



A COLLECTION OF WORDS

INSPIRED BY THE
HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER
HERITAGE CENTRE

IBROX WRITERS



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IBROX WRITERS GROUP AT HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER

This project took place between January - April 2017 as part of the Heritage Programme at House for an Art Lover. The writers responded to the content of the Heritage Centre in the former stables and dovecot buildings of Ibroxhill House, now situated at ART PARK House for an Art Lover. The Heritage Centre facility showcases the history of the local area including the 1938 Empire Exhibition, shipbuilding and much more.

Each writer responded to information in the Heritage Centre in their own way. They were inspired through group meetings, talks and personal research. A selection of the pieces written during the project are included here.

This publication accompanies an exhibition taking place in the Heritage Centre and Ibrox Library.

IBROX WRITERS

Ibrox Writers Group are a creative writing group who meet on Fridays, 10am - 12pm at Ibrox Library. They write, read, support and advise, drink tea and visit inspiring places. Open to all abilities, they are always happy to welcome new members. If you are interested in joining, send a letter including your contact details to: FAO Ibrox Writers Group, Ibrox Library, 1 Midlock Street, Glasgow, G51 1SL



Search Ibrox Writers to follow them on Facebook.

This project has been grant-aided by Glasgow City Heritage Trust.

Previous publications by the Ibrox Writers include: A Bagfull of Scripts, Second Edition, Mixed Broth, The Talking Tree, Some What We Wrote Earlier, Clyde Reflections, and Ibrox Writers Anthology - Celebrating 25 years of members past and present.

The Heritage Programme has been generously supported by:



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EMPIRE LOVE

BY TOMMY CLARKE

Elsie and Anne got off the subway at Copland Road and walked towards the main road.

"I've got a feeling something good is going to happen at the Empire today."

"Yer arse in parsley Elsie, you say that every weekend that we go to the Empire Exhibition and nothing happens."

"Honest to God, I really do feel it. It's in my waters."

"Your waters! Is that what you're calling your hips nowadays."

"Cheeky midden!" From Paisley Road West, the girls walked the short distance to the corner of Bellahouston Park where one of the main entrances to the Exhibition was situated. As had become a weekly ritual for them, they showed the man at the gate their season tickets which both girls had received as a gift for their birthday and began to walk down the path which was covered with a line of trees on either side.

"So Elsie, nothing has happened yet, still the same old guard at the gate. Were you hoping he would ask you to meet him at the flicks?"

"Oh no, he is old enough to be ma da's age. I want a young man to come and woo me. Dance with me and we could sit on the top of the hill, next to the tower and lie on the grass and look at the stars."

"As if a man would let a lassie lie on the grass and look at stars. They will look up your skirt given half the chance."

"Och Anne, don't ruin it. Let me have the romance for a wee bit at least."

The girls linked arms and passed the old Scottish village, crossing over the little wooden bridge which, even at this time of the day was packed with people refusing to pay to sit on the many deckchairs which were scattered across the site. As the Exhibition was drawing to a close, organisers had decided to lift the entrance fee and had been allowing the public access for free. A decision which had become clear for the girls as they saw the park swarming with bodies.

"Having your weekly cup of orange juice?" The man called out to the girls as they passed the orange coloured spherical shaped juice stand.

"I might do on my way back, Archie." Anne called out.

"I was looking forward to hearing you girls saying that you couldn't believe your eyes again." Anne turned to Elsie.

"Yeah, you need new patter, you say that to him every week." Shaking her head, mostly to try and remove focus on her reddening cheeks, Elsie grabbed Anne and they both set off down the Scottish Avenue.

It didn't matter that they had been down this Avenue before. A long stretch of the park with a lush grassy strip decorated with bright coloured flowers. On either side, was stunning buildings, with expanses of glass panels and the white walls had brought wonder and amazement to their eyes. Everything in the park seemed so bright which was such a contrast to the tenement buildings on the main road only streets away. The designs were so different too. Curves and glass panelling – if only more of Glasgow was built like this, it would make such a difference, though with the smog, it would be a nightmare to keep clean. It was just as the girls were admiring the fountains that Elsie gave Anne a dig in the ribs. A subtle indication with her head showed that just on the other side of the fountain, also admiring the colour water show was two young men. One was blonde, tall and slender. The other was dirty fair, more full in the face but by all means, he was still in good shape. Their eyes met. The girls flashed their seductive eyes and smiled as had been well practiced in the mirror for years before when they were young girls, and the young man nudged his fellow companion and he too was met with the eyes and smile. The girls walked slowly to the Physical Fitness Pavilion and pretended to watch the upcoming athletes of the future flex their muscles and show off their moves in their crisp white vests and shorts. The men were in hot pursuit.

