



1923-73

the
Kirkintilloch
players

GOLDEN JUBILEE REMINISCENCES

Kirkintilloch Lecture Committee.

THE KIRKINTILLOCH PLAYERS' CLUB

PRESENT

A MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENT

IN THE

TOWN HALL, KIRKINTILLOCH,

On TUESDAY, 17th MARCH, 1925,

AT EIGHT P.M.

LADIES ARE KINDLY REQUESTED TO REMOVE THEIR HATS.

KIRKINTILLOCH PLAYERS CLUB
1923-1973

GOLDEN **JUBILEE** REMINISCENCES

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Alex C Bain

It's June 1923. A coal barge surges through the canal at Townhead, Kirkintilloch, under the wooden hump-back bridge, to join the two Clydesdales that, freed from their haul, canter up the hill from Hay's boatyard and down towards the Hillhead basin.

It's warm. On the towpath, idly waiting for the barge to pass, a miner from Meiklehill pit sits on his hunkers beside a moulder from the Lion Foundry. The grocer's boy pushes his heavy barrow over the cobbled Cowgate.

Swing doors of the pubs are silent. They've been shut by prohibition-but not abandoned. Owners expected 'business as usual' in a few months.

It's June 1923 in Kirkintilloch.

On the other side of the canal a squatting miner puffs impatiently at his pipe. He tugs from his pocket the single sheet *Kirkintilloch Herald* and studies the pigeon results. He'd taken 30 birds to Carlisle a week ago-and not a single winner amongst his homers. He reads the numbers, one after another, like Premium Bond numbers. No luck.

His eye slips over the small type at the foot of the column.

MEETING For those interested in formation of society for music and drama. Boy Scout Hall at 7.30.

For three young men in Kirkintilloch the evening was only the beginning. They were three young men about to change the social habits of their home town.

Alex Bain was 21. So, too, was David Sinclair. Bill St. Clair was the eldest, in his thirties. Young men about town. 'With it' in every sense. They regularly caught the train from Back o' Loch station to Glasgow to see the latest play in the Royal or Kings.

Alec in particular was already drama daft. He'd appeared in Scout sketches, produced by Alec Ogilvie, a man he greatly admired.

The same Alec Ogilvie had wished the original Players Club to start in 1908. But the First World War killed it stone dead. Now they were attempting to raise the flame once again.

Together they had approached Mr. Dan Cameron, owner of Andrew & Cameron Engineering Works at Kelvinside for his business acumen, and Alec Ogilvie for his stage experience. The two seniors agreed to help. The stage was set in the Scout Hall in Luggiebank Road, where the Police Station now stands.

The chair, under a picture of Baden Powell, was ready for chairman Dan Cameron. Then the Kirkintilloch Players ran into their first crisis, even before they were born. A wire from Sheffield. Dan Cameron detained on business. Regrets-but he couldn't be there.

Bill St Clair



The Prayer written by Bill St Clair



Dan Cameron

Barbara Cassels



In a panic Alex Bain lobbied any senior in the hall to deputise. They all smiled and said, 'You do it, Alex.' So he did. Alex explained that he and his friends wanted to see more drama in Kirkintilloch. Not only that, they wanted to take part in it. They wanted to develop a club where everyone interested in drama and music could meet to discuss common interests and develop their talents.

The committee was chosen. Dave Sinclair, Dan Cameron (President). One after the other names were proposed and accepted. The list closed. Suddenly a member of the audience stood up and said, 'But Mr. Chairman—you are not on the committee!'

Consternation. They'd forgotten to elect Alex Bain. Fortunately one member insisted on standing down to make a place for him. They chose for secretary, Miss Barbara Cassels, a well-known local singer. She played a key role in the formative years. Inexhaustive energy and vitality. Ideas and imagination. An exceptional organiser who kept a first-class minute book. Babs' perfect records were the text book for all future Players' secretaries.

Another woman on the committee was Miss A. C. Graham, a school teacher at Townhead. A real character. First with 'bobbed' hair style in Kirkintilloch. In the twenties that caused more

stir than a mini in the sixties or the maxi in the seventies.

They were just some of the committee that waited behind in the Scout Hall that night after the first meeting. They looked at Alex Bain. 'Right,' said Babs Cassels, the most forthright. 'Here we are. What now?'

What now indeed? Alex Bain had the answer ready. His mentor, Alex Ogilvie, was the man to consult for the next move.

He had once produced a play *Our Boys*. A victorian melodrama. The newly-born Players decided to pick two casts for the play. Whichever did it best would put it on at the Guide Hall in Queen Street.

