foot private sailing yawl owned by a Glasgow business man who liked to cruise on the Firth of Clyde. Sometimes if the owner was not on board but wanted his yacht to be moved from Gourock to Tarbert, Loch Fyne, his father

⁷⁴ Photograph in James Mc Neill's collection. Where no source is given for photographs they were found in his collection, and would have mostly been taken by him.

would take him by train to Gourrock and they would sail to Tarbert and return by one of the fast Clyde steamers. His favorite steamer was the graceful paddle steamer Columba. On one occasion they saw Sir Thomas Lipton's great yacht Shamrock practicing for the America's Challenge Cup.



Paddle Steamer St Columba at Tarbert Pier.

Young people sought ways of escaping from the cities and towns of Britain. They joined rambling clubs and cycling/political clubs like the Clarion Scouts.⁷⁵ If they could afford to they bought tents, if they were poor they slept under a haystack, or a friendly farmer let them sleep in his barn. They also joined a wide variety of clubs devoted to politics and self improvement.

James Mc Neill's surviving membership cards of the societies that he joined give us a glimpse into some of the

⁷⁵ . *The Clarion* Newspaper founded by Robert Blatchford in 1890 led to the founding of the Clarion Cyclist Club in 1894. Its motto was *Socialism - The Hope of the World*. The cyclists would meet regularly and distribute *The Clarion*. They made the bicycle a political tool to spread the ideas and ideals of socialism.

leisure pursuits available to Glasgow men and women before the World War 1.

It was around about this time after a visit to a slaughter house that James McNeill decided to become a vegetarian. He found it quite difficult to adapt to a vegetarian diet. Seeking help he became a member of The Scottish Vegetarian Society.

The Syllabus of Lectures arranged by the Society for 1904-05 has survived. There were nine lectures at 8.00 pm in the Christian Institute 70 Bothwell Street. Admission price 1/-. The subjects of the lectures ranged from "Food Reform in America" to "A Rational Diet -When, Where and How." The last one must have been of great interest to the novice vegetarian.

The Glasgow Clarion Scouts offered for their 1907/08 season of evening events:-

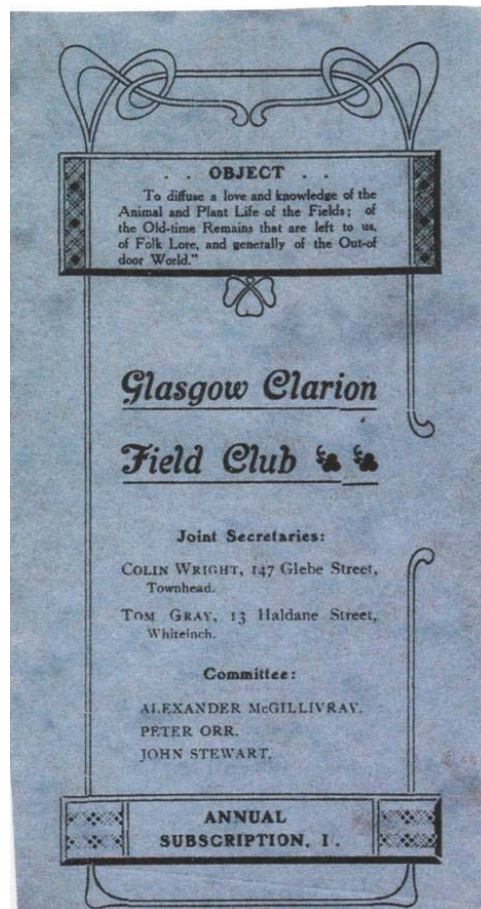
Educational Classes which in one week offered classes on Monday in Esperanto, Wednesday History of Socialism, and Elements of Economics, Thursday Biology, Friday, and on Sunday at 1 pm Literary Essays. Classes started at 8.00 pm on weekdays so that the workers could go home, wash change and eat, and get to the classes in time.

He was a member of the Glasgow Clarion Field Club whose 'object' (or as we would say now 'mission statement') was:-

To diffuse a love and knowledge of the Animal and Plant Life of the Fields: of the Old-time remains that are left to us, of Folk Lore, and generally of the Out-of door Worlds

Their syllabus for 1906 is printed on a pale lilac coloured card with a charming art nouveau

design. The programme started on Saturday 25 March with a visit to Craigallion Loch near Bearsden and continued until the 28 October with a return visit to Craigallion Loch. There were 32 excursions each with a theme. For example on 1 September they visited Beith in North Ayrshire for a Geological Day. They mostly travelled by train, or by tram and then walked, or joined in with the Clarion Scouts and cycled.



James Mc Neill was also a member in 1908/09 of the St George Co-operative Society's Camera Club which from October to April met twice a month in the Co-operative Hall, 40 Gladstone Street near St George's Cross. The Club offered lectures on all aspects of photography and held an annual exhibition of members work. He was a keen amateur photographer, sadly not many of his photographs have survived, though some that

have survived are of very beautiful naked young women in tents, or in one photograph standing by a large double bed.⁷⁶

He joined the Glasgow Health Culture Society whose motto was "Health is the First Wealth" *Emerson*⁷⁷. The subscription was 2/6 per year. In their handbook for 1909/10 it states:-

The Management of the Society.

This society is to a great extent doing pioneer work and is serving as an example to others, practically all over the world. It is therefore essential that it should maintain a high state of efficiency in all its activities. All the workers are honorary, and although the work entails a considerable sacrifice of time, this is cheerfully borne, because it is so interesting and the results so satisfactory. **We always need more keen and willing workers, and would like each member of the Society to take a share in promoting the general weal**⁷⁸

The Society offered lectures, the use of a library, a bookstall where members could buy magazines, including *Good Health*, the monthly magazine of *The Outdoor League*. They could also buy maps suitable for rambles and photographs of rambles. Brooches and buttons at one shilling each could be bought at the enrolling table, and members were asked to buy and wear them so that they

⁷⁶ I can identify the bed as it became my bed and the beautiful young woman is my mother, Jessie.

⁷⁷ Melanie Parry, Editor Chambers Biographical Dictionary 6th edition 1997 page 603.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) American Poet and Essayist. He was an idealist or transcendentalist in philosophy, a rationalist in religion, and a firm advocate of individualism and spiritual independence. He also carried on a 38 year correspondence with Thomas Carlyle.

⁷⁸ The sentence is printed in bold on the membership card.

could be identified. The logo was a spruce tree, an evergreen, as rambling was an all the year round occupation. The handbook includes rules that should be observed when exploring the countryside which became the foundation of *The Countryside Code*. Instruction was given on how to exercise in an organised class and at home. It was important to have a cold shower or cold sponge after exercise. There were official costumes for men and women.

Women:-Plain white Shirt
Blouse-Navy Blue Serge Tunic (to clear the ground by two inches when kneeling) -Loose Knickers to edge with tunic. (Paper patterns to be had from Class Secretary) - Navy Blue Stockings and Gymnastic Shoes.

Gentlemen:-White Cellular Shirt (This guards against chills better than a semmit) - Loose Navy Blue Flannel - Serge or Jean Knickers - Navy blue stockings with turn down tops - White gymnastic shoes.

The Club also offered swimming classes and a ladies hockey club.

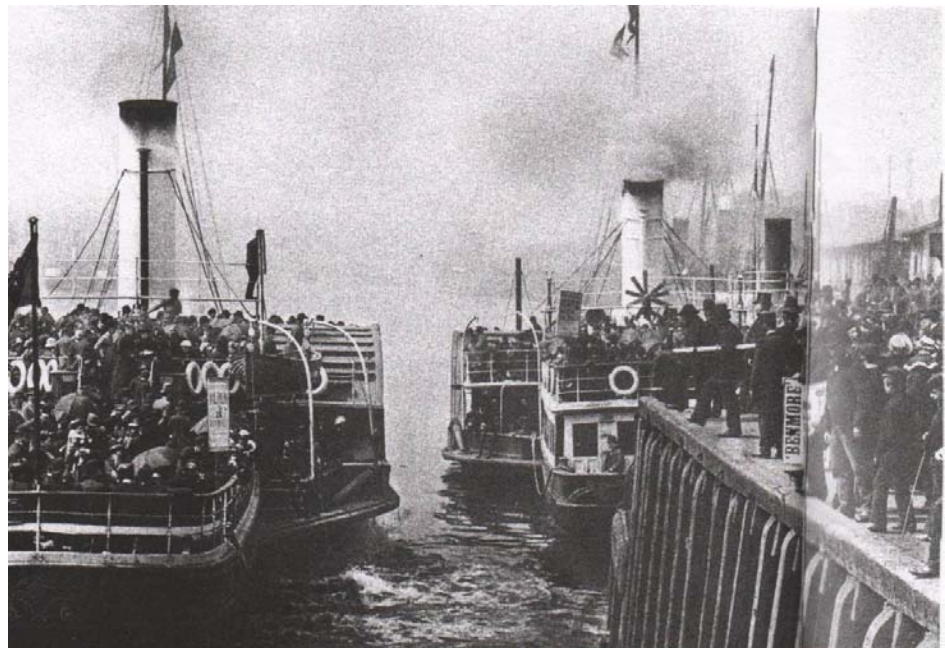
The back inside cover of the Handbook printed in bold gives a very clear picture of the kind of 'good health' sought by young men and women at that time.

YOU SIGN NO PLEDGE
BUT THINK FOR YOURSELF.[...] the Society exacts no pledge[...]it invites its Members to consider thoughtfully the importance to health of open windows, long walks, simple and very thoroughly masticated food, Daily home exercise, simple but regular.[...] no meal time drinking, but free use of water at other times, regular bathing, avoidance of Medicine, but alteration of manner of living to improve health.[...]gives its Members opportunities of learning both sides of

each question and leaves the results to their common sense. The questions are:- Food Reform (Vegetarianism, Fruitarianism, etc) Tobacco (Smoking etc) - Dress Reform (Corsets, High Heels, etc)-Alcohol.

These societies had a great influence on the young men and women who wanted to change society. They also offered the opportunity to people who had left school at 13 or 14 to continue to learn. Their other great attraction was the chance for men and women to meet socially on equal terms.

James McNeill, as a vegetarian from the age of 18, who never drank alcohol, or smoked, took regular exercise all his life and was deeply involved in political life, was a typical example of the young people who made up the majority of the membership of these societies. What he learned from his membership certainly influenced the way he taught and also how he brought up his own children.



'Doon the Water' Steamers leave the Broomielaw.

For a large majority of the population of the industrial belt of Scotland their main means of escape was to go "Doon The Water" in other words to escape to the seaside. Scotland has one of the finest coast lines in Europe offering a great variety of scenery and seaside towns and villages. From the mid 19th century onwards little fishing villages like Rothesay were transformed into holiday towns, not only for the upper and middle classes, but for the working classes. By the middle of the 19th Century the middle classes could afford to build new houses as summer homes in the seaside resorts. Some of the houses were to a very grand scale. Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817-75) the master of the Greek Revival style built mansion houses in Rothesay and Cove (Craig Ailey).⁷⁹ Charles Rennie Mackintosh built 'Hill House' in Helensburgh for the Scottish publisher Walter Blackie. The Edinburgh architect Robert Rowand Anderson (1834-1921) built a magnificent new home for the Marquis of Bute at Mount Stuart outside Rothesay.⁸⁰ It was not only great houses for the very rich or the successful middle classes that were built. As working class people began to be able to afford to spend a day, or a week by the seaside tenements were also built where landlords would offer a single room, or a room and kitchen, for a whole family. Sometimes the lodgers discovered other life had already lodged in the single roomed flat:-

In search of lodgings we did slide
To find a place whaur we might bide

⁷⁹ John Keay and Julia Keay editors. *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland*. (Harper Collins. 1994) page 937. Alexander 'Greek Thomson' is considered Glasgow's most original Victorian architect. His practice was not confined to Glasgow.

⁸⁰ John Keay and Julia Keay editors. *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland*. (Harper Collins. 1994) page 29. Robert Rowand Anderson (1834-1921) was also the architect of the Central Hotel in Glasgow which fronts the Central Station from where the trains for Wemyss Bay and steamers to Rothesay leave. The queues of people waiting for trains for Wemyss Bay at Glasgow Fair could pass the time admiring the architecture of the Central Hotel. They were unlikely to be invited to visit Mount Stuart. Now the building and the estate are open to the public.

There were forty-twa of us inside
 In a single end in Rothesay O
 We a' lay down to tak our ease
 When Cliff here happens tae sneeze
 And he wakened half a million fleas
 In a single end in Rothesay O.⁸¹

Outside the close mouth lay the beach and all the other attractions of the seaside towns, the most important one being the large amounts of fresh air, even if it was often mixed with large amounts of rain. For the short period of their holiday working people were able to breathe unpolluted air. The busiest time for the holiday resorts was Glesga Fair, Glasgow July Trades holidays. The trade holidays were staggered and the holiday period ran over at least eight weeks for the working classes and probably from Easter to the end of September for the middle and upper classes. The successful businessman who had built a holiday home would move his family and household staff there at Easter and he would either commute from the holiday town, or visit from Friday evening until Monday morning. There were excellent fast trains and fast steamer connections that made this possible.⁸² People going for their annual holiday would travel by train to Gourock, Wemyss Bay, or Fairlie and then embark on one of the many steamers or they could sail from the Broomielaw. The steamers were all Clyde built and passengers had their favourite boat. If the journey started from the centre of Glasgow the steamer would sail past the great shipyards and the docks full of ships from all over the world. If the passengers were lucky they might see one of the great trans-Atlantic liners being carefully guided down the Clyde by tugs to run the

⁸¹ A traditional folk song or Glasgow Street song. Ewan MacColl said the modern version originated from an old Scottish song *A Tinker's Weddin*. Written by William Watt a weaver from West Linton

⁸² Murray's Diary and ABC Time Table 1906 shows trains from St Enoch Station to Ayr starting at 5.25 am, and the last train was 11.07 pm. There were 35 trains per day to Ayr and the same number back to Glasgow.