"Lovely afternoon isn't it."

"It is. First time at the Exhibition?"

"Yeah it's wonderful. I can't believe I'm seeing half the things here. I think I will be here all day just trying to fit everything in."

"We've been before, we can show you around if you like." Elsie cringed at Anne's directness but at the same time loved her for it. What would she have done, stood and stared at her dirty fair man from the fountain?

"I'm Andrew." Elsie let the man kiss her hand. She felt what she could only describe as electric shocks in her heart.

"Elsie."

"Looks like we've been abandoned!" Andrew gave a sideward nod to Anne and Jim now walking slowly linking arms. Elsie couldn't believe how forward Anne had been, however, what harm was there in linking arms?

"Shall we walk? And don't worry, we can just be side by side." Elsie blurted out a noise which was a mixture of a thank you and a laugh. There may have also been a small prayer hoping that her red cheeks would fade too.

The afternoon ticked by as the foursome took themselves to the Tree Tops Café for a light something to eat, letting the boys see the wonder of how the café was built round the trees and having branches enter the building and how nature was really inside. Another tour of the pavilions took them to the amusements. They went on rides and discovered that the man above the crooked house was actually mechanical, creepy thing that it was anyway. As Elsie told Andrew, it had given her nightmares the first time that she saw it.

There was something about Andrew that Elsie really liked. The way that Anne was acting, she knew that she was just having a bit of fun and would want nothing more than a kiss from Jim but Andrew had lit something inside of her that she had never experienced before. Andrew had been keen to listen to her and what she had to say, had been open about himself and his occupation and hopes for the future. Most of all he had been in tune with her and never once had he pushed to hold her hand or take his arm. He knew she wasn't wanting to do this and for any man to pick up on such a delicate thing from the start, was something special.

"Oh look!" Andrew exclaimed. "There's coloured lights everywhere!" As the days light had slowly faded, coloured lights had taken the driving seat. Every fountain and building had a burst of rainbow to brighten the end of the day. A brass band could be heard tuning up and drowning out the sounds of the roller coaster and the screams of excitement of the children running around. Elise looked at Andrew's face change to one of glee.

"Dance with me Elsie."

"What... here? In the park?"

"Yes."

"But... people will see us."

"I don't care. Look at what is around you. Let's make a memory, one we can look back on when we're old together." Without waiting for an answer, Andrew spun Elsie into a hold and let the jazz music control her feet. Elsie at first was so conscious of the crowds that had stood to watch but before she knew it, others were taking a space for themselves and began to dance too. It was pure joy that was coursing through the park that evening. No cares in the world.

"I could really fall for you Elsie Neilson, you know that." Elsie did know that. And she liked it.

EMPIRE EXHIBITION

BY IRENE BROWN

The Empire Exhibition was a time for the young Scottish architects to show their ability, Thomas Tait was the head architect and he was in charge of them and they produced the largest collection of modern architecture built in the first half of the twentieth century, included in the company was Margaret Brodie one of the first fully qualified women architects in Scotland who designed the Women of Empire Pavilion.

The most notable among the nine were Basil Spence and Jack Coia, who were responsible in later years for buildings in and around Glasgow and abroad.

Jack Coia designed the Roman Catholic Pavilion and the Palace of Industry at the Exhibition and went on to build many churches in Glasgow also St Peters seminary at Cardross.

Basil Spence designed the North and South Scottish Pavilions and the I.C.I. Building for the Empire Exhibition, in later years he built Queen Elizabeth Square in the Gorbals and Morton Hall crematorium in Edinburgh. He was credited with building in the brutalistic style of architecture which began with the Swiss architect le Corbusier.