For weeks they laboured and vied with one another. Then came the great week. Probably the most disastrous in their history. It was the flop of the century. Too amateurish. Forgotten lines. Badly organised. Badly performed.

The Players cancelled their performance on the night of the dress rehearsal. But it taught the Players three vital lessons. Humility, organisation and preparation.

Never again did any member 'know it all'. Never again was the organisation behind the scenes not up to the people on stage. Never again was a badly prepared play put on stage. Now they got down to serious work. Each member went off with a

handful of one act plays to read. After a fortnight they had a meeting. *Mock Trial by Jury* topped the list

They were invited to use the wee annexe hall in St. David's Memorial Church. They cast Bill St. Clair, Davie Sinclair, Dan Cameron (Judge), Jim Fyfe, Jack Torrance, Alex Bain and a host of others for the show.

Then they got down to the hard slog of rehearsal. They decided the language of the play was too stuffy so they half learned, half adlibbed their lines. But they rehearsed adlibs night after night.

Their committee members begged and borrowed costumes, sold tickets, made props, bought new gas mantles (and plenty spares) for the church hall.

They lashed two violinists and a drummer into a frenzy of enthusiasm. Every ticket was sold for the great night. And a great night it was. The hall was packed. The audience, starved of local plays over ten years, hung on every word and received the Players with rapturous applause.

The drama of Alex Bain, Dave Sinclair, Bill St. Clair and the others was off the ground. The date was January 11, 1924. But where did they go from there?

After the initial success new members were slow to come forward. The Players were regarded

PAVILION, KIRKINTILLOCH
(Rehearsal Manager: Mr. A. S. MANFIELD, A.R.C.M.)

On Sunday, 11th November, 1923, at 8 p.m.



Grand Concert

IN AID OF

THE REDDING PIT

DISASTER FUND.

Tickets and Programmes gifted by D. MacLeod, Limited,
Kirkintilloch.

Concessions for Artists kindly supplied by Graham Bros.,
Kirkintilloch.

with more than slight suspicion. Too arty-crafty. Bohemian set. Fast livers.

And the Subl-5/--. A fortune!

In that first year they even lost one of their first members. He resigned because of 'disciplinary action' over his irregular attendance at rehearsals.

But one event happened that first year that gave the Players new sights for their targets. The Redding Pit Disaster near Falkirk—40 miners died, leaving 300 dependants. There were no pensions or Social Security for those widows and orphans. Collections were put in motion all over the country. The Players was one of the first organisations to move.

They put on a concert in the Town Hall. George Mackie, who'd formed the Players Orchestra,

prepared one half of the programme with vocalists. The Players presented the one act play *Till the Bells Ring* for the other half of the programme.

Several hundred pounds were raised for the Pit Disaster Fund. From that day the Players never lost enthusiasm for helping charities.

They battled their way through the twenties, with play after play, hanging on firmly to their faithful audiences. They even ventured a 'foreign tour' to Kilsyth to play *Are you a Mason?* in the local cinema.

Strong stuff indeed. Too strong for Kilsyth. While the Players didn't get the bird, it soon became evident the regulars would rather have had their silent films than the talkie Kirkie Players.

They weren't slow to make their wishes known!

But that was only a forerunner of what was to come. They ventured further afield to Tollcross, Falkirk, and Airdrie. They even entered the Scottish Community Drama Festival for one-act plays in 1928. The team selected travelled to Glasgow. But they travelled no further on that particular road to fame.

In 1929 the club made their first broadcast from the Glasgow station. They played Dr. A. P. Cowan's (the well-known local doctor) *The New Provost*.

Barbara Cassels, Alex Bain, Bert Montgomery and Bill St. Clair were all in the cast. What a turn-up it caused in Kirkintilloch. All the garages were over-run with folk wanting their accumulators charged for their battery 'wirelesses'. The following year Bill St. Clair added further to his local reputation when his own play *The Prayer* was produced by the Players.

★ ★ ★

KIRKINTILLOCH'S ANNUAL EFFORT ON ITS BEHALF.

The sum of £360 raised last year is a record contribution from Kirkintilloch, and the promoters of this year's programme are sanguine enough to believe that this figure will be surpassed on this occasion.

Another local record was set up on Saturday, when the Kirkintilloch Players' Club, interesting themselves on behalf of the Royal Infirmary, raised a sum of over £200 in one afternoon. The previous record was that of last year, when £170 were raised.

Charities Day means little to most folk in Kirkintilloch now. But in the thirties it was the day of days, thanks to the Players. It grew out of their work for the Redding Pit Disaster Fund.