'measured mile' off the north Ayrshire coast. For those who could not afford to stay at one of the resorts there were day excursions from the Broomielaw 'doon the water' to Rothesay and then through the Kyles of Bute to Inveraray or round the Island of Arran. Many a romance started on the return trip as the steamer made its careful way in the gloaming to the Broomielaw.

The holiday resorts provided entertainment for their visitors. There were concert parties playing on the sands and the bigger resorts had splendid theatres like the Gaiety Theatre in Ayr. There were rowing boats to be hired, donkeys to ride, lots of sand to build sand castles, and you could roll up your trousers or put your skirts into your knickers and paddle to your hearts delight, but you had to watch out for jelly fish. Bands played on the promenade. For a child from the Gorbals or Cowcaddens it must have been paradise.

The McNeill family had a special interest in Rothesay. The eldest daughter Annie had saved enough money to enable her to open a Boarding House, Clifton Boarding House, West Bay.



Annie, assisted by members of her family and a small staff managed the Clifton from around 1905 until 1939. Her prices did rise during that period. It was a

very respectable establishment and was well run. Her customers would return year after year. James enjoyed staying there though he would go mainly in the 'off season' and pay for his bed and board by doing repair jobs and redecorating. He became friends with the boat builders at Port Bannantyne and would crew for them if they were delivering a boat to buyers based elsewhere on the Clyde. In this way he learned the skills of sailing and navigation and would put them to good use when he owned his own boat when he lived in Ayr.

Lands End to John O' Groats



George H Allen and his support team. James Mc Neill is on the left

For James McNeill, aged twenty three, the opportunity to put his cycling skills and his devotion to the cause of vegetarianism to the test came as a once in a lifetime experience.⁸³

⁸² George H Allen. *Land's End to John O' Groats*. (The Progressive Press, Paisley.1905) All the information above about the walk is taken from Allen's book or from James McNeill's verbal accounts.

George H Allen a long distance walker had accepted on behalf of The Vegetarian Society a challenge to beat the record set by Dr Deighton who had set a new record for walking from Lands End to John O' Groats in 24 days and 4 hours. Deighton was sponsored by the makers of Bovril the popular beef drink and was supposed to drink a cup of Bovril at the end of each days walk. As the Doctor did not like Bovril this part of his routine was soon discarded unless there were reporters present.

George H Allen was 37 years old in 1904. He was 5 feet 4 inches in height. He was very fit. He had been a shoemaker to trade but had become a farmer. He had been an athlete for 21 years. He held records for road walking and also did long distance running. He had trained for 10 weeks, plus worked as usual on his farm, before setting out on this walk. He had only been a vegetarian for six years. He drank weak tea, ate a great deal of bread, brown if possible, spread with nut butter, and occasionally cheese, boiled or poached eggs, cooked vegetables, rice and stewed fruit. He did not drink alcohol and had been a non- smoker all his life.⁸⁴

Long distance walkers need a support team. My father, and an old friend John Elder, who had 'converted' him to vegetarianism was chosen to join the team along with James Brinton from Birmingham who had already accompanied George H Allen on the earlier part of his walk. They gave up their holiday to undertake the task. The photograph that was taken at the end of the walk shows the three very solemn young men very formally

⁸⁴ His diet was very similar to the diet James McNeill followed when he became a vegetarian, though James included in his diet a lot of cheese and pasta, mainly in the form of macaroni. When he was cooking for himself he would often make a big dish of "Marshall's Short Cut Macaroni" with grated cheese added in large quantities. He would then live off this for three or even four days. .

dressed in Norfolk jackets, waistcoat, a high collar and tie and knickerbockers holding their bikes. The collar and tie were removed as soon as they escaped from the reporters and the public. It was no easy task. North of Stirling the roads were very rough. They often had to stop to put a new wheel on their bikes, or repair a puncture, and then find some where that could replace their spare wheels. Their main duty for the two Scots was to go ahead of Allen and see that his accommodation, a hot bath and a meal was ready for him. They also gave him a massage and oiled his skin with olive oil. They made sure that any blisters on his feet were treated.

They started from outside the Royal Exchange in Glasgow on Monday September 12th at 05.00 accompanied by an escort of well wishers from the Glasgow Branch of the Vegetarian Society. They arrived in Perth at 21.45 having covered 60.5 miles. They left the next morning at 05.00 and travelled 57.75 miles to Dalwhinnie. They kept up this punishing pace as they walked onwards to the north via Inverness, and Golspie. They arrived at John O' Groats on Friday 16th September at 02.33. George H. Allen had walked the 909.75 miles from Land's End to John O' Groats in 16 days, 21 hours and 33 minutes, averaging 54 miles per day. The same journey had taken Dr Deighton 24 days, 4 hours. Allen had beaten Deighton's record by 8 days 3 hours and 45 minutes. He had proved to his own satisfaction and to the delight of the members of the Vegetarian Society, that flesh foods generally and meat juices in particular are utterly unnecessary for such a feat of endurance.

At the end of his walk after a hot bath and good meal he retired for a well earned rest. Allen was a modest man and a Christian. He was pleased to see above his bed a card bearing the following words:-

They that wait upon the Lord, shall
renew their strength.

The whole experience made James McNeill think about his own life. George H Allan in his life and his achievements showed the young Scot that it was possible to change your life. Allan had been a shoemaker to trade but wanted to live and work in the country. He had found a way to become a farmer. He then took the very unusual step for a farmer of becoming a vegetarian and a long distance champion walker. James McNeill after the 'John O' Groats' experience decided he would also change his life.

George H Allen may well have become a model for the life that James McNeill tried to follow after he left Glasgow for Ayr.⁸⁵ He certainly believed that this adventure was central to his life experience.

⁸⁵ He moved from the 'city of eternal night' as he called Glasgow. As a vegetarian, who eventually kept a very large garden, he became almost self sufficient. He freed himself from having to suffer a landlord by building his own house in 1924. His belief in Socialism and the essential goodness of human kind gave him a code to follow.

Chapter 3

THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Scottish socialists had a great admiration for Robert Burns whom they considered one of the 'founding fathers' of socialism. They would have cheered if they had been in the Theatre Royal, Dumfries on the night of 26 November 1792 when Burns wrote a poem for Miss Fontenelle for her Benefit Night in which she was appearing in *The Country Girl*. Her first speech began:-

While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things:
The Fate of Empires and the fall of kings;
While quacks of state must each produce his plan;
And even children lisp *The Rights of Man*;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention
The *Rights of Woman* merit some attention.⁸⁶

In the late 19th Century the battle for equal rights for women and men was intensifying. It is still an on going battle. Life in Scotland for most women during this period was hard and cruel, as it was for women world wide. All women suffered from the lack of effective contraception and thus the dangers of almost continuous child bearing from the beginning of their marriage until they could no longer conceive. Queen Victoria give birth to nine children. As can be seen in almost any Victorian graveyard many young women died in childbirth.⁸⁷ They had few legal rights. They were often poorly educated. They were not able to vote. Before marriage they were expected to obey their fathers, and take their place in the family below their brothers. After marriage they had to obey their husbands in all things. Until the Married Woman's Property Acts came into force in 1870 and 1882, the wealth and property they brought with them became

⁸⁶ Robert Burns. *Poetical Works* (W & R Chambers Ltd 1970 page.384.

⁸⁷ Mary Murray McNeill, James McNeill's mother, died aged 40 during the birth of her seventh child in 20 years of marriage.

the wealth and property of their husbands. Women born into the middle and upper classes had on the whole a much pleasanter life than working class women but they still had to contend with poor education, the problems of childbirth, and society's view of the proper place of women in the world.

Working class women suffered the same woes as their better off sisters and in addition had to often suffer poverty, dreadful housing conditions, and lack of proper medical attention. In their old age they were often condemned to spend their last years in the workhouse. Many married working class women had to work to supplement the family income and in some cases were the main wage earners. Unlike their husbands they also had to be responsible for child rearing and all the household tasks, from clothes washing to nursing the sick members of the family.

Women to survive had to be very strong. There always have been women who fought against the conditions described above. Women working in factories were exposed as much as their male companions to the dreadful and unsafe working conditions. Many were badly injured when their hands or their hair caught in the machinery. Even when working conditions improved women working in the mills had a hard and dangerous life with long hours, poor pay, monotonous work, noisy, and health damaging. It was not only from their work in the mills that women were at risk. On the 1 November 1889, part of the new factory being built for the Templeton Carpet Factory collapsed on to the weaving shed killing twenty nine women and girls and injuring another twenty three.⁸⁸ It was the need to improve conditions like these

88. Elspeth King. *The Hidden History of Glasgow*. (Mainstream 1993) pages 76, 83, and 84.

that the early women socialists fought for. They fought for decent pay and conditions of work, and they fought for the right to vote. I would argue that it was the women fighting for equal rights with men and for the right to vote who were the true revolutionaries of the late 19th and early 20th century. Through their courage, determination, and excellent organisation they did achieve by 1928 the right to vote for all women aged twenty-one and over. The battle for equal pay and equal rights still continues though many women have now breached the 'glass ceiling'.

Women played an important part in James McNeill's life. His father David McNeill and his mother Mary Murray married on the 16 July 1872 in Glasgow. Their first child David was born on 27 June 1874. Mary gave birth to five other children. She did not have an easy life. For most of her married life the family lived in a two roomed miner's cottage at Waterside, Kirkintilloch with no indoor water supply or sanitation, and only a small range to cook on and heat the cottage. She and her husband slept in a box bed in the kitchen. The latest baby and perhaps the next child would also sleep in the kitchen. The older children slept in the other room. There was an outside shared earth toilet.

F. Marion McNeill's (no relation) seminal book on Scottish food *The Scots Kitchen Its Lore and Recipes*⁸⁹ shows that the Scots excelled in making much from little. Haggis, mashed vegetables, the baking of bread or scones on a girdle, smoked fish used in soups or fish pies would be staple foods, extended by vegetables bought at the market, or fruit and vegetables given by Clyde valley relatives in the season. Meat was for most working

89. F. Marion McNeill. *The Scots Kitchen - Its Traditions and Lore with Old Time Recipes*. (Blackie and Sons Ltd. First printed 1929, second edition 1963.) Selection of recipes from pages 85 to 256.

families, a luxury item, and presented in stews, in soups as leftovers, and stock. Poultry and rabbits were more obtainable. Again through the use of grain or vegetable (oats, barley, potatoes) small amounts would feed a family over several days, and bread or oatcakes would stretch the food further; milk, cheese and eggs were more affordable, and would have been a regular part of the diet. She might not have been able to continue with this range of food when the family moved to Possilpark in Glasgow, and she may have found it very difficult to adjust from semi country living to a small tenement flat in the big city. In addition to providing all the meals for a growing family Mary would have all the washing, ironing and mending to do until her two older daughters could help her. She may have used a wash house in the tenement yard, on a set day, or alternately, one of the public washing establishments, which combined facilities for clothes washing, for baths, and for swimming. These were established as early as 1877. Chores often provided a social opportunity, and women would return home with the latest gossip from the "the talk o the steamie".

The two daughters would have learned their first skills at their mother's knee and would have had to put these to good use on their mother's early death. She must have been a good teacher as both the young women made their living 'in service'. These household skills equipped a single or widowed woman to earn a reasonable living with a middle- class or professional family, living in as cook or housekeeper. Both Maggie and Annie worked as housekeepers. Mrs Beeton in (1861) recommended that annual pay should be between £20 and £45 per year, according to whether allowances were

paid for tea, sugar or beer.⁹⁰ In most households there would be additional help for 'the rough work' and perhaps a maid too, but the housekeeper was, with the lady of the house, the manager of its efficiency, budgeting and comfort. The two McNeill girls would probably have started as maids and gradually worked their way up to being housekeepers. The move from a small crowded miners cottage, or a tenement flat to a 'big house' in a suburb of the city could be an isolating and lonely experience, as time off was limited, and she would have to travel back to her family by train or tram. Maggie for example moved to Aberdeen to be housekeeper to Professor Soddy⁹¹ and may even have gone with him to Oxford.

James and his brothers and sisters may have been taught by women teachers, at least in their first school, since by 1870 they were becoming more prevalent. He did not like upper class women though this may just have been working class prejudice. The whole McNeill family were republicans, but the reason for this was seemingly that one of their young female cousins had dared to slip on to the platform of a station where the Royal train had stopped and Queen Victoria was walking on the platform. The child approached the Queen who glanced at the little girl then pointed to the child whereupon one of her male attendants picked the child up by its coat collar and threw it over the station fence. A cat might look at a

89. Mrs Beeton (Isabella Beeton) *The Book of Household Management* (S.O. Beeton publisher. 1861 edition.) Page 8

⁹¹Consultant Editor. Roy Porter. *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (Hutchinson. 1993). Pages 631, 632.

Fredrick Soddy 1877-1956. British Chemist. Responsible for major advances in the early development of radiochemistry. In 1904 he became a lecturer in physical chemistry at the University of Aberdeen, and was appointed Professor of Chemistry in 1914. In 1919 he moved to Oxford to take up his appointment as Dr Lees Professor of Chemistry. In 1921 he won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry
When James McNeill visited his sister in Aberdeen he would often have long conversations about the state of the world with Professor Soddy.

