



Milngavie from the north

(Photo by Aero Pictorial Ltd.)

1906-1966 — The Place

IN the first decade of the present century Milngavie might fairly have been described as that modern town-planner's dream, "a balanced community." The place had still its industries, all depending upon the water of the Allander—bleach works nearby at Craigton and Clober; the paper mill, with a reputation for high-quality writing paper; a large and well-equipped laundry serving the whole Glasgow district; a small aerated waters factory (which gave its name to "the ginger hill"); and a little pottery below the old grain mill: the dyeworks at Burnbrae were being run down and would soon "die" indeed. But along with all this went a residential area of much charm, having on its doorstep a most attractive countryside which many regarded as a walker's paradise. It was not surprising that more and more people should come to live in such a place, and that one of the first uses found for the old parish church when it was vacated in 1906 was to house school children until a larger school could be erected.

It was at this time that Graham Moffat, famed as actor and playwright, came to live beside Tannoch Loch, and there he wrote "Bunty Pulls the Strings," the Scottish comedy play, set around Baldernock Kirk, which was an instant success in London in 1911 and has been revived all over the English-speaking world frequently since. Another notable resident was the singer Marjorie Kennedy Fraser, whose collection of Gaelic folk-songs, "Songs of the Hebrides," saved many of these from extinction and made them known everywhere. Sir William Smith, founder of the Boys' Brigade, first of youth organisations, also sojourned for a time in the burgh.¹

The "Kaiser War" disrupted the life and took toll of the manhood of Milngavie as of other Scottish localities. There had been a company of "Volunteers," afterwards "Territorials," for many years, and some of these, attached to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders regiment, were among the first to be called up in 1914. No fewer than five hundred local men served with the colours, and the War Memorial at Milngavie Cross bears the names of *one* hundred and ten from all sections of the community who did not return. For the first time in a century and a half a decline in population was recorded, from 4,530 in 1911 to 4,434 in 1921.

After 1918 the most urgent problem to be met was that of housing. The town council took early advantage of the Government's Housing Acts, and by 1930 had built more than 250 modern houses to the west of the town. New streets thus created included Ferguson Avenue, Balvie Road, Craigton Avenue and Lennox Avenue. A later development by the council added some 60 more houses at Keystone Avenue and Road, on the south side of the public park,² carved from Crossvegiate Farm, gifted to the town early in the century by Mr. T. Ripley Ker of Douga'ston.

There was also considerable private house-building at this period, on the west at South Mains Road, Campbell Avenue, Craigdhu

¹ (Note)—Perhaps this palmy period fathered the student rhyme on the vexed subject of the correct pronunciation of Milngavie's name:

" Yet have I heard that in Milngavie,
The folk are quite reserved and shy,
And every house has got a slavey
Who's taught to call the place Miln-gavie."

² (Note)—Milngavie is fortunate in its open spaces. There is also the Barloch Moor off Mugdock Road, and Allander Park, including Drumclog Moor, which covers many acres of fine hilly ground rising from the left bank of the Allander above the town.

Road, Craigton Road, Tambowie Avenue, etc., and on the east at Glasgow Road and Dougalston Avenue, Crescent and Gardens. Little wonder a further extension of the Burgh boundaries was called for in 1934—there had been earlier extensions in 1901 and 1921. The population at the 1931 census was 5,057.

Milngavie became known nationally, and even internationally, when in 1923 the George Bennie Railplane was erected on a trial length of track elevated over an old railway siding at Burnbrae. Here was a prototype for what was widely believed to be a revolutionary form of transport with a great future: it was designed for speeds of up to 150 m.p.h. But for the growth of commercial aviation something might have come of this project, and one still hears of successful monorails inspired by the Bennie experiment in Germany and Japan, and of proposals to build a link of this kind with London Airport. Transport *of* a less ambitious sort became a subject of importance to local residents with the coming of the motor 'bus to compete with the railway train. There was also the tramcar. Glasgow Corporation had run trams from the city to Killermont as early as 1906, and it sometimes suited Milngavie people better to walk to or from that point than to travel by train. In 1923 the tram track was pushed out to Hillfoot with the avowed object of further extension to Milngavie, but a prolonged dispute about the erection of a new bridge over the railway delayed this final stage until 1934.

The '20's and '30's were the years of industrial depression and mass unemployment, and for a large section of Glasgow's million-plus inhabitants an outing to Milngavie provided the best available " holiday " furth of the city. At the week-ends especially, the 'buses brought their thousands, the trains their tens of thousands—debouched on to the Milngavie platforms at a fare of sixpence return! Even this was undercut when the trams came, for a maximum fare of twopence applied. For this, a resident by the Allander could journey to and right across the city, then through Barrhead and Paisley to Renfrew Ferry. Two more coppers brought him back over the same 20-mile route to his home town.

The hikers (a new word then) and picnickers who spread themselves by the Water Works or over Drumclog Moor, Mugdock Bank, Craiggallion or Craigmaddie, little imagined that within a few years their interest would be diverted to place-names like Munich, Warsaw, Narvik and Dunkirk. Still less could they foresee that total war

would come very near their favourite leisure stamping-ground. Milngavie's first loss of the Second World War, however, was not the result of enemy action. On a Monday morning in April, 1940, the old Burgh Hall built in 1877, at the foot of Buchanan Street, was completely destroyed in a disastrous fire. This left the community short of halls accommodation for almost a generation. A year later, in March, 1941, one of the most pitiless enemy air-raids of the war decimated the neighbouring burgh of Clydebank, and a considerable number of those rendered homeless sought refuge in Milngavie. They were mainly accommodated in temporary dwellings erected at Clober, but many of them have stayed on and made a valuable contribution to the life of their adopted town. Although casualties in the 1939-45 war were fortunately not so heavy as in its predecessor, when it was over, forty-nine names had to be added to the local war memorial.