In 1925 a handful of members in weird costumes (those Bohemians again!) paraded in Cowgate collecting money for the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. They raised £170. The following year the Players were invited to undertake the organisation of what became the famous Charities Campaign.

Under the convenership of Messrs. Robert Cummings and Harry L. Miller the first big effort to help the Royal Infirmary (no State medicine) was launched. Almost every other organisation in the town joined in the big effort.

What was it all? A mass fancy dress parade of over 100 adults and 200 children from Lairdsland School to Woodhead Park. A midnight matinee in the Black Bull Cinema. A Fancy Dress Ball in the Town Hall that lasted till dawn. Living indeed!

Memories of the parade still linger on. Just ask any over-40 'native'. The Pipe Band. The Brass Band. Decorated floats, horse drawn and merchandised. Dancing, prancing, gay volunteers in the most bizarre and colourful costumes, all the way up the Cowgate rattling their cans.

The Charities Committee dreamed up the *Maharajah of Ootnaspoof, The Mad Fire Brigade*

[illegible]

the *Caurie Royal Flag*, the *Temperance Hotel Ghosts*—and many other spoofs.

Mad fun? Perhaps. But their efforts raised £3,200 for the Royal Infirmary.

Much of the money went to endow a bed, where it is to this day in the Royal Infirmary. Above it there is a plaque which says, 'Something attempted, something done'.

Many members of the Players, and Kirkintilloch townfolk, have reason to bless the day that bed was endowed.



Helen Campbell



W W Gartshore

But times moved on. So did the Players. By the early thirties they had almost fifty plays under their belt. From Joe Corrie's *The Hoose on the Hill* to *Murder on the Second Floor*.

They were growing fearless and ambitious. There was nothing they wouldn't tackle. But they needed more room. So they moved into an old weaving shop and Lifeboat Hall in Victoria Street. As usual, the Players' 'silent majority' knocked down walls, built stages, painted, sawed and hammered—and scrubbed—until they had a first-class rehearsal room and store.

They bought the Lifeboat Hall in 1937. But alas they weren't allowed to stay there for long. When war broke out in 1939 the hall was taken over as an ARP post. The Town Hall was commandeered by the Army. And the boys and girls of the Players Club went to war, many with the local Territorial Unit.

The members served on all fronts. Europe, the Far East, Egypt. They were in the Army, RAF, and Royal Navy. Some of the women were in the ATS—and even the Land Army. Yet providence spared every one of them to return.

So 1945 brought peace and its own crisis to the Players. Where now? Some of the members rejoined, others had moved to different areas. Newcomers to the district, and local youngsters, were eager to get cracking in the Old Vic. And the infusion of new blood and restored enthusiasm

had to be welded together. By whom?
Alex Bain, of course.

For their first post war production the Players decided on *The Nest Egg*. They played it in the Town Hall, at Lennox Castle to the troops, and at Airdrie. The Players were back in business once more.

Bill St. Clair, Helen Campbell, Haywood Clarke, Willie and Polly Cuthbert, Margery Hill and Willie Gartshore were the backbone through these difficult 'gelling' post war years. An invincible bunch.

In 1947 the Club put on *Rebecca*. For the famous ballroom scene the Players needed flowers to decorate the set. No flowers. Then Polly Cuthbert took over. She commanded a group of 'volunteers' to make paper flowers. She bought hundreds of yards of crepe paper (wholesale, of course!) and taught even the clumsiest hands how to fashion things of beauty.

On the opening night the audience stopped the show with their applause for the set. It was a mass of lovely flowers, a thing of beauty that's talked about to this day.

Betty Ann Wilson played Mrs. de Winter, the lead. She, too, showed the stuff real Players are made of. She played the last night with her finger in stitches—after a nasty accident!

But what about real recognition? The Players

had tried for so long—but had always just stayed on the fringe.

Their first big break came in 1948 with *Toom Byres*. They entered it for the three-act festival. And they won the City Business Club Shield, the first club to win it.

They also retained it the following year with *What Every Woman Knows* by J. M. Barrie. The rules debarred them from entering a third time.

They were invited to put on *Toom Byres* during the Edinburgh Festival. That's another story.

Alex had been producing and playing in it. He took ill. Then during the sword fight scene the castle wall began to fall down. Haywood Clarke had to step in smartly and with his back to the



Murder on the Second Floor

Haywood Clarke, Helen Campbell, Ena Miller



Fanni Boes

Henrietta L. Miller

John Stark

Betty Fairrie



rampart, he held up the wall till the fight—and the scene ended.

It was a week to remember. Nights at the Festival Club after the show—then back to the 'Varsity hostel in the wee sma' hours. They shared their digs with a ballet group. For once the Players really were going arty!

