



Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

# BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

New Series Number 3

October 2020

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> in the new series of Broughton History Society newsletters. Needless to say, things have not quite worked out as was foreseen in the early spring, it is not necessary to explain the reason. The current plan is that a newsletter will be issued approximately monthly, there is plenty of material for the next issue, but contributions from any members are very welcome. They can be given to any committee member or sent to the editor :- Jim Eunson ([eunsonjim@gmail.com](mailto:eunsonjim@gmail.com))

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## Cannonballs in the Garden?

Back in the early part of the year, at one of the monthly clean-ups in Hopetoun Crescent Garden, we well, it was a dog, really – uncovered a couple of interesting-looking lumps of metal. The said dog – Rosita, a boxer – instantly lost interest on discovering that they weren't edible and moved on to better things. The rest of us, not so fixated on food, poked them about a bit and removed some of the mud. They looked a bit like cannonballs, and the more imaginative among us instantly thought of Oliver Cromwell and the Civil War, and thought that what is now Hopetoun Crescent Garden, and in a previous

All BHS talks have been cancelled/postponed until further notice. Many of you replied to a questionnaire about using online platforms for talks. There was some support for using either Facebook or other online platforms, we are contacting speakers to see if they have any materials suitable for inclusion on the Facebook page.

Just a reminder that the Facebook Group page exists and can be found [here](#) – if you are not already a member of Facebook you will have to join to see it.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

Richard Love BHS Chair

incarnation was the Botanic Garden, might have been the site of a battle. What fame for the Garden! It might have been the Battle of Broughton, or the Massacre of MacDonald Road. We could do guided tours for American tourists . . .

Much discussion followed, and photos were duly taken – surely the Museum of Scotland would be keen to acquire items of such



interest? However, once the balls were cleaned properly, someone noticed that there was an inscription, and no, it was not Carron Iron Works, or whatever factory might have been producing cannonballs back then when OC invaded Scotland (1650, as I'm sure you know) but the much more prosaic "2.72 kg". Well, that knocked our dreams of fame for the Garden on the head, but it didn't explain what the items actually were?

The photos were passed round various friends who claimed to be historians, but there was no instant or obvious answer for quite some time. Then a chum interested in Athletics at

one time suggested they might be for 'putting the shot', though of course that didn't explain what they were doing buried in the Garden. However, a little more detective work uncovered the fact that in the arcane rules and regulations for that sport demanded that 2.72 kg was indeed the weight that 'Junior Girls, aged 12 – 15' would have used. So now I'm left with the vision of a fed-up fifteen-year-old, maybe having just lost out on a medal at Drummond School Sports Day, abandoning her kit in Hopetoun Crescent Garden . . . but maybe there's another explanation. Do you have any ideas?  
Maggie McClure

## Redbraes Park

One of the positives about lockdown was that the daily exercise allowed one to explore one's locality. I was pleasantly surprised to find how many parks and gardens there are within easy reach. One which seemed to be very much forgotten is Redbraes Park. On the internet where it is described thus

"This small park is much appreciated by local people as a quiet green place in a built-up area. Roses are one of the features of the park, along with a mixture of shrubs and trees. Cherry, ash, hazel, rowan, beech, laburnum can all be found around the parks edge. There is a central cycle track and a separate play area."

There was no mention of any past history despite the fact that one of the mansion houses in this area was Redbraes House, sadly no longer extant. A visit to the park revealed a not too easy to read board stating that "Redbraes House was built by Hew Crawford, Clerk to the Signet in 1727". For those unsure where Redbraes Park is it is on the North side of Broughton Road to the east of the former Refuse Depot and the railway which served it, and opposite Rosebank Cemetery. Redbraes

House was at the south east corner of today's Park and was demolished in 1927 for the building of the new housing at Redbraes Place and the widening of Broughton Road.

So far so good. However despite the claim often made that one can find anything on the internet I couldn't find anything else of use on Redbraes House & Gardens online. The city library and archive being for the time being unavailable I decided to look in past Broughton History Society Newsletters.

The house might not have been of particular interest but the Gardens were very popular with Edinburgh's wealthy in the early 1800's. There was an ornamental pond with islands and well laid out gardens with trees, shrubs



and flowers. *"Old and New Edinburgh"* in 1890 also mentions pretty walks besides the river. The Water of Leith lies to the north of the Gardens. Society member Alice Lauder researched the Gardens and found that Edinburgh City Libraries had a selection of photographs of them taken in 1873. Newsletter No 12 Winter 2002/3 has an article on Redbraes Gardens by Alice and there is a supplement with one of the pictures from the collection.