Queen, a Scottish working class child could not look at Queen Victoria.

Yet he had a fascination with women of a different class and background. He met young women students at Glasgow School of Art who held their own opinions, and were strong enough to want to train and make their own careers as artists or teachers.

Mary Reid Henderson (1882-1964) whom James McNeill married in 1912 came from a middle class family. She trained at Glasgow School of Art between 1901 and 1908. She was a painter, illuminator, metalworker, enameller and etcher. She may have even taught James McNeill at the night school classes he attended at the School of Art. She had her own studio at 134 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, where she taught private students Drawing, Painting, Art Needlework and Metal Work. She also held exhibitions of her own work.⁹² She continued to work all her life and taught in schools in Motherwell, Helensburgh, and Stirling.⁹³ To James McNeill she clearly represented a more independent woman than those amongst whom he had grown up, and a woman who knew her own mind and direction. Whether she shared his political viewpoint is not known. But they shared enough artistic and creative interests to start a relationship that ended in marriage and the birth of a child.

⁹¹ I have in my possession an advertisement for one of her exhibitions.

⁹³ Paul Harris and Julian Halsby. *The Dictionary of Scottish Painting* (Cannongate 1998) Page 96.

The Paterson Family

When James McNeill moved to Ayr, on 11 February 1911, to teach he first lodged with the Paterson family.



The Paterson Family. Back Row. William and Jessie (1895-1961). Middle. Mrs Paterson(1860) Grandma Patterson and James Paterson.(1869) Front Annie(1900-1986).

In the house lived Mr. and Mrs James Paterson, Jessie, and Annie their youngest child and Mrs Paterson's mother.⁹⁴ Mrs Paterson had to let rooms because her husband's business as a licensed grocer had failed. Jessie was sixteen when James joined the household. She was an impressionable girl, pretty and intelligent. She had been Dux of Newton Park School and had won a Scholarship to Ayr Academy. This award only covered her fees and the family could not afford the cost of books and a school uniform. They also needed her wage. She found employment as a junior clerk in the office of the Ayr

⁹⁴ William the eldest of the family, and only son, emigrated to Canada in 1910 to work for the Canadian Bank of Commerce. His first posting was to White Horse in the Yukon where he worked with a loaded revolver under the bank counter.

branch of Templeton's the carpet weaving company. She went to night school to study book-keeping, typing and shorthand. Her sister Annie was eleven and also found James a novel addition to a predominantly female household. Responding to such evident interest, James took Jessie out and about, on what she called 'adventures', which included walks and cycle journeys into the Ayrshire countryside, swimming off the sandy beaches, and visits to the Gaiety Theatre and to the silent pictures in the new picture house that had just opened in Burns Statue Square. She also would have found his companionship attractive as she sorely missed the company of her eldest, and only brother, William who had emigrated to Canada. James did tell her that he was friendly with Mary Reid Henderson, and she met Mary. But she was unaware how deep the relationship was until he told her shortly before his marriage that he was going to marry his Glasgow lover on 16 March 1912. Jessie noted in her tiny diary 'the end of her dream'⁹⁵

Mary Henderson became pregnant in November 1911; she may have told James that she was pregnant and he agreed to marry her. Whether he was flattered by the adoration of the younger girl, or whether the relationship with Mary Reid Henderson had run its course is not clear: however the marriage ended after the birth of a child in 1912 who died in August of that year. To Jessie's great relief, James (known to her as Mac) decided to stay in Ayr. By this time it is clear from her diary that the relationship had become close, and they fairly soon became lovers.

1912. 13 to 22 July. Went camping to Arran. Climbed Goatfell and

⁹⁵ My mother Jessie Paterson kept a diary in a grey covered cash notebook 9 x 6 cms called *Special Days*. The first entry is for 11 February 1911 which reads "Mac first came to Ayr"

had to race the mist coming down.
Everything was just lovely and it was
rare to be among the bracken up the
glen at Corrie.⁹⁶

Their relationship became strong and eventually, after he gained his divorce, they were able to marry in 1929 when he was forty eight and she was thirty four. The young James McNeill, this fiery young socialist, vegetarian, and free thinker was also a romantic and tried his hand at being a poet. I think the following was written for Jessie Patterson soon after they met in Ayr.

She is not an auburn beauty
Nor is she tall and dark
She is just a fair haired Lassie
With a cheeky smile and laugh
A happy disposition
She always sees the fun
When others are complaining
And things look very glum

An honest little lassie
A chum that is straight and true
Willing to give a helping hand
In anything I do

So this is sister Jess
And I'm her foster brother
The ways she kisses and hugs at times
You would think I was her lover

Not that I would really mind
But then she's got a Mother
Who thinks that I'm too old to be
Anything but her brother.

Jessie was sixteen and James thirty when he wrote this poem. Four years later he was much more specific.

There was a maid of twenty
Quite nude on bed she lay
A vision of perfect beauty
Inviting me to stay

⁹⁶ Entry from Jessie Paterson's diary. The pages are not numbered.

The next five verses describe their love making. The poem ends with verse seven.

So when he asked the greatest
That any women can give
She gladly consented to his wish
And oh! How she did live.⁹⁷

We know these were two women close to James McNeill, and there would certainly have been others before he met Mary Reid Henderson. In what context did they live? Women had a much greater access to education after the 1872 Education Acts and that began to change their view of life. By the end of the 19th Century they were questioning why they had no greater influence on the world. The movement for women's suffrage had started with the well-educated, independent and moneyed individuals, but as a cause, it quickly spread to those who had real need of a better job, and better pay, the working class women of Britain. These women, with the support of their socialist male friends and partners were to carry the fight into industry and onto the streets.

Women of means chose other routes to express their individuality. They travelled, took up creative pursuits from writing to photography, or good causes, from Christianity to nursing. Better education, allied to an innate sense of privilege, were powerful tools in campaigning, whether by speaking, letter-writing or the influence exerted in the drawing room, and women were seeking a more defined and prominent role in society.

By the 1890s women were becoming impatient by the lack of progress in giving them the vote. Stronger action was clearly required. Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst (1857 - 1928) and her daughter Christabel (1880-1958) in

⁹⁷ . The verses are from a notebook kept by James McNeill

1903 founded the Woman's Social and Political Union (WSPU)⁹⁸ which until 1914 was to 'fight the good fight' to obtain 'Votes for Women.' It would take twenty five years before the Representation of the People Act of 1928 established voting rights equally for men and women.

There were many unsung, and perhaps now forgotten women, who fought for the right to vote and for better conditions for working women. Most of these women were socialists. In the north of England one such woman was Ada Nield Chew, (1870-1945) born on a farm in North Staffordshire, she left school at the age of eleven as her help was required in the family home to look after and provide for the needs of a large family of brothers. She then worked in a factory in Crewe producing uniforms for the army, post office and railway men. She was sacked from this job because she wrote a series of letters to the local papers exposing the working conditions of the factory girls, and the sharp practices of the owners. In 1894 she joined the Independent Labour Party and became until 1898 a travelling Socialist speaker going round the country addressing meetings from the steps of a Clarion Van. She visited Scotland several times. From 1900 - 1908 she was a woman Trade Union Organiser, and then from 1911 to 1914 a Women's Suffrage Speaker, Writer and Organiser. Discouraged by the failure of International Socialism to prevent the outbreak of World War I she became a successful businesswoman, though she never stopped fighting to improve the lot of women, and especially working class women.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst suffered badly in the battle being jailed and force fed many times, as did a great many of their supporters.

⁹⁹ Doris Nield Chew. *Ada Nield Chew-The Life and Writings of a Working Woman*. (Virago.1982.)

For example in the issue of 6 March 1914 of Common Cause a suffrage newspaper she wrote:-

It is desirable that married women should be economically independent, and free to develop their humanity on lines best suited to that object. The bondage of the married workingwoman is two fold: the dependence of her young children, and the primitive stage in which domestic industry still remains. In other words, her babies and her domestic jobs are the chains which bind her; and it is these chains which must be broken before talk of human development for her ever becomes more than talk¹⁰⁰

In Glasgow a branch of the WSPU was established in 1906 and they obtained their own Headquarters at 141 Bath Street in 1908 opened by Dr Marion Gilchrist.¹⁰¹ The Glasgow organisation was much more closely related to the Socialist movement. *Forward* and its editor Tom Johnston gave the WSPU his full support. He believed that 'civilisation is the womanisation of brave men.' Keir Hardie and James Maxton also were strong supporters of equality for women. So in theory were the majority of socialist men, but many still expected their tea to be on the table when they returned from work!

Tom Johnson in a public lecture given in Glasgow listed the aims of the women's movement which included :-

[...]entry to University, a say in the framing of the laws that govern her life, economic equality with men[...]maternity payment[...]representation in Parliament[...]marriage will be a bargain between equals and will partake of a greater

I had the pleasure of knowing and working with Doris Nield Chew MBE (1898-1984) who like her mother was a very formidable fighter for women's rights, and for the arts.

¹⁰⁰ Gerry Holloway. *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (Routledge, 2005), page 82.

¹⁰¹ Dr Marion Gilchrist 1864-1952 was the first woman graduate of Glasgow University.

spirit of comradeship than it does at present¹⁰²

Scottish women were more than capable of speaking for themselves. In 1908 the Women's Freedom League had a summer centre at Dunoon. The organizers reported:-

If we are not seen with a banner and a bag of literature at the pier-head in the morning, chalking the streets at tea time, and drawing crowds to the Castle Hill at night, the canny Scot would consider the collection penny ill-spent. In return we have our privileges - stalwart policemen turn their backs when we produce our pipe clay[...]Yes I think Dunoon is converted[...]and every where 'doon the watter'¹⁰³

The Suffrage movement did not confine their activity to spreading propaganda 'doon the watter'. They physically attacked the buildings of the establishment. In 1913 a portrait of King George V in the Royal Scottish Museum was damaged. Even a small county town like Ayr was a target for militant suffragettes. The Western Meeting Club at Ayr Racecourse was burned to the ground. Two women hid on the golf course at Lossiemouth and physically assaulted the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith.

¹⁰² Elspeth. King. *The Hidden History of Women*. (Mainstream 1993) page 94.

¹⁰³ Elspeth King. P112.



A group of Clarion Scouts & Anna Munro of Dumferline¹⁰⁴

In 1914 Frances Parker, a niece of Lord Kitchener was caught trying to blow up Robert Burns' birthplace in Alloway. The women who went to prison because of these incidents were very badly treated and many were force fed.¹⁰⁵ It was not only for the right to vote that Scottish women fought. They fought for better conditions in the workplace and for better wages. *Forward* reported in its issue of 1 October 1910:-

The spirit of revolt among women workers seems to have found its way to Larkhall. A strike affecting some 64 women has taken place at D.C. Millar and Co Ltd, Dye Works. The women were not members of any trade union[...]At a mass meeting the masters caved in and a satisfactory settlement was carried out.¹⁰⁶

In Scotland working class men and women fought side by side to establish fair wages and working conditions in Scottish industry. My mother Jessie Paterson

¹⁰⁴ Elspeth King. Page 112. Anna Munrow was one of the leading lights of the Women's Freedom League. Group of Clarion Scouts. Both female and male members of the Clarion Scouts fought for Votes For Women.

¹⁰⁵ Elspeth King. Pages 127-131.

¹⁰⁶ James D. Young. *Women and Popular Struggles. A History of Scottish and English Working-Class Women 1500-1984* (Mainstream.1985). Page101

walked out of her office job in Templeton's carpet factory in Ayr to support the women weavers when in 1914 they struck for better wages. The Ayr women won their strike. Jessie was not victimised though the Head Clerk, a man, tried to tell her off. He lost the argument.

Socialist Sunday Schools

Another area of political activity which very much involved working class women was The Socialist Sunday School movement. To quote the 1923 edition of the Socialist Sunday School Manual:-

The Socialist Sunday Schools have arisen because of the need for some organised and systematic method of presenting the Socialist point of view to the young and rising generation. [...]They seek to create throughout the community, and especially amongst the working classes, a Socialist atmosphere.[...]their two aims may be stated as (1) To teach the children to think for themselves; and (2) to feel themselves to be a part of the great community of workers. In short, the immediate purpose of the Socialist Sunday School, as an institution, is to supply the Socialist movement with fearless, capable and conscientious thinkers.¹⁰⁷

The authorities at the instigation of the Churches tried to ban Socialist Sunday Schools by refusing them the use of local authority buildings. The Co-operative Societies were happy to let them use their halls. Many of the women teachers were also very active in the Co-operative Movement.¹⁰⁸

James McNeill, who had taught in Glasgow Socialist Sunday Schools, started one in Ayr in 1912 and Jessie

¹⁰⁷ *Socialist Sunday Schools. A Manual* (National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools 1923) Page 9.

¹⁰⁸ My mother who was a teacher in the Ayr Socialist Sunday School told me how the Kilmarnock Equitable Co-operative Society (KECS) who had shops and halls in Ayr welcomed the Ayr SSS into their halls.

Paterson soon became a teacher. She continued to be very active in the Socialist Sunday School movement until 1939 when the Ayr school closed. She made sure her own children were well grounded in the teachings of the SSS.

Women of all classes fought very hard from the beginning of the century to gain their rightful place in society. During the coming war they proved that their abilities were at least equal to those of men, if not indeed better. At the end of the war women were rewarded to some extent, though many had to leave their work for men returning from the war. In December 1918 some women were able to vote for the very first time ever, and in 1929 the voting age for women was brought down from thirty to twenty one. The battle for true equality still goes on.

Chapter 4

WAR



Scottish Soldiers marching in the mud of Flanders.