In 1950 Bill St. Clair and David Clarke, Musical Director, were made life members. How well they deserved the honour.

But Bill was by no means finished with the boards. In 1952 he played in *Hangman's Noose* which went on to take second place in the whole of Scotland at Inverness.

The Jewish Players beat Kirkintilloch by a solitary point.

Now that was a Festival. The cast went up by train and car. The sets by furniture van. And how they ever got together was a miracle. But they did. Thanks mainly to Alex's bullying and Willie Cuthbert's organising.

Hangman's Noose was such a success that T. M. Watson, the playwright, added a first and second act to the play and had it produced by the Players as *Johnie Jouk the Gibbet*.

They put it on at the town's celebration for the Coronation in 1953. It was an honour for Kirkintilloch Players that Tim Watson gave them the play for Duncan Macrae had wanted it.

In 1954 David Clarke died. A sad loss to the Players. He'd been Musical Director for many

years and had guided the club through difficult stormy periods. James Manfield took over—and the tradition of the orchestra was secure.

Pride comes before a fall. Things had gone well for years. Not a flop. Not a disaster. *The Devil's Disciple* at Stirling changed all that. Members still shudder at the memory. It was a great play. They even roped in the orchestra as a military band for crowd scenes. But unfortunately they forgot the first principles—preparation.

It was a long day. Haywood Clarke was ill, suffering from diabetes. Jim Wilson as the minister caught his goonie on a nail.

Bill Wright the hangman, hanged his man several pages too soon. And so the play

disintegrated. But not Alex Bain. He shook his head, more in sorrow than anger—and made his proteges work twice as hard for the next production.

So too did Helen Maitland with her encouragement of the younger members. For all her work, she was given the honour of being first woman Life Member in 1957.



Rebecca Ian Hay Ritchie, Alex Bain, Margery L Hill, Betty Ann Wilson, Bill Wright, Bill St Clair

In 1959 Willie Fountain took over the orchestra and proceeded to conduct it to a different tune. He still drove the orchestra over their orchestral hurdles, but varied it by swinging occasionally in the modern idiom. Willie conducted from his first love, the piano. And created the nucleus for today's programmes.

He took the modernised orchestra to Springburn and other areas to play modern concerts. And in 1962 Willie played a key role in *Words and Music*, the first effort away from a straight play. A revue type song and dance entertainment.

Yet you couldn't win them all. Half the audience thought it was marvellous. The other half thought it was 'beneath' the Players. One thing is for sure. Willie Fountain had Players who hadn't a note in their heads, singing. And he paved the way for musicals in the future.

Once again it was time to move. The Old Vic was crammed. 70-80 members. Scenery and costumes. Everyone tripping over one another. Already there was a compulsory purchase order on the premises for demolition. £350-for a building that had cost the Players £35!

But where to go?

Search parties scoured the area for suitable accommodation. They found-the Washington!

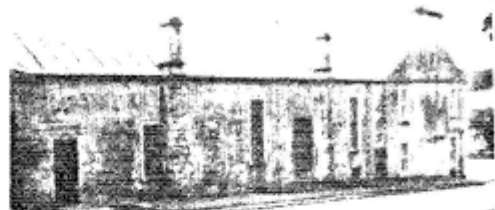
It was 200 years old. It had been a doss house, a lodging house, a pub, a tap room, a dance hall, a billiard room (where still active members learned, as boys, how to pot the baker!)

Some even say Bonnie Prince Charlie slept there! Fame indeed.

And so the Players bought the Washington for £650.

It was the same old story. Two years of slog, with the handymen showing their real worth to the club. They re-jigged the tumbledown premises

The Washington



with saws, chisels, and paint brushes. In 1961 the Players moved in lock, stock, barrel-and costumes.

That year the Players made Mrs. D. Cameron their first Honorary President since the war. She was the widow of Dan Cameron, first President, who'd helped to found the club back in 1923.

From the Washington the club turned out two three-act plays per year, plus two one-act plays. One innovation was that in the Washington the club put on their one-act plays before their patrons. They'd to suffer the pains of the dummy runs before the public.

Now we come to the highlights of recent years. Remember *The Fish* in 1962? Not a great play. But a moment to remember was the opening scene with Johnny Lang walking across the stage playing an accordian, accompanied by Chris Marshall with Eileen Goodbrand's poodle.

The adjudicator didn't think much of the play. But he loved the opening scene, especially the lilting French tune composed by John Lang for the occasion.

In 1963 the club had its 40th birthday. The Players had a patron members dinner at which William Whitelaw (now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) was chief speaker. Alex Bain was presented with life membership at this function.