MYSTERY ACCIDENT AT GLASGOW DOCK

BY KAREN GALLACHER

Shanks and McEwan Ltd was the contractors firm responsible for the construction of the new Clyde dock at Shieldhall depot on the Southside of Glasgow.

On June 30th 1927 in Glasgow, two men were killed and one injured as the results of an accident at the works. The three men were victims of shock from an electric current. The accident occurred about 11:30am when a squad of five men were working with a large derrick used for the sinking of a monolith at that point. The squad of five consisted of a crane driver and a boy, another man on top of the monolith and two waggon drivers.

The derrick is fitted with a "grab" for the removal of mud from the bottom of the monolith. Thomas Campbell used a long metal bar to direct the "grab" into the correct position over the waggon before the crane driver discharged the load. The accident occurred as the result of an electrical current which passed through the bar from the crane. He gave out a shout and his fellow waggon driver, William Wilson went to his aid. In his effort to get his colleague clear, however the full force of the electric current struck him. Another man named Joseph Love was also struck. The three men were found beside the waggons only because of the two workers bringing a supply of coal to the crane.

Joseph Love and William Wilson were pronounced dead. Thomas Campbell survived the accident suffering from just a headache. To the present day, the accident remains a mystery.

How did the metal bar which Thomas Campbell used meet with an electrical current? The crane was steam driven, and the only electrical part of its equipment was the lighting at the driver's cabin and on the job of the crane.

Why was the accident not seen by the crane driver or the boy working alongside him, nor the man on top of the monolith?

Where was Joseph Love working that day? Why was he the only one to come to the aid of his fellow colleagues?

I ask these questions because Joseph Love was my maternal great grandfather.

A MORNING IN ELDER PARK

BY ISABEL HAGGART

Broken branches bare of leaves

Winter slips as spring emerges

Sunshine days are always welcome

After darkness draws it's curtain

Soil aglow with Yellow Sea

People walking, talking, smiling.

SS DAPHNE DISASTER 1883

BY MARGARET NICOL

Robert Baylis was 43 years of age and working on the SS Daphne, a vessel of 177 feet in length and 460 tonnes in weight. He was employed by Alexander Stephen and Sons of Linthouse, Glasgow.

The intention of the steamer was to be used on the Glasgow to Ireland run.

Robert was happy working on the shipyards giving him routine and of course a wage as Robert was a married man and had a family of 7 children to feed and clothe.

He resided in Paisley and his fellow workmen called him "Paisley Bob".

On the morning of 3rd July 1883 Robert turned back from going to work 3 times according to his wife with foreboding feelings he could not understand. He really had no choice as he had a large family to provide for so off he went.

Little did Robert know it was the last time he would see his wife and family again. As on the morning of 3rd July 1883 the SS Daphne he was working on was to be launched. The rush was on for this launch as the Glasgow Fair holidays were looming and the ship yards closed down at the Glasgow Fair.

200 workers of all trades were still to finish off internal fittings on board as the Daphne was being launched and within 3 minutes of the launch the SS Daphne capsized into the cold Clyde water. 124 men and boys some as young as 14 and 15 years of age died that morning Robert Baylis being one of the dead.

On this occasion the checking apparatus failed to function and the current of the river at the critical point turned her over on her port side throwing all these workers into the water. One survivor, a joiner named Kinnaird who experienced this terrible experience that day said that nothing had occurred until she had taken to the river then an extraordinary scene happened with tremendous shouts and screams from those on board the vessel he would never forget. He scrambled onto the bottom of the vessel and he and others retained a hold.

The owners were exonerated from any blame leading to claims of a cover up.

The ship was eventually raised and repaired at Govan Dry Docks and emerged as the "Rose".

Two memorial plaques were made one at Elder Park and the other at Victoria Park representing the loss to the two communities on both sides of the Clyde.

The Bronze plaque in Victoria Park was ripped from the granite base in August 2011. Glasgow City Council funded a new casting and was replaced and unveiled 8 months after the theft.

3 of the youngest who died that day were pivot boys John Laden 14 years old, Patrick Yarrell 15 years both from Partick, Alexander Maxwell 16 years old, were all drowned that fateful day.