From August 1914 until 11 November 1918 the 'Great War' was the central governing event in the lives of the people of Britain and the world. Socialists who had believed that the working classes would refuse to fight in a capitalist war saw their dream of world wide opposition to war shattered. Many of them, though it was against their principles, fought and died in the war. Many others were totally opposed to the war and when conscription was imposed became Conscientious Objectors and served harsh prison sentences. Some of them died in prison.

John McLean the great Scottish Marxist was opposed to the war right from the start. He said:-

It was the business of Socialists to develop a class patriotism, refusing to murder one and other for a sordid world capitalism.

At his trial in Edinburgh for sedition he claimed:-

He had enlisted in the Socialist army 15 years ago, the only army worth enlisting in. God damn all other armies. Take out of that what meaning you like.¹⁰⁹

Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald also spoke out bravely in Parliament against the war.¹¹⁰



Keir Hardie speaking at an Anti War Rally in Trafalgar Square.

Unfortunately for the cause of peace the majority of The Labour Party, The Trades Union Congress, and the Co-operative Party supported the decision to go to war. Ramsay MacDonald then resigned as leader of the Labour Party. Keir Hardie, Leader of the ILP, and very much the elder statesman of the British Socialist movement, said he would raise the working classes against the war. He found to his great sadness that the majority of the British working class supported the war.

The workers rushed to join the armed forces because they wanted to support their mates, or because it would be a break in the monotony of their working life.

¹⁰⁹ Nan Milton. *John McLean*. (Pluto Press 1973.) Page 100.

¹¹⁰ Trevor Royle *The Flowers of the Forest*. (Birlin 2006) Page.26.

The industrial unrest and the troubles in Ireland were swept away in a wave of patriotic support for the Government backed by the belief that the British Empire should and would stand against the wicked foreigner. Britain only had a small professional army. It possessed the biggest and strongest Navy the world had ever seen. The general expectation was that the war would be over by Christmas 1914 and naturally the British and their Allies would be the victors. The private soldier would soon learn to his cost that the Staff Officers of the British Army, who were mainly Cavalry Officers, had not learned from the mistakes they had made in previous wars and the result was the enormous slaughter in the trenches. By the 4th September 1914 only four weeks after the start of the war 300,000 men had volunteered for the Army. The majority were working men though the middle and upper classes supplied most of the officers. All classes suffered tremendous losses. Bullets and high explosive falling on the mud of the trenches had no respect for the class structure.

An upper class woman Georgina Lee noted in her diary:-

We are in for it at last. But there is not one of us in the country who is not thankful at last the great fight is to take place. The strain has been too great for many years. We all marvel at the reckless audacity of the Kaiser who, with Austria, has Russia, France, England and Belgium to fight.¹¹¹

¹¹¹Georgina Lee. Edited by Gavin Roynon. *Home Fires Burning The Great War Diaries of Georgina Lee*. (Sutton Publishing. 2006). Page. 5. Georgina Lee was the wife of Charles Wilfred Lee, a successful solicitor. His family firm acted as Legal Secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury. They were successful and comfortably off. Georgina was 44 when war broke out and was the mother of a very young boy. She decided to keep a diary during the war so that when he grew up he would be able to read it and understand the great fight that Britain had put up to save the civilized world. She had no doubt that Britain would win the war. Her diary is a fascinating document and

Not everyone was caught up in the rush to hate the Hun and to turn war into a great adventure. Some were determined to oppose war in every way they could. Five days after war was declared 5,000 protesters attended a large anti-war rally in Glasgow featuring speakers from the Independent Labour Party, the Scottish Branch of the British Socialist Party, and the Glasgow branch of the Peace Society. Speakers included Patrick Dolan a prominent city councillor representing the I.L.P. (and later Lord Provost of Glasgow) a young militant socialist called James McDougall who had already been sacked by the Clydesdale Bank for participating in socialist activities. To McDougall the war was not only unnecessary but a capitalist adventure that would benefit the profiteers and damage the working classes. According to contemporary newspaper reports the crowd appeared to agree with him.¹¹²

It was not only in Britain that socialists were opposed to war. During the build up towards the war the international socialist movement had tried to find ways to avert a world war. An emergency Congress of the Labour and Socialist International was held at Basle in 1913 attended by five hundred and fifty five delegates from twenty three countries. Keir Hardie summed up the work of the Congress:-

The Basle Congress was turned into a mighty demonstration against war. A manifesto was drawn up to the Socialists of all countries represented outlining the programme and measures to be taken for the preservation of peace. It was a great gathering and full of significance for the future of our race. Those gathered there represented not so many nationalities, but the disinherited of all lands. They now have no country, they are the mob, the proletariat, the oppressed. These are the ties that bind them. The Internationale is

gives us a window into the attitudes of the Middle and Upper Classes of Britain during the 1914-18 war.

¹¹² Trevor Royle. *The Flowers of the Forest* Page 26

uniting them in the fight against bondage.

¹¹³

This belief in the solidarity of the international working classes was one of the most important beliefs of the young socialists like James McNeill. When he travelled through Germany on his journey to Sweden in 1911 he had been made welcome by German socialists. Socialists in Britain and Europe had expected the Social Democratic Party in Germany, and the Second Internationale to call for international action by the working classes which would then led on to the workers refusing to fight. These hopes came to nothing though some of the Socialist leaders like the German socialists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg¹¹⁴ spoke out against the war claiming that the 'chief enemy is at home' by which they meant the capitalists of the world. The three great Socialist leaders of the Internationale were Auguste Bebel, Jean Jaures¹¹⁵ and Keir Hardie. Bebel died in August 1913, Jean Jaures was assassinated in Paris on 31 July 1914 and Keir Hardie died in 1916. The International Socialist movement was not strong enough to stop the war.

¹¹³ JohnMcNair *James Maxton-The Beloved Rebel* (George Allen & Unwin 1955) Page 40. John McNair was the General Secretary of the ILP and a very good friend of James McNeill

¹¹⁴ Melanie Parry. Editor. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. Chambers 1997) Page 1131. Karl Liebknecht. (1871-1919) German left-wing lawyer and Social- Democrat member of the Reichstag. He opposed Germany's participation in the war but was not supported by his fellow members of the Social Democratic Party.

Melanie Parry. Editor. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. (Chambers 1997) Page 1171. Rosa Luxemburg. (1871-1919) Jewish German Marxist theorist, socialist philosopher and revolutionary who opposed Germany's involvement in World War I.

¹¹⁵Melanie Parry. Editor. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. Page 159. August Bebel. (1840-1913) was a German social democrat and one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. He was totally against war.

Melanie Parry. Page. 975. Jean Jaures. (1859-1914) Became the leader of the French Socialist Party. He was a strong anti-militarist. He was assassinated in 1914.

In Scotland prominent members of 'the Socialist Army' opposed to the war included James Maxton who was later to be an outstanding Socialist MP and leader of the ILP. For Maxton the war was an unmitigated evil, a war of conquest for markets, for spheres of influence and of raw materials. James McNeill agreed totally with this view. He was very angry when he read Robert Blatchford's¹¹⁶ call to arms. He was on holiday from his post as the Handwork Teacher at Newton Academy in Ayr. He cycled to Yorkshire where Blatchford lived near Scarborough with the intention of meeting Blatchford and persuading him to support the anti war movement. He took a tent and camped when he stopped for the night. Blatchford refused to see him and he had to return to Ayr. One morning during his return journey he woke up to find two uniformed police men outside his tent. They thought he might be a poacher as he was camping near a wood which belonged to a large estate. He agreed they could search his tent and saddle bags, but explained he was a vegetarian opposed to taking any kind of life, and thus it was unlikely they would find dead rabbits or fish. The police allowed him to continue home to Ayr. He thought he was lucky not to have been arrested as a suspected German spy!

In 1915 John McLean called for a Marxist revolution and an immediate armistice to end the war. He held Sunday afternoon meetings at Nelson's Column on

¹¹⁶ Robert Blatchford was born in 1851. He served in the British Army reaching the rank of Sergeant Major. He left the army in 1878 and became a journalist. In 1891 he founded the *Clarion* as a socialist newspaper. He was the editor and wrote much of the copy. The policy of the paper was "a policy of humanity; a policy not of party, sect or creed, but of justice, of reason and mercy." His collected articles from the *Clarion* were published in book form in 1895. *Merrie England* became a best seller with a cheap edition selling 2,000,000 copies. His readers were very disappointed that Blatchford supported the Government's policy during the Boer War, and even more disappointed when he supported the government in 1914. After the war he supported the Conservative Party. He died in 1943 totally discredited in the eyes of his one time socialist supporters.

Glasgow Green opposing the war and in the evenings meetings outside the Glasgow Transport Offices in Bath Street which had been turned into a recruiting office. He was arrested by the police acting on a 'request' from the Army. He was continually hounded by the authorities for his opposition to the war.¹¹⁷ In 1918 he was again arrested and tried in Edinburgh on the 9 May and found guilty of sedition. He was jailed for five years but released on 3 December 1918. He served his last sentence in Peterhead Prison where he was force fed. The long term result of this kind of treatment over four terms of imprisonment was his early death at the age of forty four on 30 November 1923.¹¹⁸

Conscription and Conscientious Objectors

The slaughter on all fronts was so dreadful that the Government decided they had for the first time in Britain, to introduce conscription in 1916. Conscription was to apply to all men between the ages of 18 and 41, unless they were exempt on one ground or another, e.g. work of national importance as defined in the Regulations, or poor health, or were clergymen, service in the army was imposed. To combat conscription and support COs the No-Conscription Fellowship was set up. Clifford Allen and Fenner Brockway¹¹⁹ were the leaders of the movement.

¹¹⁷ Tom Bell. *John McLean. A Fighter for Freedom (Communist Party Scottish Committee. 1944)* pages.37, 55, 70,111. John McLean was jailed in 1915-16-17 18.

¹¹⁸ Nan Milton. Pages 121-126

¹¹⁹ Melanie Parry (Editor) *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Chambers. 1997 Edition) Page 272. Fenner Brockway. Baron. 1888-1988. Converted to the socialist cause by Keir Hardie he became a member of the ILP. He became a militant pacifist and was jailed during WW.1. He became an MP and was made a Life Peer in 1964.

Will Ellsworth Jones *We Will Not Fight...The Untold Story of World War One's Conscientious Objectors.*(Aurum Press, London 2007.) Pages 86 & 230.

Clifford Allan had gone to Cambridge to study for the ministry but became an agnostic and a socialist. He told the tribunal who heard his case that:-"I am a Socialist and hold in all sincerity that the life

Support came from religious groups like the Quakers, and from some establishment figures who approved of the war but did not believe that men should be forced to fight if they had genuine reason of conscience to oppose war because killing ones fellow men was fundamentally wrong. The Government set up Tribunals to hear objections from those called up for military service. These tribunals mostly consisted of local worthies, often town councillors, and Ministers of Religion. They were chaired by retired army officers. Many applicants lost their cases and were ordered to join the army. They however could appeal to an 'Appeal Tribunal', as could the Army who could appeal against a decision to grant exemption. These Tribunals mostly confirmed that the man appealing should serve in the army. Many refused and were then arrested and taken to the nearest army barracks. If they refused to wear a uniform they were stripped naked and left in a unheated cell until they gave in and put on the uniform and accepted army orders.

For the first three years of the war James McNeill continued his outspoken opposition to the war. These views made him very unpopular with the Headmaster and staff of Newton Academy and many other people living in Ayr. His fellow ILP members supported him as did Jessie Paterson. She went on supporting his opposition to the war even when her elder brother William Paterson returned to Britain as a Private in one of the Canadian Highland regiments. Later he was badly wounded on the Western front, a 'Blighty wound' and evacuated to England. William though fighting on the Western front also supported his future brother-in-law. He said that he wished more men and women had stood out against the

of every man is sacred." He refused any form of 'work of national importance' and went to prison. He was released from prison because of ill health and weighed under eight stone.

war and he admired the courage of those who did. He also said that the Canadian, and other Empire troops had no respect for British officers, though they respected their own officers. They saw most British officers as upper class fools, but did respect the courage of the line officers, many of whom were hardly more than school boys. But they had no respect for Staff Officers and they believed that Field Marshal Haig was incompetent and only interested in his own advancement.¹²⁰

When Conscription became law in 1916 James registered as a Conscientious Objector and in due course appeared before the local tribunal in Ayr. The Tribunal was chaired by a retired Army officer, Colonel Ker and the Town Clerk of Ayr acted as Secretary, the members consisted of two local Ministers of the Church of Scotland, who would certainly have been biased against James because he was the Superintendent of the Ayr Socialist Sunday School, an organisation loathed by the Church of Scotland. The other members of the tribunal were two businessmen both known Conservatives. He was told to stand while they examined him. He immediately found a chair and sat down. He politely informed the Colonel that he did not recognise the right of the tribunal to examine him. He questioned why two men who claimed to be representatives of "The Prince of Peace" were involved in sending Scottish men to slaughter German men. He also wondered why two obviously fit men who came within the

¹²⁰ Information about William Paterson's views on the conduct of the war was told to me many years ago by my mother Jessie Vallance Paterson McNeill and by her sister Annie Vallance Paterson.

age range of the Regulations were not already in the army. He stated that his job was to teach young people how to make objects out of wood and metal and to be useful future citizens. He wanted to make it quite clear to the tribunal, that as he did not want to waste their time, or his own, if they wanted to make him become a soldier they would have to call an escort now to carry him to the Depot of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in Ayr. They would then have to strip him and force him into a uniform. His defiance did not go down well with the civilian members of the Tribunal but the Colonel seemed interested in his stance. He was asked if he would leave the room so that they could consider his case. He said he would but made it clear that he would not accept so called 'work of national importance', or join an ambulance unit as both these occupations helped to support what he regarded as a criminal war. After a short interval he was brought back in and the Colonel said that he respected his views and was prepared to ask him to accept work in the local agricultural works who desperately needed a pattern maker. He would not be allowed to continue teaching as the civilian members of the tribunal led by the two Ministers believed his extreme and outrageous views would corrupt young people and turn them against the Church and State. If he refused this offer he would be escorted to the RSF Depot and inducted into the army. He decided to accept and worked there until by March 1917 he had made all the patterns they required. He was then ordered to report back to the Tribunal. This time the only people present were the Colonel and the Town Clerk. Before the Tribunal sat the Colonel asked James to put his reasons in writing for his continued refusal to fight. (A summary of that letter is given on page 37 and the full text is given in the appendix.)