And so to the Pageant. In 1964 Kirkintilloch celebrated its 750th birthday. It had grown from a wee hamlet in 1214 to a modern industrial town.

The Town Council wanted something special, to mark the occasion. They turned to the Players for guidance. And the idea of the Pageant was born.

It was to depict Kirkintilloch as it was in 1214. Then move through the centuries, showing the work and life style. Industries. Over 50 scenes and tableaux were written to show the town down the years, including its historical 'peaks'.

Mary Queen of Scots' visit to the town. The opening of the old church (now a public museum) at the Cross. Bonnie Prince Charlie's quick call at the inn near the Cross on his way south.

A picnic to the water works in Victorian times. Women going to the wash-house with their 'bundles'. There was hardly one aspect of Kirkintilloch life over 750 years left out of the Pageant.

What a mammoth task it was to produce. The Kirkintilloch Male Voice Choir came on as weavers. The Junior Choir played in the picnic scene. A local group of Highland Dancers helped in crowd scenes. Rev. Frank Haughton, St. Mary's Minister, played in the dedication of the original St. Mary's Church.

Patients in Woodilee Hospital made period furniture for the tableaux-including 20 'antique'



stools. Priests at St. Ninian's Church supplied all the robes and hassocks. Mrs. Bryson, a former Lenzie Academy Art teacher, designed and made many of the principal costumes.

Never in the history of the Players, or the town, was so much co-operation given by so many. The Town Council installed new lighting in the Town Hall for the occasion. In fact they supplied everything required—on demand.

But who was going to tie together this huge production? The Town Council commissioned Robert McLellan to write the Pageant and Charles Baptiste and Robin Richardson to produce. They couldn't have chosen better.

Nessie Wilson of the Players was selected as co-producer when the 'pros' were unable to attend.

All the rehearsals were in the Washington Club rooms. The floor hasn't been the same since! At the dress rehearsal Charles Baptiste decided Mary Queen of Scots should arrive by horse. Someone was sent forth to find a pony.

Mary-Nessie Wilson—nervously mounted the more nervous beast. It slithered and slipped and juddered along the timbers of the Town Hall—with terror in its eyes. Nessie Wilson was commended for her courage. But producer Baptiste decided after all that perhaps Mary Queen of Scots should arrive on foot!

Often there were as many as 50 actors taking part in the rehearsal of just one scene. Chaos and confusion reigned.

Yet when the Pageant opened in the spring of 1964, it ran without a flaw. Many came back to see it several times. The Town Council generously gave every actor and member of the stage crew a memento of this wonderful success.

Perhaps two behind-the-scenes figures should be singled out. Ian McLeod had the task of installing the new lighting in the Town Hall. He also created the lighting effects for the Pageant—a superhuman job. But one, which when completed, added so much to the finished look of each and every tableau.

Annie Duthie had another formidable task. Property mistress. She begged and borrowed all over the West of Scotland, from broadswords to spinning wheels. Each and every item found its way home again!

It took the Players a long time to get back to 'old clothes and porridge' after the giddy heights of the Pageant.

In 1965 they were proud to honour another old and faithful servant—Stanley Nairn. He'd been one of the earliest members, a past president. Now the club made him Honorary President.

★ ★ ★

Some shows are produced, acted and forgotten. Others somehow have a magic happy quality that stays with those who act and those who watch for a long, long time. One such show was *Red Peppers*, produced in 1965.

A simple story of a vaudeville act staged in front of the curtain—complete with corny jokes. The curtains open—to reveal the dressing room and the real story of the life a stage couple lead. Vaudeville with the lid off!

Bill Harris played the male lead. Hilda Howson, the female. Bill would be the first to admit he was born with two left feet. But his terrific acting talent and enthusiasm soon overcame any tap dancing problems.

The show was entered for the one-act festival in Glasgow. A win. On to the semi-finals in Castle Douglas. Another win. On to Troon for the final.

Norman Gilzean played the part of the musical director. Jimmy McLellan spent nights (without success!) trying to teach him to conduct. Yet Norman almost stole the show with his zany and enthusiastic interpretation. Even the adjudicator reckoned it was the best interpretation of a third-rate conductor he'd ever seen.

Alas, even with such performances the Players could get only second place in the Festival. But no matter. What fun! What a show. Everyone who took part still says—thanks for the memory.

★ ★ ★



Haywood Clarke

In 1965 Haywood Clarke died. A terrific loss. He was one of the most active members to bridge the pre-war and post-war years. Player, actor, producer and past president.

His talents were many. For years he played the policeman or village boby in every Kirkintilloch play. But these parts minimised his talent. Soon he was recognised for true worth in major roles as in *Toom Byres*.