I realised at this point that I had not looked at the NLS maps which are nowadays available on line. Maps of the area up to the early 1900's certainly show the pond and its islands. Some of them show a Redbraes Nursery, on the 1853 Ordnance Survey map it is shown as the area between the Gardens and the river & mill lade from Redbraes weir which served Bonnington Mill. This leads to a further strand of the history of Redbraes. In the newsletter no 28 Summer 2011 there was an article by Broughton resident Fay Young on James Grieve, a celebrated horticulturist. In 1859 Grieve went to work for Dickson and Son a well-known nursery in Leith Walk. Whilst working there he created the James Grieve Apple a hybrid apple, part Cox's Orange Pippin, part Potts Seedling. In 1895 Dickson's moved to Liberton and Grieve with his two sons set up business at Old Redbraes Nursery. On 13<sup>th</sup> September Jenny Bruce and I found ourselves in Muiravonside Country Park hoping that one of its paths might take us to a suitable point to get a photo of the Avon aqueduct on the Union Canal when we found ourselves walking along a path lined with young apple trees one of which bore the legend "James Grieve, pick early September Use: Eater. One of the first apples to flower. It is an early soft sweet eating apple. Very

popular raised by Mr James Grieve of Edinburgh. Not good for storing." Grieve was born in Peebles in 1841 and a memorial plaque was erected by the Peebles Civic Society in 2010, but he lived and worked in Edinburgh from 1859 till his death in 1924 at 7 Annandale Street. He is buried in Rosebank Cemetery. A portrait was painted of him by Henry Wright Kerr which should be found in the National Portrait Gallery. Due to Covid-19 I have yet to go and see if I can find it.

Of all the parks I visited during the last few months Redbraes is the only one with a cycle track. A search though some of the archive material which I was given by Alice Lauder unearthed some programmes for the Edinburgh Monarchs who used to race at Powderhall Stadium and hidden in these was a reference to the Edinburgh Falcons; a quick online search found a Facebook page for Edinburgh Falcons Cycle Speedway Club, one of three cycle speedway clubs in Scotland. Training and race meetings held at Redbraes Park. An article "About Cycle Speedway in Scotland" gives the location for Edinburgh Falcons Speedway Track as Redbraes Park, Redbraes Place Edinburgh, EH7 4LL. Incidentally the cycle track (shown below) is located roughly where the ornamental pond was.

Redbraes Park has been a leisure garden for the wealthy, the Nursery for an eminent horticulturist and is home to a Cycle Speedway Club. Let's hope that Libraries and Archives can return to service in the near future, there is clearly more research to be done which can't be done on the internet.

Sandra Purves



## Covid 19 Recollections

For everyone globally 2020 will certainly be remembered. How were we to know that such an upheaval to normality would occur, imploding on us to spend time with “ourselves” during lockdown? Forcing us also to self-reflect, discover or explore new ways to survive.

Pre-Covid, this year was to be a memorable one personally with 3 celebratory conferences all of a historical nature which I was helping to organise, and another where I was an invited speaker. The diary was full of other interesting possibilities and events, then suddenly, all to evaporate into infinity.

The frenzy of stockpiling food etc did not inflict problems for me, being a thrifty Highlander I had already accumulated stocks of dry goods, tins etc as a precaution for any problems of Brexit, and so my store cupboard was actually full of goodies, and this was no longer “the family joke”.

In fact, I did not need to buy anything for about 5 weeks except perhaps some milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, maybe once a week. Home-made scones replaced bread, and the fun to bake these and cakes helped alleviate tension.

Spring cleaning became a priority to divert the mind from fear and panic as the daily Covid reportage escalated, and the disposal of unwanted clothes and objects helped unclutter the home. Gardening and planting of seeds as Spring approached and the wonderful sunny weather helped boost the spirits. The dandelions too increased in my garden blooming each day with yellow magnificence like a spring meadow. Daily I had sufficient to make a small batch of dandelion syrup from an old Icelandic recipe and picking the flowerheads also eradicated any puff balls scattering into the wind to the

annoyance of the neighbours. The recipe produces a honey-like syrup in its clarity and thickness, and the plant having special properties like nettles aids immunity from colds and flu. So a cup of warm water with lemon, ginger, nettle leaves and a teaspoon of this syrup was an essential drink each day to fight any infection.