The reasons given in the letter are based on the philosophy and methods of teaching he had studied in Sweden and continued to study on his return to Scotland. There is no record of any reply from the Colonel. However the Ayr Tribunal found a small factory in Glasgow not involved in war work that required a Works Manager. They were prepared to send him there, but until the war ended he would be banned from Ayr. Strictly speaking he was not 'banned' but had to find civilian work at least 30 miles from Ayr. He did not return to teaching until the beginning of 1919. The State also took their revenge for when he retired the three years he had not been teaching were not allowed to count towards his pension. This ruling meant that his pension was smaller than he had expected and therefore he had to find other work to supplement it.

He was very lucky that Col Ker listened sympathetically to his case. Many of his fellow Conscientious Objectors went to jail, or were forced into the army to serve in the so called Non Combative Corps. Some were even taken to France and when they refused the order to proceed to the Front were put before a Field Court Martial and condemned to death. The next day the unfortunate men were marched onto the barrack square and lined up in front of the serving soldiers on the depot. They were then tied to posts which had been driven into the ground. An officer read out the Sentence of Death by Firing Squad. He then paused for several minutes before announcing that their sentences had been commuted to ten years' penal servitude.¹²¹ The Conscientious Objectors were then shipped back to Britain to serve their

¹²¹ Will Ellsworth Jones *We Will Not Fight...The Untold Story of World War One's Conscientious Objectors.* (Aurum Press, London 2007.)
Pages 136 142 169

sentences in HM prisons, and for a short time some were sent to an Aberdeen Granite Quarry to break stone.¹²²

An excellent account of being a CO is given by Dr Eric F. Dott in *Voices From War* by Ian MacDougal.¹²³ Eric F Dott became eighteen in December 1916 and was called up to the army in March 1917. He did not report and was duly arrested. His reason for not joining the army was that war was not compatible with the proper observation of the Christian Faith. His mother, who had died two years before, had been a devout Christian and her son hoped to become a Minister. His father, Peter McOmish Dott, on the other hand was a free thinker and a very earnest socialist. He was the proprietor of Aitken Dott the well known picture dealer then in Castle Street in Edinburgh.¹²⁴ Eric Dott because of his upbringing had very good reasons to be 'agin the war'. He duly faced a Court Martial and was sentenced to serve three months of hard labour at Wormwood Scrubs. His first month in Wormwood Scrubs was spent in solitary confinement, this was standard practice for all prisoners of conscience. His only reading material was the Bible. After that Eric F. Dott was able to mix with other CO prisoners many of whom had had a very unpleasant time as Conscientious Objectors. He found his fellow COs to be a very interesting body of men. After his time in "the Scrubs" as he had agreed to do Work of National Importance he

¹²². At the time it was believed that some of the Conscientious Objectors were in fact marched on to the square, tied to execution posts, saw the firing squad march on carrying rifles and then were blindfolded, the Chaplain said his prayers, and the order to fire was given, but the shots passed over their heads. The blindfolds were then removed and the OIC announced that Field Marshal Haig had commuted the Death Sentence to 10 years hard labour. No record of this incident has been found. But many records concerning co were destroyed sometime after 1920. James McNeill was told this story by a fellow CO and he told me.

¹²³ . Ian MacDougal *Voices from War and Some Labour Struggles. Personal Recollections of War in Our Century by Scottish Men and Women.* (The Mercat Press. 1995).Pages 78-90

¹²⁴. The firm is still in existence under the name The Scottish Gallery in Dundas Street in Edinburgh.

was sent to Dartmoor which had been decommissioned as a prison and was now called a Home Office Settlement for COs. But some of the CO prisoners would not accept this and remained prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs. Some of their reasons for doing so were:-

They've no right to have the war. They have no right to send us in here. They have no right to bargain with us to send them anywhere else.

These brave men were Anarchists who were opposed to conventional forms of government. He was also very impressed by Bill Deans, a tailor from Newmilns in Ayrshire:-

He was a radical socialist of a very, very earnest and high idealistic type, a very fine man[...]a gifted man, a poet, a good speaker, a good organiser, and a tremendous enthusiast for the aims of socialism [...]He loved art and poetry, and above all he loved freedom. He greatly admired Burns and would recite many of his poems in his broad Ayrshire dialect, which was the dialect of Burns.¹²⁵

Dott finishes his account with a statement about the Conscientious Objectors he met in prison.

One sometimes hears it spoken as though some of them had a fairly light time, or some of them perhaps rather light-heartedly undertook such a position. Now my impression of these men[...]men of all sorts of different types of conviction, is that they were men of tremendous earnestness, of a very fine idealism, men prepared to suffer a great deal for their views[...]They were men of the very finest calibre, of great ability, and of very great

¹²⁵ This could be a description of James Mc Neill, though the poetry he wrote was not up to the standard of Robert Burns, and he did not have an Ayrshire accent. He had a good educated Scots accent but not a Glasgow working class accent which he had managed to shed. He may have done this so that he could make himself very clear when he was teaching, or when he was making public speeches explaining Socialism.

earnestness[...]men of the highest quality and most devoted feeling.¹²⁶

It is important to remember that there was great social pressure brought to bear on COs. It was not uncommon in a family to find one brother was a CO, and other brothers had joined the army. Socialist COs saw many of the working men who had supported the Socialist cause march off to join the forces. These men had been their comrades. Middle and upper class girls presented young men in civilian clothes with white feathers accusing them of being cowards. Some of the men given white feathers were Merchant Seamen who did not wear uniform, or fishermen, and many of their comrades would have been lost at sea because of enemy action.

The Russian Revolution.

The greatest change brought about by the 1914-1919 War was the establishment of a Soviet Socialist Republic in Russia. On the 15 March 1917 The Tsar abdicated and a Provisional Government under Kerensky was set up. The Russian Revolution which began in February 1917 was greeted with horror by the ruling classes in Britain and as a 'dawning of a new day' by many socialists who believed that the Revolution in Russia would spread across the world displacing the 'old order' and setting up 'People's Republics' which would bring fairness and justice to all. The reality was to be very different.

On 19 March 1917 Georgina Lee wrote in her diary:

The Russian Revolution is calming down. Meanwhile the Provisional Government of moderates is doing its utmost to preserve order. But there is much anxiety owing to a small violent section of extremists. They are

¹²⁶ Ian MacDougall. Pages 78 to 90.

preaching anarchy and seem to be gaining ground among the people.

Then on Saturday 9 June 1917:-

The war would probably be over this year if those wretched Russians hadn't let us down. Not only are they doing nothing on their Front, but their Socialists and workmen's delegates and a large part of the Russian Army are in favour of immediate peace with Germany"

In Scotland the moderate socialists supported the Kerensky Government but the Marxists supported Lenin. Scotland's leading Marxist John MacLean was elected an Honorary President of the First All Russian Congress of Soviets, and was appointed Bolshevik Consul in Glasgow in 1918.¹²⁷ The British Government sent MacLean to jail for his support of Russia.

James McNeill, and many of his comrades rejoiced in the Russian Revolution. To them a new world was being born in Russia. The old order of Tsar and nobles living off the back of the toiling masses had been swept away and the Red Flag now flew over Russia where all men and women were now equal. Like James Maxton he admired Lenin. Among his books was a copy of Maxton's biography of Lenin. He had underlined the following paragraph:-

One looks back through history in vain to find someone with whom comparison is possible[...]In political life there have been many more subtle statesmen. But nowhere is to be found in any single man the peculiar combination of devotion, courage, wisdom, skill and human understanding, except in the man Lenin, who will live in history under the name he chose when his work was carried out in underground cellars, when he was an outcast in the country of which he was to become unchallenged ruler.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Nan Milton. Page 154 and 155,

¹²⁸ John McNair. *James Maxton- The Beloved Rebel* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd 1955) Page306.

Alas the reality of the new Russia was not the great workers Utopia that so many workers had hoped for. James McNeill did not approve of Stalin who he believed had betrayed the teachings of Lenin. It is unlikely that James McNeill, or James Maxton, would have survived long in Stalin's Russia. But the failure of Russia 'to unite the human race' did not stop his belief that the establishment of Socialism as a way of life across the globe was the only practical future for the world.

The Home Front

The First World War changed the life of the British people. For all classes it meant personal loss of loved ones, fathers, sons, sometimes daughters. For working class people it often meant greater poverty as their men volunteered for the armed forces or were conscripted into the forces. Rent for housing was increased by unscrupulous landlords and tenants who could not pay the new rents were evicted. The working class women of Glasgow fought against the rent increases. They demonstrated their ability to organize and to take control of their own lives.

Elsbeth King in *The Hidden History of Glasgow Women* writes:

The most significant victory (for women) was that which came from the 1915 Rent Strike. Collective action by the women of Glasgow against poinding or eviction for rent arrears forced the Government into passing the Rent Restriction Act.[...] Large parties of women turned up to prevent poindings and evictions taking place. This action was supplemented by meetings, demonstrations and court appearances.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Elspeth King. Pages 135 -136

The Independent Labour Party, the Trade Unions, and all left wing organisations supported the women. Even some of the owners of the ship yards supported the action of the women because their workforces were leaving the yards to support the demonstrations. The Government gave in and pegged the rents at the level they had been in 1914.

The other great political action in Glasgow against the Government was the opposition by the Trade Unions and the socialists to the Government's plans for the operation of the Munitions Works. The combination of the huge losses in the war and the endless demand for munitions began by 1915 to change the industrial situation. The workers realized that the desperate need for munitions and skilled men and women to make them gave them enormous bargaining powers.¹³⁰ Lloyd George tried to get the workers to accept unskilled workers, many of them women, into the factories. The men refused, and again the Government had to give way.

The great advances in engineering brought new horrors to the 'art of war' not only at the battlefield but to the home front. Throughout the war the Germans continued, with surprising success, to bomb London using their giant airships the Zeppelins and later planes. They also bombed some south coast towns, and their warships bombarded east coast towns. The German raids over England was the first time in history that cities and towns had been bombarded from the air. The sea no longer protected Britain from invasion.

Women at War

¹³⁰ Edward J. Cowan and Richard Finlay *In Scotland Since 1688 - Struggle for a Nation*. (Cima Books 2000) Pages 133-134.

The demands of war did change life for many, mainly working class women, who were recruited to work in factories, munitions works, on the railways and as bus and tram conductors and drivers. Though their pay never equalled that of men doing a similar job their wages were much better than they had received as shop assistants or domestic servants.



Munitions Workers.¹³¹

Munitions Wages:-

Earning high wages? Yes, Five Quid a week. A woman, too,

Mind you, I calls it dim sweet.[...] I spend the whole racket on good times and clothes. Me saving? Eilydh! Yer do think I'm mad.

I am acting the lady, but I ain't living bad. I am having life's

¹³¹ Elspeth King. Page 148. Collection of the People's Palace. Glasgow.

Good times. See 'ere, its like this
[...] A touch and go bizz.

We're all here today, mate.
Tomorrow - perhaps dead.[...]

I'll have repaid my wages in Death -
and pass by.

Munitions Worker. Dornock Munitions
Factory. Eastriggs. Gretna.

The women worked very hard to earn their £5 a week. 12 hour shifts were common. The work was dangerous and many women died, killed in explosions, or from the long term effect of the fumes from the chemicals used in the manufacture of cordite¹³²

The War also brought other positive experiences to those at home. Upper-class and middle class girls who had never been allowed to walk alone in the street suddenly found themselves, as the result of taking a war job, with the freedom and company of factory girls. One quarter of the 1,600,000 domestic servants took their chance to switch to the new openings for women in munitions and other factories, in transport and on the land. There was also an influx of women into The Civil Service and commercial occupations. There must have been many like Lillian Miles, who moved from Exeter to a Coventry factory, and though she did not find the 'big money' she had expected, felt it was 'like being let out of a cage',¹³³

Women from all classes also served as nurses in field hospitals very close to the front, drove ambulances, and served on Hospital Ships.

¹³² www.i-know-scotland.co.uk

¹³³ Paul Thomson. *The Edwardians The Remaking of British Society*. (Routledge 1992). Page 252.

The middle and upper classes had a more comfortable war. They suffered much less from food shortages than the working class. They continued to have servants. The upper classes maintained their great estates and had access to supplies of food not available to the workers. Though rationing when introduced in 1917 applied to everyone it was much easier for the better off to still get plenty food and drink. Georgina Lee noted on 2 October 1915 that food prices increased steadily during the war.

In over a month butter went up from 1/6 to 1/10, tea from 1/7 to 2/2 and bacon had risen to 1/7. In top of this there is a baby requiring a first-rate nurse and an extra servant for the increase in the household" ¹³⁴

To be fair to Georgina Lee and her class these women had been brought up in homes where there were always servants and while daughters were trained to manage a household they were not trained to manage without servants. She, and many other middle and upper class women gave, a great deal of time to voluntary war work which ranged from helping the nursing services to making bandages and other 'comforts' for the serving soldiers, or for refugees.