Possibly the greatest thing about Haywood was the silent way he kept his illness to himself. Often, in his latter years, he must have felt like chucking the Players. But he never did.

Shortly after his death his widow Martha started the Junior Players—The Young Theatre Group. It was a huge success. Forty budding actors and actresses (all under 16) were at the first meeting.

Soon the Young Theatre Group had to be limited to that number in order to give most youngsters a part. They began with small one-acts in the clubrooms for parents. But in April 1969 they put on *Toad of Toad Hall* in Oxbang Primary School.

Now the Young Theatre Group put on their own three-act pantomime at Christmas in the Town Hall.

Try and get tickets! You'll have a hard job for the hundreds of Brownies, members—and their parents—who love this clean, family Christmas fun.



In 1965 Willie Fountain retired. What a power of work he'd put in. He'd helped to re-organise the orchestra. He'd composed a special tune for *Johnnie Jouk the Gibbet*. A tireless talented conductor. The Players were sorry to lose him.

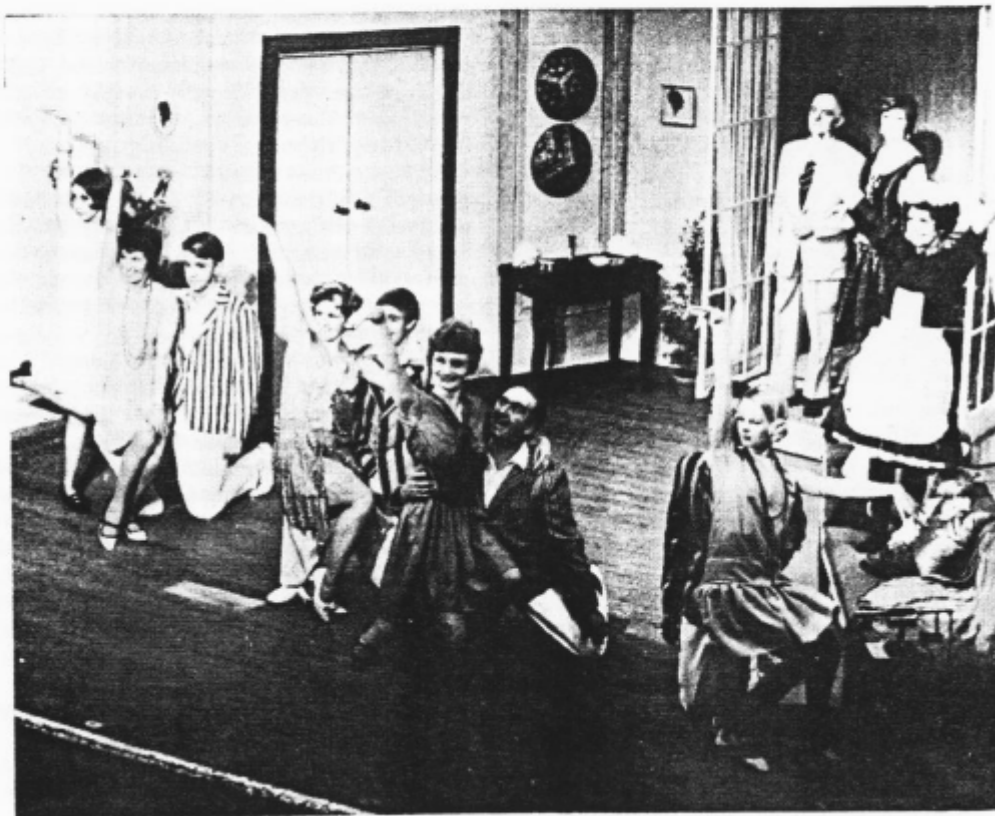
But every period in the Players' history has thrown up its own man, with his own special talent. Jimmy McLellan took over the orchestra and started looking for new talent. He found rich pickings at Lenzie Academy and St. Ninians.

He helped build up a happy relationship between the club and these schools. The club gladly help the schools' operatic and musical societies-and the schools don't mind the club 'poaching' their French Horn players or violinists. A happy state of affairs.

Jimmy never lets his orchestra rest. He whips them off all over the West of Scotland. In fact he's got to be constantly reminded when to be back in the Town Hall for Players' productions.

In 1966 the club again reached the finals at Leith of the One-Act Festival. Again Bill Harris played the lead, a small Jewish shopkeeper this time in *The Eccentric* produced by David Cummings. Again the same result-second.

But now the new voice of Jimmy McLellan was beginning to make itself heard. For two years he'd been musical director. For two years he'd lobbied and persuaded and cajoled. His theme? It's time the Players did a musical, said Jimmy.