Early morning cycle rides down the old railway path to Newhaven at 7am gave me my allotted exercise free from hordes of people. I had found from experience that any later in the day meant confronting families with dogs or children, and so I managed to avoid those new exercise enthusiasts as they panted laboriously past you without wearing masks. What a pleasure in early spring to see the trees start to bloom with white and pink blossom, and these early morning outings gave sanity to the day, followed by breakfast in the patio before all the neighbours were even up. What a change from previously when early morning noise meant children going to school and parents beginning their commute to work. Now a distinct peace reigned with the air seeming to be cleaner and clearer. Time stood still, dignified and without sound.

As the days grew to weeks, I was not always clear as to what day it was or the date. Each day was the same, and blank pages filled the diary. No events to see, no friends to visit, no holidays planned and time scales irrelevant. With such freedom, the intention to complete a family history booklet and also my memoirs meant I had no excuse now not to begin. The studio in Meadowbank was where I could retreat to for even greater peace. Several opportunities to exhibit artwork on-line provided the impetus and the will to complete some painting from ideas that had bubbled away before lockdown. I had taken photographs and sketches of plants in the



Botanic Gardens prior to closure, and these provided the source material I required. Inspiration of design patterns in plants had a similarity to the structure of the Covid virus, but now alas I had no access to the ASCUS LAB in Summerhall to examine cross sections of plants or solutions under the microscope. So reliance on my own intuition to find the best methods to interpret these plant patterns was now necessary.

Synchronicity was to provide a unique opportunity with the Rhubarb plant (shown in the photo below) in Hopetoun Crescent Gardens suddenly flowering after 15 years, and again to my delight a similar pattern in the seed-head structure was evident. Each day more examples presented themselves from photos of people or crowds seen from above, to glass panels in a pavement providing geometric or asymmetrical patterns. So I proceeded with this research with the intention of presenting the artwork for a bursary award, but not to be. For an artist, professional knockbacks and rejection are inevitable and part of our existence, so a steely resilience is essential for survival and progress.



During this time too I had a scary experience one evening with a speedy journey to the A and E Dept of the Royal Infirmary. Intense pain like giving birth had erupted out of the blue and with no symptoms of Covid 19 evident. I had various X-rays, blood tests and ultrasound examinations etc followed by subsequent visits to both the Western General and Leith Medical Centre over the next month. A kidney stone of some size which had been around for years quite unknown had erupted but is now eradicated thank goodness. I can only state how grateful I am for all the attention and care received by doctors and staff everywhere. Not a pleasant experience especially during Covid but one I will especially remember from summer 2020. By the middle of June a certain easing of lockdown occurred, and meeting up with a friend for a walk was possible. By July a car journey of 5 miles was on the cards, and thanks to a fellow BHS committee member Sandra Purves, a weekly Sunday outing became possible. Helping her to photograph engineering structures for updating the Institution of Civil Engineers's Panel of Historical Engineering Works (PHEW) records became our escape to the country each week. Short journeys within easy reach of the city with places like Dalkeith, Dunbar, Peebles or Berwick being a welcome haven for exploring their particular engineering heritage. 15<sup>th</sup> c Bridges, 19<sup>th</sup> c viaducts, aqueducts, canals and harbours all providing the interesting research. We made twelve such journeys with picnics in delightful country parks such as Dalkeith and Muiravonside or even sitting on a bench beside the Union Canal or at a sheltered spot away from people and traffic. Lockdown has been interesting, varied and not uneventful with a chance to even celebrate a little.



The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Union Chain Bridge near Berwick (Sandra Purves pictured above) gave us the opportunity to enjoy this special occasion, albeit not as originally intended as part of the PHEW 2020 Summer visit for members and international guests,

but instead in a simple handing over of a plaque with a glass of champagne and a piece of birthday cake on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

When will life as we once knew it return is another matter. A positive attitude, plenty of exercise outdoors and focusing one's mind on creative or academic work has helped immensely to not indulge in fear, worry and depression. The virus and its disruption could be here for some time yet, so until it is gone, online meetings and booked visits to museums, galleries and historical places can give a hint of normality. Sunday journeys will continue along with painting or sketching and I have even acquired a magnificent honorary cat (below) who had adopted me during lockdown although belonging to a neighbour. Such are my memories of this strange time.

Jenny Bruce