Another casualty of war was the change in sexual caution. The illegitimacy rate jumped from 4% to 6% of all births, higher than what it was to be until 1960. For all classes there were the innumerable rushed and shotgun marriages. Women wanted to have a child with their lovers before the man went off to what on the Western Front could be almost certain death. The lucky ones who married their men before they were killed would get a war widows pension and something for the

¹³⁴ Georgina Lee Page 135

child. The others and their children received no support from the state.

The Armistice was signed at 11.00 on the 11 November 1918. The guns fell silent on the Western Front and over most of the battlefields of the world. "The War to End Wars" was over. The people took to the streets to celebrate. For Britain, the Dominions and Colonies, the United States, France and all the Allies it was a great victory. The cost of the war in human terms was really beyond calculation. 65,030,810 fighting men had been mobilized, of these 37,506,686 were casualties, 57.6% of those taking part in the fighting. There are no accurate figures for the number of civilians killed, or who died of starvation and illness caused by the war. Fighting continued though Germany and her allies had surrendered. The Revolutionary Government in Russia was fighting for its life against the White Russians backed by Allied troops. In Germany the Kaiser and the Crown Prince abdicated. The German Navy mutinied at Kiel, the ordinary seamen seized the ships and arrested their officers. In other parts of Europe workers set up Workers Soviets. Revolution was in the air and the 'old order' trembled.

It was a false dawn. Twenty years later the world was again at war.

Chapter 5

PEACE

There was no official celebration of the Allied Victory until the Peace Treaty was signed at Versailles Paris on the 28 June 1919. The Manchester Guardian carried an account of how London was decorated for the great victory parade that would celebrate the event.

Aftermath of War: The Peace Festivities.

Seeing the Decorations.

In the last 36 hours London has undergone a transformation, and although a great deal remains to be done the main streets are a blaze of colours [...]

The Women in the March

If it is a hot day the seven miles that the Victory procession will march over hard un-elastic London streets may tax the endurance of the soldiers. People have been wondering whether the women of the three services, who are so proud for the first time to be part of a great pageant, will walk or ride. They themselves do not seem to have considered the alternative. Of course they will march, and the whole way too. The women chosen to represent all the commands in the country are all physically very fit, and they are now training in readiness for Saturday.

From Givenchy to the Sales.

It was during the summer sales of 1915, when there was so conspicuous a shortage of men behind the counters of the largest shops, that one first realized how many of the London shop assistants had gone to war. Most of those who will return are

back now, and the departments have recovered their normal appearance.¹³⁵

As Britain began to settle to peace time living it quickly became clear that the 'land fit for heroes' promised to the fighting men was not to be. Women had won one victory. Women over the age of thirty, and all men over the age of twenty-one could vote for the first time at the General Election held on 14 December 1918. Nancy, Lady Astor, representing Portsmouth, became the first woman MP.

The Manchester Guardian sang the praises of the women from the services who were fit to march the seven miles of the Victory Parade, but the sting was in the last part of the story. The men from the large London shops who had gone off to fight had returned, and though it is not stated, the women who had replaced them were now unemployed. Soon many of the ex soldiers would also find themselves unemployed.

Spanish Flu spread world wide and was estimated to have killed 50 to 100 million, many more than the number of soldiers and civilians killed in the war.¹³⁶

Women lost their jobs in factories and mostly returned, if they were lucky, to being, wives and mothers. So many young men had been killed in the war that many women now faced a life of spinsterhood and low paid work. The 1921 Census recorded one and three quarter million unmarried women in Britain.¹³⁷ Though the lack of men opened up careers to women as secretaries, bookkeepers, bank employees, and in the

¹³⁵ Manchester Guardian. 18 July 1919. Reprinted in the Guardian 19 July 2009.

¹³⁶ Wikipedia. 11/07/09.

¹³⁷ Virginia Nicholson. *Singled Out. How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (Penguin Books.2008). From the introduction.

medical, legal and teaching professions. But if they married they often had to give up their jobs.¹³⁸

A Parliamentary Election was called in 1922 and Labour won 142 seats:-

The Scottish Left fought the election on a programme that called for the nationalization of land, coal, water, gas, electricity, rail, tramways and shipping[...] A capital levy would be imposed on private fortunes over £5000[...] the State had a duty to provide work or adequate maintenance.[Pensions were to be £1 for every one over 60...]rents would be set at a level tenants could afford.

Labour won one in three of every vote cast in Glasgow and returned twenty nine MP's to Westminster. The programme which they had fought the election was not put in place until Labour won the 1945 election with a landslide victory over Churchill.

For a short period shipbuilding and heavy industry boomed as the need to replace ships lost in the war filled the order books. This prosperity did not continue. Scotland's heavy industries went into decline, a decline that was to last into the mid 1930s. Recovery only started when it became clear the Britain would need to re-arm to be prepared to face the threat of another World War.

¹³⁸ Annie Paterson, Jessie McNeill's younger sister was a 'surplus' woman, the young man she was walking out with in 1918 was killed on the Western Front in late October 1918. She never married and spent the rest of her working life in full time employment rising to be Chief Cashier in the SMT Bus Company's Ayr Office. She nursed her ill mother, and later her sister, and looked after James McNeill after Jessie died in 1961. She was a much loved Aunt to Sheila and Ruari McNeill, and Great Aunt to Sheila's children, Gordon and Christine.

Chapter 6

RED REVOLUTION

The Government in Westminster, much influenced by Winston Churchill was convinced that revolution would break out in Scotland. There was a great deal of industrial unrest among the work force in Glasgow and the surrounding districts. This led to a mass rally in George Square in Glasgow on the 31 January 1919.

Bloody Friday 31 January 1919

Divide and Rule for as Long as you can

Glasgow
Trade Unionists march through the Square
Towards the City Chambers

Police.Police.Police
And in the streets leading off the Square-
Scottish soldiers with rifles.
Live ammunition.
They may be ordered to shoot into the crowd.

And behind the Scottish soldiers-
English soldiers with rifles
Live ammunition.
If the Scottish soldiers refuse to shoot into the
crowd
The English soldiers will be ordered
To shoot the Scottish soldiers

Oh, but that was long ago.
That was in the future.

Adrian Mitchell 1975.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Adrian Mitchell. *The ape-man cometh*. (Cape Poetry Paperbacks. 1975.) Page 73. Adrian Mitchell wrote this poem in 1974 after I told him about the events in George Square. It was not generally known how far the Government, spurred on by Winston Churchill, was prepared to stop what he saw as 'red revolution on the Clyde'



Tanks in the Cattle Market waiting for orders to proceed to George Square.

Winston Churchill persuaded the Government to deploy troops in Glasgow supported by tanks. The first line of defence was the Glasgow Police, then Scottish troops were to be used first of all to control the workers, but if they refused to obey their officers, the English troops had orders to shoot the Scottish troops. Tanks were also standing by and would be used if matters got out of hand.

It was the police who got out of hand. They panicked and drew their batons and violently attacked the demonstrators. Both Gallagher and Kirkwood were attacked by the Police and arrested. Other arrests were made and the Riot Act was read. Many of the demonstrators including women were quite badly injured.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Harry McShane and Joan Smith. *Harry McShane. No Mean Fighter.* (Pluto Press. 1978) Pages 106-107



David Kirkwood under arrest in George Square.

The police tried to seize the Red Flag that had been flying in the square. They did not succeed and the flag was smuggled out of the square under the skirt of a young woman. It was given to James Mc Neill who safely managed to take the flag to Ayr.¹⁴¹ In Ayr it was flown at ILP meetings on Ayr Low Green and famously on VE Day when James, aged sixty four, erected a flagpole made out of one of the masts of Machum his ketch and I as a proud nine year old hoisted the Red Flag. My mother and father, and their two children then sang the first two verses of The Red Flag.¹⁴²

The people's flag is deepest red
 It shrouded oft our martyred dead;
 And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold
 Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold
 Then raise the scarlet standard high!

Beneath its folds we'll live and die.

Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer

¹⁴¹ James Mc Neill had come to Glasgow as an observer and to support his younger brother my Uncle Billy who was a shop steward in an engineering works. I was told the story about the Red Flag by both my father and my uncle.

¹⁴² The Red Flag. Written by James O'Connell in 1899. Sung to the German hymn tune Tannanbum

We'll keep the red flag flying here

He kept it flying until all the Union Jacks and Saltires had been hauled down.¹⁴³ He still believed that the workers of the world would defeat capitalism. Above his front door he erected a placard that read:- "Once again the Workers of the World have Triumphed Over the Evils of Capitalism" He believed the Capitalist system was responsible for the rise of the Fascist Powers.

The demonstration in George Square was an indication of how difficult it was going to be for the working class to maintain and improve their standards of living. Even with a sympathetic Labour Government unemployment continued to increase. A General Strike was called by the TUC on 1 May 1926 but achieved very little for the workers. Ramsay MacDonald, then Leader of the Labour Party was so desperate to appear responsible and respectable to the middle and upper classes that he did not support the TUC. The Great Depression which started in 1929 left thousands of working people unemployed. This situation continued well into the 1930s.

World War II began on 3 September 1939.

Chapter 7

THE AYR YEARS 1911-1964

James McNeill told me that he had never enjoyed living in Glasgow. He wanted to have easy access to the country side and the sea. Living in Ayr would provide these opportunities. Ayr was the County Town of Ayrshire and an ancient Royal Burgh founded in 1205. Wallace and Bruce had played a part in its history. It was the birthplace of Robert Burns. In 1911 it was a handsome and prosperous town with a flourishing holiday trade and a large service industry for the rich agricultural hinterland of the county.

Robert Burns in the opening verses of *Tam O' Shanter* celebrates Ayr as:-

*Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
For Honest Men and Bonnie Lassies.*

Ayr provided James Mc Neill with most of what he sought in his life including the 'bonnie lassies'

Becoming a school teacher had one immediate material effect on James McNeill's life. As a draughtsman he earned £1-10/- a week or £78 a year. As a teacher of Educational Handwork he earned between £90 to £125 per year.¹⁴⁴ He also enjoyed much shorter working hours, basically from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm with an hour break for lunch. Instead of the 55 hours a week he had worked in industry he now worked a 7 hour day for 5 days per week, a 35 hour week which was 20 hours less than the hours he worked in industry. He also enjoyed 8 weeks paid holiday

¹⁴⁴ Information on teacher's salaries from the Educational Institute of Scotland's journal. *The Educational News*. Adverts of situations vacant. E.g. 1 May 1912 (The year James McNeill started teaching in Ayr). *Kilmarnock Academy. Certified Teacher in Woodwork. Salary £90 pa rising to £130 pa*. There were no agreed national scales for teachers at this time. Each local authority education committee set its own rates)

during the year. In his first years of teaching he earned additional income by teaching City and Guild courses to Tradesmen 'Night School'. On 1 April 1912 he became a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland. (No.19333). This was a considerable achievement for the boy who had left school aged thirteen to become a hammer boy in a railway workshop. In Ayr James continued his political activities. He was a very active member of the local branch of the Independent Labour Party and the Co-operative Party. He started the Ayr Socialist Sunday School in 1912 which lasted until 1939. Both his children were 'named' in the Sunday school. When Ayr held its Victory Parade on Monday 4 August the local youth groups marched with the Town Council and the soldiers. The members of the Ayr Socialist Sunday School did not. The ILP celebrated with a Public Meeting on the Low Green on the following Sunday.¹⁴⁵ The subject of the meeting was that all wars were attacks on the working classes by the capitalist classes. James McNeill chaired the meeting. Such activities did not endear him to the many ministers who served on the Ayr School Board, later the County Education Committee. When he started the Socialist Sunday School they wanted to have him dismissed from his teaching post at Newton Academy. As they could not fault him in his work they did not succeed. It could be said however that a state of war existed between him and the Church of Scotland in Ayr for the rest of his life.

The politics of his early life in Glasgow was sustained. He continued to create or join organisations that would improve life for the working classes, and provide access to the country, or to learning, and to provide practical assistance from the wealth of his experience. He joined the Peace Pledge Union. He

¹⁴⁵ Ayrshire Post. 8 August 1919.

maintained his links with national politics in Scotland and particularly in Glasgow. Though he had moved up the class structure he never considered himself middle class. He believed that all men were equal and he did not recognise classes in society. He however did not in his own words, " have any time for the British Royal Family, or indeed any Royal Family, Lords, ministers of religion who are parasites living off the workers, or Tory MPs". He would have disapproved strongly of New Labour. The politician he most disliked, with a deep loathing, was Winston Churchill who he said was a warmonger and one of the greatest enemies the working classes had ever suffered under.¹⁴⁶ He continued to read *Forward* and other ILP newspapers, and on a Sunday *Reynolds' News* which was published by the Co-operative Society. The Ayr branch of the ILP closed in the late 1940's. He continued his membership of the national body but turned out to help the Labour Party at election time. He would also attack the members of the Labour Party for not keeping the pure light of the ILP's version of socialism burning. He attended Labour College Classes and maintained a keen interest in the political scene. He always kept his political views out of the classroom.

When the Scottish Youth Hostel Association was founded in 1931 he became a life member. He was a very active member, helping to build and maintain Youth Hostels, showing films and giving talks to organisations to recruit new members. He was very involved in the politics of the organisation that he considered should be run on firm Socialist principles. He served on the South West

¹⁴⁶ In 1947 Winston Churchill was made a Freeman of the Royal Burgh of Ayr. James McNeill as Chair of Ward 5 was invited to the ceremony in Ayr Town Hall. He was seated on an end seat by the central aisle. When Churchill entered the hall the audience stood up. James McNeill remained seated. He said afterwards that he could not be party to making a warmonger a Freeman of Ayr. When asked why he had accepted the invitation he said as Chairman of the Ward Committee it was his duty to attend.