One by one he convinced the committee they could do it. Slowly the 'opposition' came round. But what musical? The Players thought for their first venture they'd be best with a professional producer. They hired Roy Wilkie, who immediately suggested *The Boy Friend*. Jimmy's wishes were coming true!

For the first month 50 members of the club went two nights a week to the Washington. There they had community singing of all the numbers from *The Boy Friend*, under Roy Wilkie and Jimmy McLellan. They learned every tune inside out.

Next the private auditions. Each member was left to choose the part he or she wanted—and learn it. Next they had to give a private audition for Roy Wilkie and a casting committee. The would-be participants in *The Boy Friend* found this the biggest ordeal of the lot.

But how they worked for their parts. Leslie Buchanan went regularly to the home of Johnny Lang—with five others. Slowly Johnny 'stretched' Leslie's voice until he could reach the top note in the part he wanted.

At last the final casting. Out of 45 the Players had only to engage one professional male dancer.

It was an experience the Players will never forget. Their longest-ever rehearsals. Four months. Yet in all those rehearsals not one member of the cast heard Roy raise his voice. He had the magic of making a man with two left legs able to learn the Charleston.

Meanwhile Jimmy McLellan was whipping his orchestra into shape, on alternate nights. It was his idea—now he was landed with it! But he stuck to his task.

At last in April the show was ready. With more optimism than judgment they'd booked the Town Hall for a whole week—the only time they'd done this, other than for the Pageant. Sandy Ross was

business manager and had flogged tickets throughout the town. But no-one could sell tickets every night of the week. There were great bundles still to go.

Then came the first night. The orchestra played the overture—*The Boy Friend*. The curtain rose to the girls in Madama Dubonnet's School of the early twenties, perfectly costumed.

The audience sat back and tapped their feet. *The Boy Friend* was a success from that opening curtain. Word went round the town like wildfire. By the end of the week you couldn't buy a ticket for love nor money.

The highlights? Hilda and Rowland Howson singing and dancing, *It's Never Too Late to Fall in Love*. Hetta Lang and Leslie Buchanan singing and dancing *Fancy Forgetting*. And Roy Wilkie's never-to-be-forgotten speciality Tango Dance.

This show also gave Charles Bell the chance to move up from the juniors to the chorus. Today he's the club's vice-president.

The leads were terrific. But that's only half the story of the success of *The Boy Friend*.

It was the enthusiasm of the youngsters. The boys and girls in their teens, who danced and sang and who carried the leads along on a cushion of vitality. Needless to say such a show ended up with the cast party to end all parties in Leslie Buchanan's house. The neighbours still talk about it to this day.

Bill Harris



David Cummings



Stanley Nairn



Hilda Howson



Peggy and Jim Lewis



Down the years the club has waxed and waned on the enthusiasm of a handful of key members. In 1967 they went into a 'wane' period. One after another key members uprooted themselves and moved to pastures new. The loss was great.

Hilda and Rowland Howson were first to go. They moved to Hale, Manchester, where they're both very active in the local dramatic club. Then David and Bess Cumming moved to York. David left us just as he was making a name both as producer and actor.

Peggy and Jim Lewis moved to Edinburgh. They were the real key figures behind scenes in set building and props. Bill Harris—the star of *Red Peppers* and *The Eccentric*—moved to a new post in Manchester.

So in a short period the Players lost seven key members who had acted, produced and created. A team in its own right.

It took a few seasons to get over this blow, but as always, new recruits came forward. And *The Boy Friend* had been a great enthusiasm builder. New recruits who had sniffed the savour of the boards in that musical came back for more—and helped the club through their sticky patch.

In 1967 the club made William St. Clair Honorary President, a position he still holds.

The following year they recognised the services of Mrs. M. Forrest, violinist in the orchestra, by making her a life member. Mrs. Forrest lives in

Kilsyth. Yet for year after year she scarcely missed a rehearsal—despite snow, ice or blizzard. She retired through ill health, yet still shows a lively interest in all the affairs of the club.

By now the club had well over 100 active members. But each play could only use half a dozen actors—and the same number back stage. How do you keep up the enthusiasm of those not selected for 'active duty'?

After a long committee 'talk-in' a new idea was hatched—the theatre workshop. Idea was to use the talents and enthusiasm of those not involved in big productions. To give a springboard for those who wanted to produce, yet lacked experience.

To provide an outlet for those whose artistic talent ran to poetry readings or revue type shows. In short it was to be an experiment theatre in every sense of the word. The plan was to put on such a show every two months in the Washington before members and friends.