On one unclaimed body there were found a pair of boot laces, a pocket knife marked W. H., a caulk line (straight lines), a gimlet (boring holes) and a 2 foot rule and 3 lead pencils.

DREAMING OF 1938

BY KEITH MILLAR

Jane woke, refreshed by her sleep, she immediately reached for her writing pad. For the next 20 minutes or so she scribbled furiously. Jane was one of these folk who could recall dreams. Quite a talent she was born with. The vast majority of folk barely recollect anything more than the 'bare bones' of their dreamworld.

Later once she had coffee and croissants, Jane wasted no time in typing up, this, her latest adventure, as revealed to the world in "Janesweeblog".

Jane found herself transported back in time. She was walking around the Empire Exhibition in Bellahouston. She found herself in the Rhodesia Exhibition. Standing next to her taking notes, was a black man. Being a time-traveller, she found herself driven to converse. She introduced herself, and asked his name. In a rich Caribbean accent, he said George Padmore. They then went on to discuss some of the exhibits, before he made his own separate way. A few stared at the couple engaged in critical appraisal. They appeared uncomfortable at the idea of "one of their own", a Scots lassie talking to a "negro". Jane noted this but paid no attention. She was engrossed with what George was saying. He laid down his critique of the Exhibition as a whole then focussed on what he considered misrepresentations of the exploited masses in India, Africa and the West Indies colonies. Before he went, he alerted her to an alternative exhibition that was to be launched the following week.

But before that episode, Jane's dream saw her transported to a street meeting in Brunswick Street. Guy Aldred, not unsurprisingly was the orator. Jane was offered copies of various leaflets, all at odds with the Empire Exhibition. There was a drizzle, and damp cold, that March day, but the small crowd were quite stoical. She engaged with a woman in her 50s. To her delight she explained that Jane was her name too, but she was known as Jennie. She explained her tumultuous time in Madrid though that was eclipsed by the experience of her younger compatriot, Ethel McDonald in Barcelona. Jennie Patrick was the partner of Aldred. Ethel was in effect his adopted daughter, but she was still away in France on a speaking tour. A number of other, less impressive speakers took Aldred's place on the soap-box, Willie McDougall, being one. Guy Aldred sauntered over. His voice was educated and still sounded London through and through. Guy was an evangelist rather than a conversationist and Jane found her mind wandering after a short while, but her ears pricked up

when mention was made that the leaflets had been printed at 78 Nethan St in Govan. Jennie explained that a veteran socialist Tom Anderson had made the flat and press at the service of Aldred's United Socialist Movement after their own press was repossessed for non-payment of debt.

The mention of money saw Jane transported to the City Chambers, in September 1938, where Glasgow's City Councillors led by the Labour Party were debating a motion. The press dutifully scribbled. A few observers, murmured disgust, others agreement. The proposal was to finance the attendance of 100,000 school-children and 100,000 of the city's unemployed from the Common Good Fund, administered by the Council. An amendment urged the other councils around Scotland to follow suit. Outside the grey skies and drizzle continued unrelenting.

But as dreams do, she found herself transported to early August, she joined the crowd filing into the Kingston Halls. Inside a platform had been prepared. But before that she walked around the Workers Exhibition which was centred around a central column which explained how business profited from the Empire. In her hand she had a copy of the All Red Route, a pamphlet written in a satirical style, which cost her 2d. Magically, such a coin was found in her purse. She listened to the gaunt man on the platform opening the Exhibition. Jimmy Maxton, the legendary Red Clydesider, M.P. Since 1922 for Glasgow Bridgeton for the Independent Labour Party. 2 years before Maxton had proposed a republican amendment to the Abdication Act, calling for an end to monarchy. In the royalist House of Commons he could only find 4 other supporters. He was followed by Ethel Mannin, a freethinker, novelist and libertarian socialist. Both speakers were striking in different ways. A telegram of support from Nehru in India was read out. Many of the themes she had heard from George Padmore were further elucidated on. She moved around, there were several anti-colonialist personalities present. She recognised George Padmore, and standing beside him CLR James, a marxist also from Trinidad, who preferred to use his initials rather than his first name, Cyril, I wonder why, thought Jane?