Area Committee. He and his younger brother William McNeill who was employed as the Warden at Arrochar Youth Hostel founded the Warden's Association to represent wardens and to see that they had decent pay and conditions. These activities often brought him into dispute with the National Executive of the SHYA. He remained closely involved with the SYHA until his death. From 1948 until 1954 he spent much of his time repairing and maintaining Youth Hostels in the remote North and North West of Scotland. He often acted as a temporary warden and though he claimed he could not sing was a great success leading 'sing songs' in the common room, which often included dancing. He was a good dancer having been taught by a 'dancing master' in his youth. His elegant dancing still charmed the lassies, even into his late seventies. All my school holidays from 1948 until 1953 were spent assisting him in his work for the SYHA.

James McNeill occasionally wrote articles for the SYHA Newsletter. Here is an abstract from an article about Achmelvich Youth Hostel a small hostel still in existence about 5 miles North West of Loch Inver. My father and I converted the old school into a hostel in 1950.

When we turned the last bend and reached the last hill top we could look down on our objective Achmelvich at the end of the road. The sun had come out and what a sight! The Atlantic before us and a little sandy bay between headlands like a pearl in a sapphire sea. And what sand too! As fine as the driven snow and as dazzling. Achmelvich caters for all kinds and those who prefer to scramble to the dizzy heights of two to three hundred feet have miles of rock and crag to climb, and as each peak is bagged a new view of the Atlantic is seen, and also one of the ever present Suilven like some giant sentinel raising his cranium to the clouds

The article was signed "Theffort" the name of his house in Ayr.

He was 69 when he carried out this work, and was to continue repairing Youth Hostels until he was 75.

I have already described his early life in Ayr in 1911 and 1912. Mary Henderson his first wife lived with him for a short while and then returned to Glasgow. They had a daughter who died in her first year. Shortly after the death of their daughter they separated and eventually were divorced in 1925. After the separation James and Jessie became lovers. They married in 1929.



Machum. James McNeill's 32 foot Loch Fyne skiff which he had converted to a gaff rigged ketch. Drying sails in Ayr Harbour 1930. (Photo by JMcN)

He founded the Ayr Amateur Swimming Club and Humane Society in 1912. There were no swimming baths in Ayr. One of the major aims of the club was to persuade the Ayr Town Council to build baths. They did not succeed. He continued to live the open air life until he was well into his seventies. During his working life as a teacher he cycled a minimum of 12 miles a day between his home and work at Newton Academy. He hill walked

and sometimes rock climbed. From about 1920 to 1939 he spent much of the summer sailing his 32 foot converted Loch Fyne fishing skiff on the Firth of Clyde and the Western Islands. He had converted the skiff into a gaff rigged ketch, with comfortable living accommodation and an auxiliary engine. In 1963 a friend and I restored Machum and James McNeill though almost blind again enjoyed sailing his own boat. There was after all an ancient Gaelic saying "Bha birlimn aige fheim aig MacNeill aig a twil." "The MacNeill had a Galley of his own at the Flood." When asked why he had his own private yacht he would reply that he was only maintaining the ancient traditions of the McNeill of McNeill.

As related earlier his teaching career was interrupted in 1916 when he registered as a Conscientious Objector. In 1919 he returned to Newton Academy where he resumed teaching wood work, metal work and technical drawing to a very large number of boys between the ages of 12 and 14.¹⁴⁷ He also taught the same subjects in Evening Classes. When I was a boy it was difficult to go into any kind of workshop in Ayr without meeting someone he had taught.

In 1927 he applied unsuccessfully for the post of Handwork Teacher at Ayr Academy. He had been a teacher for 17 years, 16 years in the employment of the Ayrshire Education Authority at Newton Academy the handwork centre for 5 schools. He taught 270 boys each week.

His testimonials were from:- William Cowie, A.R.I.B.A. Architect, Duncan Macgregor, late Headmaster, Newton Academy, Alex.D.Thomson, Head Teacher, Newton Academy. Public School, Ayr.

¹⁴⁷ His basic salary was increased to £260 p.a.

He had higher qualifications than the person who was appointed. He claimed his political record as a Socialist and Conscientious Objector had counted against him. Ayr Academy in the 1920s was a fee paying Academy where the Ayr establishment, who were Conservative to a man, sent their children. He believed they, and the Church of Scotland ministers who made up 40% of the Education Committee, would have made sure that no one with his views would teach there.

In 1922 he designed his own house and bought a tract of land in Oswald Road which gave the house an excellent view of Arran and the Ayrshire coast, and as far south as Alisa Craig. He did not trust the town surveyors who marked out his building plot so he concreted in their marking posts. The area he chose to build Theffort was earmarked for private development, but in the early 1930's Ayr Council decided to build a housing scheme. My father discovered that their plans including putting a two storied house beyond his garden which would completely block the view of the sea, and of the Island of Arran. He immediately bought the plot of land they were planning to build on and extended his garden and the eight foot wall. The Council also tried to claim that the front wall of the garden had been built beyond the boundaries of the land he had bought. He took the surveyors to where he had concreted in their marks. They had to accept that the wall had been built exactly on the line laid out by them. James McNeill was not a man to be crossed.

As soon as he had permission to build the house he began work with the help of a mason and bricklayer and by 1924 had completed the building. The house had a steeply pitched roof covered with Belgium glazed tiles, and a deep mansard on the sea side of the building. It surprisingly had the look of an English country villa c1912.

The interior was greatly influenced by the style of C.R. Mackintosh and the houses he had seen in Sweden. The house was designed as two flats but was lived in as one house. It was built of concrete blocks faced with granite. He built a mixing machine for the concrete he required and he cast all the necessary blocks himself. There was a story that he forced his pupils to help with the labouring required. This was not true, but he did pay some of the bigger and brighter boys to help him. He also fitted out most of the interior woodwork himself. He cast a date stone for the front door '1924' and cast the name of the house, "Theffort" into the central stones of the front garden wall. After the family moved in he built an eight foot high garden wall, cast in concrete, to protect the garden he was making from the strong south west winds that sweep across Ayr Bay. It was not surprising that after he finished the house his health broke down and he had to have leave of absence from teaching until he recovered. I have been asked why my Socialist father built his own house and thus became a property owner. This was a question I never discussed with him but I think that the answer may be that he believed, along with Marx, that the worker had the right to decide the manner in which he and his family lived and thus be free from any interference from landlords. He had seen how the Glasgow landlords had tried to force up rents during World War I and also their failures to maintain the properties they rented out.



James and Jessie Mc Neill outside Theffort.

He moved alone into the house in 1924. He married my mother Jessie Paterson on the 31 August 1929. Annie my mother's younger sister also moved into the top flat of "Theffort". My mother stopped work when she married. They had two children, Sheila Katherine born in 1931, and me born in 1936.



An oval copper framed mirror made by James Mc Neill for the living room in Theffort.



A 'baby chair' made by James McNeill for his daughter.





Part of a wooden train set made by James Mc Neill for his son¹⁴⁸

He was known to generations of school boys as “Auld Paddy” the “woodwork man”, not because he was Irish, but rather than wear a conventional dark suit and bowler hat, the 'uniform' of most teachers at the time he wore a brown Harris Tweed suit, and soft tweed hat known as a “Paddy Hat”. His suits were made for him and had very large ‘poacher’ pockets where, much to the despair of his wife, and to the delight of his children, he carried a collection of objects including a many bladed pocket knife, miniature pliers, apples, conkers, interesting stones he collected from the beach, his bicycle clips, and of course string. On high days and holidays he took the family camping in a Swift open touring car, and when that could no longer be repaired he bought a second hand Morris 12. He was always awake by 5.00 am and would in the summer work in his large garden until it was time to change and go to school. He would be home by 4.15 pm, and would work in the garden until teatime. He did not eat breakfast and his only hot meal was at 1.00 when he

¹⁴⁸ The mirror and baby chair are now family heirlooms in the possession of his granddaughter Christine Stringer. The wooden toys which are part of a full goods train set are in the collection of Glasgow City Museums.(Photos RMcN)

cycled the three miles back to his home to join the family for their dinner.

Working in his garden, continuing his political activities, making toys for his children,¹⁴⁹ running the Socialist Sunday School, including writing for the Sunday School Magazine, making furniture and fine metalwork, swimming, sailing, and arguing with all and sundry ensured that he had a very full life. He continued his wide reading and was a member of The Left Book Club. Among his books was a paper back edition of *A Scots Quair* by Lewis Classic Gibbon. Both my sister and I were encouraged to read and had a free run of his library.

In his home life he was not always a pleasant man to live with. He was very quick tempered, but never physically violent, though in a rage he could be frightening. He believed in the equality of the sexes and had fought for women to be given the vote. He considered himself the 'head of the family' however and expected his children to obey him without question. My mother Jessie did not support this view. She was a socialist and a feminist with her own strongly held views of society. She was not going to be dictated to by him, or indeed any man. Her sister Annie supported her in her own quiet but equally determined way. The result was that in later years when my sister and I were growing up there were many rows in the family home.

He did not always make life easy for his children. He made sure that my sister and I did not receive any religious instruction at school, or say prayers. Jessie agreed with him on these matters. Her children's father was the man she lived with, not some Holy Father in a

¹⁴⁹ . During the 1939-45 war he made wooden toys that were sold in several Glasgow toy shops. Some of these toys are now in the Glasgow Museum Collection.

mystical Heaven somewhere up in the clouds. We were not allowed to stand up with our fellow pupils for the National Anthem, after all we were republicans, and the Royal Family lived off the flesh of the workers. He taught us that Winston Churchill was the arch enemy of the working classes. This was not a commonly held view in 1941 when I started school. But at least he did not approve of Stalin. As he did not think little boys should have 'pudding bowl' haircuts, I went to school in 1941 with shoulder length hair. I had to learn to defend myself from shouts of 'lassie boy' and prove to my tormentors that though I had long hair, as my father said 'so had Samson', that I could hit back. These views made us both outsiders at school and ran contra to wartime feelings for "King and Country".

His children did not follow his plans for them and went their own way. He was very proud of his daughter Sheila who was both Dux of Heathfield Primary School and of Ayr Academy. She went on to Glasgow University to read modern languages, and became a very good primary school teacher. His Victorian upbringing came to the surface, and perhaps his Victorian values, when his daughter decided to get married in 1955 only two years after she had qualified. He considered that she should have stayed at home until she had made a significant contribution to the family income and repaid some of the sacrifices that he and his wife had made to allow her to go to University and Jordanhill Teachers Training College. He did relent and paid for a splendid wedding held in Belisle House Hotel in Ayr. He even went as far as agreeing that the couple could be married by a Minister, but there was no blessing or speech at the reception from the Minister, nor was there any alcohol served to the wedding guests.

My own rebellion took a different form. At the age of 18, when I was required to register for military service, I decided I was not going to follow his footsteps and become a conscientious objector. I think my reasons for this decision was not that I rejected his teachings which is how it seemed to him, but that I was tired of being different from my friends. I did try to compromise by stating that I wanted to serve in the Royal Army Medical Corps. In due course I did so and spent most of my two years service as a clerk at Cowglen Military Hospital in Glasgow. I spent nearly all my spare time working as a theatre technician at the Citizens Theatre and the College of Drama (now the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama). The second of my decisions that deeply disappointed him was, when after a year at Jordanhill Teacher College in Glasgow, I told him that I did not want to follow in his footsteps as a woodwork teacher and was leaving the College so that after my military service I could work in the professional theatre. Though once I had become established in the theatre he was quite proud of me. He was very pleased when I became the full time Scottish Organiser for British Actors Equity Association. At last I was clearly on the side of the workers.

When William McNeill, James's brother died suddenly in 1948 there were two obituaries for him published in the SYHA Magazine. The obituaries published when James McNeill died have gone missing, but the two brothers were very similar in temperament and shared the same socialist views therefore a picture of James McNeill can be had from the obituaries for his brother.

The death of Mr William McNeill removes an outstanding figure from the Glasgow District and the Association. A man of forthright opinions and a stalwart of the

Warden's Association he was a man to be reckoned with in debate. Those who only knew of him from his thunderous speeches at Annual District Meetings remained entirely unaware of his helpful humorous and persuasive advice and assistance to young members[...]At sing-songs and other common room events this sturdy fighter unbent to oblige the company with 'Mary of Argyll' but his rendering alas will be heard no more. [...]At all times he was a man of contact, impatient for the rectification of anything that he considered in the light of injustice. He lacked what he termed a school tie education but the evidence of his search for knowledge could be found on the overloaded book shelves of his limited quarters at Glen Loin

In 1945 he attended the ILP Summer School which was held in Ayr. James Maxton gave the main address. Gordon Brown in his biography of Maxton summarized the speech.

We must not allow ourselves to become ants in an ant-hill[...]For Maxton the only test of socialist progress was in the improvement of the individual, and thus the community.[...]A truly socialist society would free men and women from the fear of poverty, the uncertainties of unemployment and the miseries of deprivation.[...] Maxton (and James McNeill) had seen how poverty crippled the schoolchildren he taught and unemployment divested the constituency he represented. From the first he had understood that men and women should be treated equally.