It worked. And it still works. Many of our members have broadened their experience most usefully in the workshop.

In 1970 Stanley Nairn died. He was Past President and Honorary President. Stanley joined the Players in their second year and helped nurse them for close on half a century. He was one of the stalwarts in the thirties at the time of the Charities Day and again in the forties when the club was fighting to re-establish itself after the war.



The following year, in March 1971, Alex Bain died. What is there to say? He created the club. He gave it life. It was his life and only love. Every member was just one of Sanny's family. How he loved to meet his boys and girls to talk over old times, even after he'd been forced to move to London through ill health.

What a string of successes he had to his name. He produced *Rebecca* and *Toom Byres*, two of the most spectacular shows ever produced in Kirkintilloch. He could see talent where only a little existed. He could nurse it, cherish it, teach it-aye and even bully it into producing something worthwhile.

Every success of the Players has a little of Alex Bain in it, even to this day.

In the autumn of '71 musical director Jimmy McLellan made his presence felt once more. Another musical! The reading committee chose *Little Me*, the story of the poor little rich girl who made good by bumping off her husbands on the way up the ladder.

This time the club decided that Hetta Lang should produce. But what a team job it was. A cast of over 40. Many of the men took three parts. The stage crew were fantastic. They took part as players while moving props and scenery in front of the audience. The women, as maids, helped to shift furniture around.

There were eight major scenes, always reverting back to the original. It really was a masterpiece of stage planning and direction—and went without a hitch every night.

How did the audience react? They either loved it or hated it. No halfway house with *Little Me*. Brash and brazen, as was its music. Not the sweetness of *The Boy Friend* but more the hard glitter of the career film girl who never became a star.

One memorable number was Charles Bell and Donald Rutherford singing as the Buxgrave Brothers, a number about Chicago gangsters.

Poor Elsa Currie! She had a dozen quick costume changes. Yet she breezed on to the stage looking cooler and calmer after each one. A perfect Old Belle.

Jimmy McLellan had proved his point again. But it cost him and his team many sleepless nights. They'd to re-score the whole orchestral scores into the instruments they had. The original scores were for banjo, ukeleles and a dozen instruments the Players orchestra didn't have. But it was done, perfectly.



Hetta Lang president 1972/73

Little Mel



1972-73 has been one of the busiest seasons in the club's history. Here's a breakdown of one year's effort:

November—*The Glass Menagerie* (Full-length)

December—Junior pantomime—*Alice's Adventures*.

Solsgirth Theatre—*O'Flaherty VC* and *Augustus Does His Bit* (Two one-act plays).

Revue at Queenzieburn School.

January—Revue at Kilsyth Townswomen's Guild.

Scots Night at Kilsyth Woman's Guild.

February—The Cottage Theatre, Cumbernauld with the two one-act plays.

Abbeyfield House—One-act play.

Orchestral Concert.

One-act Festival (Glasgow District), the Players won the City of Glasgow Trophy with *O'Flaherty VC* and go on to Troon for the Divisional Finals.

March—Solsgirth Theatre—Irish Night.

Just a sample of the Players at work.



City of Glasgow Trophy



O'Flaherty VC

In 1969 the General Committee began to get in a sweat. They'd spotted that the 50th anniversary was only four years off. They selected a 50th and Theatre Building Committee to look into possibilities of acquiring more suitable property for the club.

For three years they scoured the town, inspecting old churches, Scout halls, empty factories, any building with a roof and a floor. Sadly they came up with the answer—there was no better property available than Washington.

Next move was how to improve the Washington? In the summer of '72 an architect was engaged to draw up a feasible plan to convert the Washington into a small intimate theatre. With kitchen, cloakroom etc. for the public.

His first costing was £29,000. By January 1973 it had increased to £34,000. And by April the price was over £40,000! The plans and applications for grants were sent to the Town Council and

Dumbarton County Council. The Club also applied to every 'arty crafty' organisation in Scotland for grants.

But—no success. The Town Council have met the Club on several occasions and been very sympathetic to the problem. They certainly want to help.

The future of theatre certainly lies in the small more intimate theatre, seating 150-200. More and more local authorities are becoming convinced that this type of theatre is viable as a municipal project.

Perhaps in the future the Players Club may have the honour of operating just such a theatre in the town.

It's nice to think on such things during the club's 50th anniversary year. But it's also good to remember the fun and laughter given to audiences down all those years.

'Something attempted, something done' says the plaque above the Players Club bed in Glasgow Royal Infirmary. That has become the club motto, albeit, unofficial.

And somehow, in a new civic theatre, or the Washington clubrooms, something will be attempted and something will be done for many years to come.

~~THE END~~
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