



Old view of Milngavie

1840-1906 — The Place

In 1852, Hugh MacDonald, writer of that minor classic "Rambles Round Glasgow," visited Milngavie. The description he gives would stand good for the first 30 years of our period, viz.:

"The village of Milngavie, which we now reach, has an irregular and somewhat straggling appearance. The houses are for the most part plain two-storeyed edifices, in many instances tastefully white-washed, and consequently wearing an agreeable air of tidiness and comfort. In and around the village, on the banks of the Allander, are a number of public works, . . . in which a considerable portion of the population, both adult and juvenile, is employed. The locality altogether, although not by any means particularly attractive in what may be called its pictorial aspect, has a cheerful and prosperous appearance. The spirit and prosperity of Milngavie, indeed, are abundantly evinced by the number of respectable-looking shops which it contains in proportion to its size, and also by the fact that it now supports a line of stage-coaches, plying hourly to and from Glasgow. . . ."

The village as MacDonald saw it would meander northwards from the grain mill, then eastwards over the "field brig," and finally northwards again up "Mugdock Road," with short tributary "streets" to the west (Douglas Street) and to the east (now Station

Road). A gas works had been opened a few months earlier; it stood where now there are pleasantly laid out flower plots behind the war memorial.

Three years later the construction was begun of what were to become one of the best-known and most attractive features of Milngavie—the Glasgow Water Works reservoirs. Mugdock Reservoir, to hold 489 million gallons, was opened by Queen Victoria herself in 1859. But there is little to indicate that this considerable engineering undertaking affected the life of the village community at the time. The nature of that life is indicated by a list of occupations from a contemporary church electors' roll which reads: "bleacher, calico printer, dyer, beatler, engraver, starcher, callanderer, grocer, blacksmith, cloth sapper, veterinary surgeon, tailor, pattern drawer, surgeon, millwright." One son of the village who won considerable distinction was A. R. Stirling (1811-1881), the self-taught naturalist.

Prosperity there may have been in 1852, but it was evidently a fluctuating commodity. There were other years of depression in local industry which brought distress and near famine. In 1863, for example, the Kirk Session of New Kilpatrick made a contribution for the relief of "Milngavie unemployed."

That was the year the railway came, a harbinger of further change. For whilst at first the new means of communication simply replaced the stage-coach, soon it was realised that now it was possible to reside in Milngavie and "commute" daily to the city. Thus was born the Newtown of Milngavie, an attractive residential region mainly of villas, cottages and terraces, situated to the north and east of the railway station:

By 1875, with a population of 2,184, Milngavie could be accounted "a populous place," and a meeting of householders held in the parish church in July of that year decided to claim Burgh Status. This was granted in September, when Mr. Robert Crawford was elected first provost, and Mr. James Watt and Mr. James McAulay were appointed bailies. The first purpose-built school was opened in the same year, and with an additional wing, is still in use as the infant department of the Milngavie Public School. At that time the Milngavie area formed part of Stirlingshire, but in 1891, it was transferred to the County of Dumbarton.

The influx of new residents from the city continued apace, so that in 1900 the railway line was increased to double track, and in 1901 the Burgh boundaries were extended. By then the population was 3,481. Provision for the recreation of the inhabitants and visitors began to be made when Milngavie Bowling Green was opened in 1891 and Milngavie Golf Course in 1895; and in the same year, with the founding of the "Milngavie and Bearsden Herald," the area achieved the distinction of a local newspaper.

The second Glasgow Water Works reservoir, Craigmaddie, with a capacity of 700 million gallons, was constructed between 1883 and 1896. A hutted camp, laid out along upper Strathblane Road, accommodated the hundreds of navvies and other workers, mostly from Ireland, employed on the job. Saturday was pay day, when there would be a mass descent on the village, where licensed premises were still more than adequate for all comers.

Other shopkeepers also reaped a good harvest, however. One of our older residents, then employed as a girl in a draper's shop, remembers well the stir on a Saturday night, and the customers coming in from the camp. The order was always the same: "A shirt and a pair of socks, miss!" And the price was—two-and-ninepence: one-and-eleven for the shirt, and tenpence for the socks!

Throughout this period, and up to 1914, the bell was rung from the parish church tower at 5 a.m. each weekday, and again as curfew at 9 p.m. Woe betide any young person who was not indoors by that hour! A public clock, subscribed for by the inhabitants, had been erected on the church tower in 1855. It kept reliable time until 1963.