She gazed at photographs from their island off the coast of South America. Again, in an instant, Jane was transported to Port of Spain. In the Court-room, a man called Uriah Butler was in the dock. She quickly gleaned that Butler, as leader of the Citizens Home rule Party was public enemy no.1 of the Oil company Apex. Impoverished oil workers had gone on strike, in 1937, which had escalated to riots. British gunships were dispatched to restore the status quo. Butler had given himself up to give evidence to a Royal Commission but instead found himself charged with incitement to murder. He got 2 years followed by internment during World War 2.

Jane's travel through 1938 ended as she walked past Ibrox Park in the spring of that year. Inside King George VI was giving his opening address for the Empire Exhibition but instead of hearing his stuttering delivery, she was whisked over to Kingston, Jamaica. It was the very same day. A pitiful and decidedly impoverished group of workers and their families had one demand. To be imprisoned for their defiance: that way their bellies would receive food, and hunger staved off for a day. In Jamaica and elsewhere, the Hungry Thirties meant exactly that. At this point, a natural light protruded into Jane's consciousness and she re-awoke to her day, and a return to the research rooms of the Mitchell Library in the afternoon.

EMBROIDERED TABLECLOTH DEPICTING 1938 EMPIRE EXHIBITION

BY LIZ COWAN

Although it is almost a dying art embroidery has been ongoing since the Middle Ages. Many museums display huge wall coverings meticulously embroidered by court ladies and well to do daughters of rich families. These hangings depicted historic scenes and views of this era. By the time the 1938 Empire Exhibition came about the beginnings of factory machine made embroidery had begun. However the majority of people could ill afford the cost of such an article but for a few pence transfers could be purchased and these were then ironed on to a plain cotton cloth. A few colours of embroidery threads could be bought. This thread actually contained 6 strands and these threads were often split into half by the thrifty to make the threads go further and the cost cheaper.

It was still over a decade before dyed factory printed cloths, especially tea cloths were mass produced and these were great souvenirs to bring back from your holidays without the necessity of any time consuming work to create a memory.

Right up until the 50s girls as young as 6 or 7 years old were taught sewing and knitting for an hour at school on 3 days per week. This also involved embroidering your sewing work with a flower, a fancy pattern and your name with coloured threads. Although it seemed arduous work learning from such a young age it meant that most of us have never forgotten these skills.

However the durability of the cloth and threads used in this particular piece from 1938 is a telling story of the quality of things from this age, compared to the throwaway society of today.

THE TEA PARTY

BY ROSALIE WHITE

'Mum,' said Sadie 'I forgot to tell you, but I invited Robert's parents to come and meet you and dad this afternoon. After all we have been going out together for a few months now.'

'Oh Sadie,' said her mum 'you haven't given me much time to prepare anything. I suppose I could rustle up some scones and a nice wee fruit loaf so at least I can give them a cup of tea.'

She started rushing around getting things ready for her visitors but when she looked at the coffee table she noticed that it had a water stain on it. 'Oh goodness me, I can't have folk seeing that,' she thought. 'What would they think of me.'

She had a good rummage in the linen cupboard and all she could come up with was a very old table cloth that used to belong to her mother. It smelt a bit musty but was still lovely and clean. It was a work of art and depicted the Glasgow Coat of Arms in the centre. It would have to do. Before long the doorbell rang and there was Robert and his parents. They handed Sadie's mum a lovely bunch of flowers and Robert gave her a bottle of Irn-Bru. He laughed as he explained and told them to come in and sit down.

When Robert's mum spotted the tablecloth she said 'Isn't that beautiful. Isn't it a souvenir of the Great Exhibition that was held in Glasgow in 1938?'

'Yes it is,' said Sadie's mum, 'my mother embroidered it from a pattern sold at the Exhibition.'

'Oh look at the lovely work that has been put in to it said Robert's mum, 'It takes me back to see the embroidered daffodil and thistles, it has been so well taken care of. I remember doing things like this myself.'

'Yes,' said Sadie's mum, 'I really love it.'