The cultural revival which strangely blossomed in wartime brought gain to Milngavie. The Milngavie Players had been presenting amateur drama of a high standard to the citizens since 1912, and the Art Club had held exhibitions from time to time from the years of the First World War. But now, in 1942, Milngavie Music Club was born, and it has won a nation-wide reputation for concerts and recitals by celebrated musicians. Until the opening of the new Town Hall in 1962, these were given—as were the Players' productions—in the old Parish Church building, which had been converted for use as church halls in 1925. The same premises housed a wartime "British Restaurant" and for 21 years provided the only suitable accommodation for all the uses to which public halls are put.

Even before the end of hostilities house-building was resumed, and this was greatly intensified after 1945, when the town's boundaries were again extended, and has never ceased since. Emergency "prefabs" appeared at once at Cloberfield and Oakburn on the western perimeter, and having outlived their intended span of ten years, are only now making way for more permanent erections. Further west still, an extensive development between Craigdhu and Craighton roads gives substance to the claim that Milngavie town council have been particularly enlightened in meeting the housing needs of the people.

Private house-building has gained momentum continually on all sides of the burgh: Nethermains in the south-west, then Barloch in

the north-east, and now Clober Estate in the north-west and a greater outreach at Nethermains than ever! Soon Mains Estate, between the two latter areas, is to support a thousand new families. In 1951 the population was 7,885; by 1961 it was 8,900: and we are told that in a few years it will be 15,000.

The growth in school population has severely taxed the available classroom accommodation. From 1959 all secondary-age pupils began attending the new Bearsden Academy at Kilmardinny, soon over-crowded, leaving the local school to provide primary schooling only. A new primary school, named "Clober," was opened in the town in 1965, and Milngavie's own secondary school, "Douglas Academy," is won building on Mains Estate. St. Joseph's, a new Roman Catholic primary school at Craighdu Road, came into use in 1961. Scholars from this move on to secondary school at Kirkintilloch. If it is right to judge by the number of residents who attain to a ripe old age—eighties are commonplace and nineties far from uncommon—Milngavie is a more than ordinarily healthy place. Most people too consider that the town is particularly well served by its doctors, of whom at present there are seven. When, hospital treatment is necessary, all the facilities of the fifty and more infirmaries and hospitals in the Glasgow area, and some outside it, can be and are called upon. No members of the community are more highly thought of than the two district nurses, one of whom has now given more than 30 years devoted and cheerful service here. In 1955 a public health clinic, providing for child welfare and certain out-patient treatment, was opened in Craighdu Road.

At least from the date of its erection into a burgh, 1875, Milngavie has had a local police establishment, at first one policeman from the Stirlingshire force who lived in Mugdock Road. Soon after, a police station was built adjoining the old burgh hall in Station Road, this being replaced in 1960 by the present well-equipped and up-to-date office of the Dumbartonshire Constabulary in Main Street which serves both Milngavie and Bearsden.

For some years during and after the war, Highland Games were held in Milngavie, a fitting kind of gathering for a place which is one of the gateways to the Highlands. Then it was too, from 1949, that the locality boasted a zoo—or more accurately a Zoological and Botanical Park—at Craighend Castle. Had the enterprising proprietors waited for the coming of universal car ownership the venture

would probably have enjoyed the financial success it deserved, for they had a magnificent site and a fine collection of animals, large and small. Difficulty of access deterred many would-be visitors.

Another might-have-been concerns the famous Burrell Collection of art treasures gifted to the City of Glasgow in 1944. In 1952 Dougalston estate and mansion house were presented to the City by the then owner, Mrs. Therese Connell, to accommodate the Collection and provide a public park. The arrangement was on the point of fulfilment, and indeed part of the Collection had already been moved to Dougalston, when Sir William Burrell, the donor, insisted that a site farther from the city should be found. In the event the estate had to be returned to the Connell trustees, and its fate still lies in the balance.

Changes that have taken place in industry have in the main been beneficial. The bleach works, the paper mill and the laundry have succumbed to the march of progress, but in their stead have come a fairly large cardboard box factory at Clober (originally built during the war to produce radio supplies); a firm producing flexible ducting; another which makes and supplies equipment and furniture for schools, colleges, etc.; a paint works; and a greatly enlarged and very modern successor to the old "ginger beer" factory. These, with several smaller enterprises, all show promise of growth and extension, and none of them is of a character to interfere with the amenity of the area. With the electrification of the railway and the introduction of the fast and frequent "blue train" service in 1961, the public transport system is now thoroughly up-to-date.

A notable date in the recent history of the burgh was 31st March, 1962, when the new Town Hall, Council Chamber and Lillie Art-ings, with its spacious surrounding layout, provides not only an attractive and dignified townscape feature, but also excellent accommodation for civic, social and cultural occasions.

Its facilities cater too for the needs of a flourishing and varied growth of clubs, associations and societies which foster community spirit. In addition, the Boys' Brigade, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and the local detachment of the British Red Cross Society have their own premises in different parts of the town. The West of Scotland Football Club, one of the oldest and most successful rugby clubs in the country, moved out to Milngavie and constructed new playing fields for themselves in 1960 at "Burnbrae," close by the long-established cricket and tennis club grounds. *Page Twenty-three*