He could have been describing James McNeill. He was not a theoretical socialist. He was a practical socialist, and in so far as he was able he practiced what he preached. He would have liked to have been an Anarchist and believed that some day the people of the world would live in Anarchy, by which he meant in a world where governments, states and laws were no longer necessary and all the people, no matter of what sex,

colour or creed, lived in peace and harmony. He was a committed pacifist who believed even in 1939 that the way to defeat Fascism was by passive resistance. He sincerely believed that there were no circumstances where killing another living creature was justified.

Perhaps the best way to sum up his life, and the life of many of his socialist comrades, is to quote the simple precepts taught by him to the children of Ayr who attended the Ayr Socialist Sunday School, and to the many children across Britain who attended Socialist Sunday Schools.

Love your schoolfellows, who will be your fellow workmen in life.

Love Learning, which is the food of the mind; be as grateful to your teacher as to your parents.

Make every day holy by good and useful deeds.

Honour the good, be courteous to all, bow down to none.

Do not hate or speak evil of anyone.

Do not be revengeful, but stand up for your rights and resist oppression.

Do not be cowardly. Be a friend to the weak and love justice.

Remember that all good things of the earth are produced by labour. Whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.

Observe and think in order to discover the truth.

Do not believe what is contrary to reason, and never deceive yourself or others.

Do not think that those who love their own country must hate and despise other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism.

Look forward to the day when all men and women will be free citizens of one fatherland, and live together as brothers and sisters in peace and righteousness.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Precepts of The Socialist Sunday School published by the National Council of the Socialist Sunday Schools 1923.

He fought all his life to try and better conditions for the working people of the world and tried to live by these precepts. He did not always succeed. As his daughter Sheila once said to me. " Your father did not suffer fools gladly." That statement was true and he could not always control his terrible 'McNeill Temper.' In spite of that he was in the words of the poet he so much admired, Robert Burns, " A Man's A Man For A That."

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

I believe that by writing a biography of James McNeill combined with a description of the social, political and cultural life of his time I have shown that central to his life and the life of his companions was their desire to bring about a political change which would result in a fairer and more egalitarian society.

By 1919, and in spite of the disaster of a major World War, the socialist movement in Britain had established the following:-

The ILP and the Labour Party were a strong political force.

The Trade Union Movement clearly represented the work force.

There were strong links between the Trade Unions, the Labour Party, the ILP, and the Co-operative movement. Together they represented the working classes and had established the voice of the working classes within the country.

Female emancipation had been established, and though the battle still continues, women were beginning to achieve some equality with men.

The British Establishment, though they tried very hard to do so, could no longer ride roughshod over the working people.

The 'footsoldiers' and what they fought for did become the conscience of the Left.

It was this 'conscience' that was to ensure the important social changes, including the National Health Service, introduced by the 1945 Labour Government, and probably every important social change brought about by Labour Governments since 1945.

In personal terms James Mc Neill played his part in these changes and he continued to fight all his life to improve the lot of the common man.

In his own life he had moved from industry into education and had a long career as a teacher of Technical Subjects where he successfully introduced boys to the principles of design, engineering and craft skills.

Through his involvement with the Socialist Sunday Schools, as a teacher and by writing articles in the Socialist Sunday School magazine he helped to set standards for a personal morality.

But in spite of the advances made towards a fairer world the battle is not over. The 20th century became the bloodiest ever known. The young idealists had established the need for vast change but the battle has still to be won. James McNeill, and his comrades would not have been surprised to find that in 2009 the world still faces enormous problems. There is still vast inequality and greed in the world. There is a very real danger that the excess of our modern industrial and mainly capitalist society will succeed in destroying the physical world as we know it. These problems would have made him, and his comrades, fight all the harder to establish a world ruled by fairness and equality where children would grow up in security and peace.

His hero Keir Hardie said in 1899 "Agitators we have been and Agitators we must remain." All his life James McNeill was an Agitator.

The message that James Mc Neill and his comrades pass on to their descendents is that if we are ever to have a sane and better world we must continue to fight "the good fight" until the day the hopes of Robert Burns become a reality.

Then let us pray that come it may,--
As come it will for a' that--

That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a that.
It's coming yet for a' that'
That Man to Man the world o'er.
Shall brothers be for a' that" ¹⁵¹

The descendents of the young idealists must carry
on the struggle.

¹⁵¹ Robert Burns. *Poetical Works*. (W & R Chambers Ltd 1971) Pages
444 &445.

APPENDICES

James McNeill's Qualifications.

- 1881 Born at Waterside a mining village on the outskirts of Kirkintilloch.
- 1887 Family move from Waterside to Glasgow, James aged 6
- 1894 Leaves school aged 13 and works for a year in a Springburn railway works as a hammer boy.
- 1895 Begins his time as an apprentice Structural Engineer
- 1899 Leaves home after row with his father and lives in digs.
- 1900 Completes his apprenticeship and starts work as a time served structural engineer.
- At some point between 1895 and 1900 he began studying engineering drawing at Night School so that he could qualify as a draughtsman.
- 1908 Started studying City & Guilds Cabinet Making as training towards becoming a Manual Instructor.
- 1909 C&G Certificate in Cabinet Making. Studying C&G to become a Manual Instructor
- 1910 C&G Certificate as a Manual Instructor.
Begins teaching in Glasgow.
- 1911 Moves to Ayr to teach at Newtonhead Public School but continues his training in Glasgow.
- 1911-12 8 June 1911 arrives in Sweden via Holland, Germany and Denmark at Naas College to attend a first course in Sloyd which he completes on 18 July 1911. The course included drawing plans for cardboard model making, making the drawings, woodwork, and gymnastics. The course was attended by both men and women.
- 1912 He moves from Newtonhead to teach at Newton Academy.
Gains his Educational Handwork or Sloyd Association of Scotland Educational Woodwork Teachers Certificate. (issued to meet the Requirements of Article 21 (c) (2) of the Scotch Code. (Scotch is the spelling used on the Certificate.)
- 1912-1913 Gains the Glasgow School of Art Training Certificate of Teachers in Design and Execution in Metal Work, Repousse, Silversmithing and Enamels with a pass marked Excellent.
- 1913 Glasgow School of Art Vacation Course. Third Course Certificate in Drawing, Painting and Modeling.
- 1 April 1912 is admitted to membership of the Educational Institute

of Scotland. Continues taking classes in metal work and wood work organised by the Glasgow Provincial Committee for the Training of Teachers.

Course 383 G in Metal Work.

Course 386 G. Drawing:- Theory of, and practice of projection, interpenetration, free drawing of tools, sections of wood etc.

References from his employers when he left to begin his teaching career.

Craighall Iron Works, Saracen Street, Possilpark, Glasgow

1 August 1910.

I have much pleasure and confidence in commending Mr. James McNeill. During the last six years I have been associated with him I have been led to form a very high appreciation of him. As to character, he is what a young man should be, being both gentlemanly and refined, and I am confident would prove himself capable of carrying out, in a masterly fashion, any work entrusted to him, as, for the greater part of the last five years he has come directly under my supervision in the work of the Drawing Loft and Drawing Office, and I have found his work to be of a high and scholarly character. He is painstaking, energetic and obliging, and I have the utmost confidence in recommending him for the appointment he now applies for.

(Signed) W.S.Pairman, Chief Draughtsman.

Letter to Col Ker. Chair of the CO Tribunal in Ayr. 1917.

106 Hunter's Avenue, Ayr. 29 March 1917.

To Colonel Ker, Park Circus,

Dear Sir,

It gives me great pleasure to comply with your request for a general outline of the work undertaken by me as a Handwork Teacher in the elementary school in Ayr. The boys come to the handwork room at the age of twelve, and attend for two to three years. In the early stages the boys are taught the use of the foot rule and the importance of accurate measurements. Next comes the manipulation of tools, showing their practical purpose and deducing the theory of mechanical motion. In conjunction with this the boys make simple models in wood or metal, and so become acquainted with the adaptability of the different materials. Mechanical drawing is taught in the form of plan, elevation and section, each pupil making a working drawing of the article to be made. This embraces practical workshop drawing. Lessons are given to advanced pupils on the theory of practical mechanics, such as the 'Principle of the Lever' etc Materials

are studied with a view to their practical utility in constructive handwork; also their source and composition.

This is a bare outline of the work undertaken, but I would like to substantiate the claim of the importance of handwork in the elementary school, and the bearing it has on the supply of efficient workmen. The trend of modern education is to make the subjects of study more real and vital to pupils attending the elementary schools.

All educational authorities now admit the great importance to the community of the development of a more "practical" form of instruction. This practical or constructive movement is not isolated from the ordinary subjects, but is related to other educational movements: in fact it is correlated with all other subjects taught in the school. Arithmetic, which the average boy only understands in a vague way, in the manual room becomes a real thing to be used for a practical purpose. He sees the utility of it, and goes back to his classroom with a desire to learn more. It is the same with Mensuration; he handles the actual surfaces, the measuring and the calculation of areas and volumes becomes understandable; he is working not in the abstract, but in the concrete; he grasps and retains knowledge that otherwise would be lost. Handwork properly taught not only opens a new realm of thought to the boy, but it affords an outlet for his growing activities that the ordinary subjects do not have. Those natural activities, guided into the right channel, becomes productive as well as healthful. Educational handwork has been found not only to be a greater stimulant to the boy's intelligence than mere book learning, but it so reacts that his ordinary school work becomes more interesting, hence of more educational value. In the manual room the boys realise that the subjects they have been taught have a practical purpose and a direct bearing on their powers to earn a living.

So much for the purely academical aspect of the subject. Technically, constructive handwork has a very strong claim as an essential part of the industrial education of the boy and his chances of success as an efficient workman. While it uses the day school subjects it introduces the workshop practices and so forms a connecting link between the two. Many workmen who have no training in the manual room never grasp the elementary and fundamental principles of their work simply because no one has taken the trouble to explain it to them. This the handwork teacher does. Not only that, but under his instruction the boy develops a dexterity of hand, his eye is trained to the sense of form. He receives impressions and is able to express them in action. This manipulative skill so improves his general intelligence that his capacity to deal with difficulties is greatly increased.

Even to the boy who will not make his living by manual labour, the training in the handwork room fosters a worthy spirit of services, and a sympathetic and appreciative attitude towards those who carry on the manual work of the worlds.

In the foregoing I have tried to show you the aims of educational handwork, its theory and practice as I understand it, and try to carry out.

Were I reinstated 200 boys would receive instruction in this important part of their education. Owing to the half-day system most of this valuable training would be given in the time that is now spent by the boys in the street, so that it would not take time from the subjects now taught in the schools, but as I have shown will increase their educational value, and technically add greatly to the efficiency of those boys who are the workers of the near future. All this can be attained by the release of one man.

I understand that many of the larger School Boards, such as Glasgow, recognizing the importance of the subject, appealed for their handwork teachers and got exemption. On the Declaration of War there were two handwork teachers in the town. The younger one volunteered, and I was left to carry on the work until last August when the finding of the local tribunal was that I find work of national importance. This I did until lately, when my services were no further required by my employer.

Under these conditions I respectfully ask that I be allowed to return to my school work. I enclose a letter from the School Board showing that they are quite willing that I resume my educational duties.

Thank you for the interest that you have shown in my case.

I am yours faithfully,

James McNeill.



Chair designed and made by James Mc Neill 1908

Testimonials

References for to support application for post of Teacher of Educational Handwork at Ayr Academy

William Cowie, A.R.I.B.A. Architect.

I have known Mr. James McNeill for about 15 years and have formed a very high opinion of his capabilities as an Instructor in Woodwork and other Manual Arts. Mr. McNeill is a thoroughly practical and refined workman, as well as a teacher with high ideals and enthusiasm in all his work.

There were equally good references from Duncan Macgregor, late Headmaster, Newton Academy and the then Headmaster, Alex.D.Thomson.

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WEB SITES

WWW.Clan McNeill. Updated 31 July
www.i-know-scotland.co.uk modifies 26 August 2009

¹ Letter from Glasgow Museum Service

& Sport G I A S G

GLASGOW MUSEUMS
225 Scotland Street, Glasgow G5 8
PHONE 0141 287 0500
FAX 0141 287 0515
TEXT PHONE 0141 287 0513
WEB www.glasgowmuseums.com
www.csghlasgow.org

Our ref: AB/GSA-JM/2009
Your ref:
Date: 13th October 2009

Mr Ruari McNeill
Laggenfield Farm
Dumscore
Dumfries
DG2 0JT

Dear Mr McNeill

Re: Work by James McNeill in Glasgow Museums' collection

I am contributing a chapter to a book published to coincide with an exhibition celebrating the Centenary of the second phase of the Glasgow School of Art. The book is edited by Ray Mackenzie, lecturer at the GSA, and published by Luath Press and looks at different aspects of the GSA over the period that Francis Newbery was Director (from 1885 – about 1916). My chapter is on the relationship between Schools in Glasgow and the Glasgow School of Art, and the GSA's role in contributing to elementary and secondary education. The main focus of the essay is on the developments in teacher training and art education.

The papers and metalwork by your father, James McNeill, that you so kindly donated to Glasgow Museums' collection has been excellent source material to consult during this research. I am writing to ask your permission to reproduce a photograph of the display board of his mounted metalwork samples in the publication to accompany my essay. This display board demonstrates work using the skills and techniques learnt at evening classes held at both the Glasgow School of Art and at School Board of Glasgow premises. The reference papers written for your father demonstrate he is an excellent embodiment of what Newbery describes as the ideal teacher and I reference in the text some of these documents to show him as such an example.

I do hope you are willing for this image to be reproduced and look forward to hearing from you.

With very best wishes.

Yours sincerely
Alison Brown
Alison Brown
Curator, European Decorative Art from 1800
Glasgow Museums

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