They admired all the different stitches and colours in the table cloth and all the work that had gone in to it. Sadie's mum went in to the kitchen to make the tea and was startled when there was a commotion from the lounge room and rushed in to see what had happened. Robert stood there looking sheepishly down at the coffee table which was covered in Irn-Bru.

'Oh I'm so sorry' he said.

'Don't you worry about a thing', Sadie's mum said 'it will clean up.'

She took off the cloth and put it into the kitchen while they had their tea. Later when everyone left she started to wash the cloth but couldn't get the stain out.

'Oh my,' she thought 'it looks like Irn-Bru has wasted the cloth that survived for all these years. I can't use bleach on it with all these lovely colours. Oh well, maybe I shouldn't have used it but it certainly was a great icebreaker.'

A HELPING HAND

BY NANCY BAIN

Nellie slowed as she turned the corner into her street. "What on earth was going on?" she wondered. On such a damp, chilly day she had expected the street would be almost empty. She slowed her steps further, and narrowed her eyes, as she weighed up the situation.

Small groups of women huddled in the close mouths, most of them with their backs to Nellie, facing the far end of the street.

Nellie clamped her hand to her head, as the wind worked its way under the brim of her hat. No way was she going to let five pounds' worth of brand new hat go bowling along the filthy gutter. "Five pounds for a hat!" she thought, "Five pounds!" That was more than the huddled women had to feed their families for a week.

If her hat did blow off, she knew the women would smirk in pleasure. A sneer crossed her face as she looked at them. Most of them hadn't even a coat to their backs. An old shawl to throw round their shoulders was the best they could run to, and no doubt it would be used as a bedcover at night.

Nellie was under no illusion about her lack of popularity. They might not like her, but most of these women at one time or another, found their way to her door.

"Can I borrow five bob till the end of the week, Nellie? I'll let you have it back when my man gets paid on Friday."

When Friday came, Nellie got her five shillings back, and of course she charged a little interest. Money lenders always did.

"He probably did it because he couldn't keep up with her charges!" A spiteful voice was aimed at her back.

Nellie whirled. "Who said that?" she glared at the women.

Mary Rooney's face paled.

Nellie barged up to Mary, "What the hell are you talking about? Who couldn't keep up with my charges?"

"Johnny McVey killed himself this morning."

"Did he indeed? Well that's nothing to do with me. He didn't owe me a penny."

Nellie glared at the women. "Well, are you going to tell me how he did himself in?"

"Jumped out the window," Mary Rooney whispered.

"Where did he land?" Nellie looked along the street.

"He jumped out the kitchen window round the back."

"So why are you all watching the street?" Nellie wanted to know, but she didn't wait for an answer.

"Stupid idiot!" she thought as she walked away, recalling all the times that Johnny McVey had borrowed money. She hadn't been truthful with the women. McVey still owed her quite a few quid.

"I suppose I'll have to write it off," she thought, knowing that his widow would never have enough to pay her back.

"I wonder how she's going to pay for the funeral? She better not come to my door."

As Nellie approached her own close, she noticed that her daughter Madge was among the women there.

Nellie smiled grimly to herself. "I bet she was disappointed again!"

Madge had taken to visiting at times she knew her mother would be out, and Nellie knew why. Madge came to search for Nellie's money. Like everyone else in the street she was sure Nellie had a fortune hidden in the house

Ralph always let Madge in, no matter how many times Nellie told him not to. Ralph was the best lodger she had ever had. Quiet, clean and paid on the dot. No trouble at all, except he would let Madge in.

Nellie tightened her grip on the handles of her shopping bag, and thought of the bank book hidden in the lining.

She knew that everyone thought she kept all her money in the house, because no one had ever seen her going into a local bank. Nellie had started squirrelling money away right from the first time her late husband had handed over his pay packet.

Her husband had never known she used a bank in town, and neither did her daughter and neighbours. Of course she did keep a good sum in the house.

Well she had to, for she couldn't run to the bank every time someone wanted to borrow money. She never let anyone borrow more than a few quid, and she never let them have more than they could pay back.

Although she dealt in small sums it was amazing how quickly the interest mounted up.

Nellie smiled at the thought of the four figure sum in her bank account, and the two hundred pounds hidden in the house. Hidden where Madge would never find it.

Madge saw the smile on her mother's face, and thought it was for her.

"Hello Mum. Did you hear what happened?"

"Yes." Nellie answered, mouth tightening at the thought of the money she would never recover.

The entrance to her close was blocked by Madge and the group of women. As Nellie bulldozed her way through, she was entertained to the details of the finding of the body, the arrival of the police and the ambulance, and the speculation as to why Johnny had jumped.

The close was like a wind tunnel, and Nellie was thoroughly chilled by the time she reached her front door.

"I can't wait to get in and plug in my new electric fire," she said to Madge as she opened the door.

A wall of heat hit her as she opened the kitchen door. The electric fire had been lifted from where she had sat it in front of the grate, and a huge coal fire blazed up the chimney.

"I thought a coal fire would be more cheerful on such a cold day," Madge said.

Nellie slumped into her armchair and two fat tears ran down her cheeks.

Two hundred pounds had gone up in smoke.

"Don't cry, Mum." Madge patted her hand, surprised at her mother being so upset at the death of a man she didn't know very well.

Nellie looked at the blazing fire and mourned the loss of the banknotes she had hidden in the ashpan.

WWI SCOTTISH SOLDIER'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE

BY J ANTHONY LENTINI

Private Charles Sterling, British Company WF 48B
Western Front France
British Army Carrier Postal Service
4th Division
366 Rue de Lucerne
Paris, France

Letter addressed to:
Mrs. Clara S. Sterling
262 Paisley Rd West
Glasgow, Scotland G511BN

26-December-1914

Dear Clara,

Merry Christmas my Love!

You will not believe what happened today. It's six o'clock and I just returned to my trench. Something wonderful happened today amidst all the killing and war. I am still in a state of shock still trying to convince myself that it really happened. Let me start from the beginning. It started on Christmas Eve, there was an eerie quiet, not a sound, no shots were fired all along our portion of the Western Front. There was something very unusual happening on this historic day. Not a shot had been fired since Christmas Eve and the deafening silence continued at daybreak on Christmas Day. During the quiet of the morning, no one knows exactly how it happened. But this is what I wrote in my journal:

6:30 am Christmas Morning, 25-Dec-1914. There is an eerie silence, nothing, no fighting, no gunshots.

7:00 am. I hear singing, yes singing. A German soldier singing a Christmas song! Is this really happening? More Germans joining in, louder and louder, clearly the words in German but the tune, O Come, All Ye Faithful, unmistakable. My friend, Gary sitting next to me stood up and began singing in English.

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem...

Suddenly everyone around me started singing all along the trenches. The German soldiers emerged from their trenches calling out "Merry Christmas" in English. You cannot imagine the strange almost surrealistic feeling I had, my mind struggling to comprehend what happened next.

Our soldiers and our allies tumbled out of our trenches and greeted them, the enemy, the people we have been shooting at trying to kill each other now it was as if nothing had happened, there was no war we were all long-lost friends and as I got up and walked out of my trench I saw a German soldier waving a sign, "Pleeez, you no shoot, we no shoot".

Over the course of the day, we exchanged gifts; cigarettes, food, buttons and hats. The Christmas truce allowed both our sides to bury dead comrades, the dead bodies had lain there for weeks in "no man's land" on the ground between the opposing trenches.

I laid down my rifle, climbed up over the top of the trench and greeted the German soldiers, some no older than our eldest son, John. They were just like us, the only difference... is the uniform.

It felt like we were all one, I smiled, shook hands and joked with German soldiers. No one really wanted to fight, it was a job we were supposed to do for some higher ups. I wished they could be here. I would shove this dirty war in the faces. The next day after the celebration the fighting resumed as though nothing had happened...nothing at all.

I am hoping this will be the spark that ends the war. Keep your fingers crossed!

Clara give the boys all my love. Tell them their dad is doing his duty and will be coming home soon. I love and miss you more than you can imagine.

Love,

Charlie

Visit the Heritage Exhibitions page at www.houseforanartlover.co.uk for background research by J Anthony Lentini.



Bellahouston Park, 10 Dumbreck Road, Glasgow G41 5BW

T: 0141 353 4770, W: www.houseforanartlover.co.uk

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