

Langholm & District Art Club

... the early years

It's June 2013, and in the year that Langholm & District Art Club celebrates its diamond jubilee it is perhaps appropriate to recall how the Club came to be. While many of the original members are no longer with us, their enthusiastic contributions to the Club, both socially and artistically are fondly remembered.

This account is a transcription of a conversation with Jean Weatherstone, a founder member of the Club and happily, after sixty years, still painting and enjoying Club activities. After initial demurrals along the lines of 'A canna remember ony thing'... 'A've nee memory for dates'... and 'Gie's anither glass o' thon wine', Jean passed on her thoughts, with apologies for historical inaccuracies, more or less as written below.



Origins of the Club

In the early 1950s in Langholm, there was an Arts and Crafts group that met in what is now Philip Gunn's Gallery,

but which then was Morrison's shop and café. David Murray participated as an artist and his sister Mary enjoyed craft work.

The 'artist' members of the group felt that their needs were not really being catered for and so with David in the lead they set about forming a splinter group, finding a room in the Town Hall for their use and setting up what is now Langholm & District Art Club.



David Murray 1948

In common with most of the artist group, Jean was interested in drawing but not an expert. As firstly a shop and mill worker and then a young mother, she had also had little opportunity to pursue the interest.

It was David who invited Jean to join the group. Jean at this stage was getting over the traumas of having her first child Niall, and was yet to embark on her second. Having always been interested in painting and drawing she was looking for something better than nappy changing and nights in child minding. True to form she was reluctant at first but was persuaded by her friend Jean Nichol, who lived at the other end of Holmwood Gardens, along the lines of 'A'll gan if ee gan'.



Rita Paterson 1958

At the beginning, there were around twelve members in the group led by Rita Paterson of Terrona who was a fine artist and the founding President.

The founding fathers (and mothers)

Jean is a bit inexact on who joined the group when, so some of the following names were there from the start and others joined in the early years. The group was always a fascinating mix of the aristocracy, business leaders and 'ordinary folk' brought together by their common love of art.

Early members in addition to those already mentioned included Andrew Aitchison, Jessie and Arthur Tolson, Madge Latimer, Harry Scott and Percy Howard (Reid and Taylor director). Rita Cotter the minister's wife, Mary Graham and Rita Douglas, whose passion was for horses, also joined early on. Rita Cairns joined slightly later and Mrs Glover, wife of the Ewes minister James Jamieson Glover and Asher Banks, bank manager at the Royal Bank (and of course Art Club treasurer) were also early members. The group appealed to all ages and younger

members included Alex Morrison, Brenda Morrison, Frank Zemla and Audrey Maxwell, who at one stage sat for the group.

Dick Irving, Jean's brother joined the Art Club a bit later and is still an active member.

R R Scott-Hay, manager of the Reid and Taylor Mill, was an early member of the group. A keen artist, he was also very active in promoting an appreciation of art amongst his workers and the people of Langholm. In April 1962, he inaugurated the Scott Hay Gallery at Reid and Taylor, which became the home for many club exhibitions in later years.



R R Scott Hay

Guest Visitors and Demonstrators

Rita Paterson knew lots of artists from painting holidays she had been on. She was successful in persuading a number of these to come to Langholm and to demonstrate to the Club members. Notable tutors included Jack Merriott, who spent a lot of time in the north-west highlands teaching classes, and impressed the group by painting skies using a shaving brush! Heaton Cooper from Grasmere in the Lake District was another popular visitor and following one of his visits to the group's exhibition, David Murray was invited to go to the Lakeland Artists'

exhibition in Grasmere. This was the start of a long association with the Lakeland Artists and many outings to their exhibitions.

Group activities

The group met to paint together in the Town Hall or outdoors and to listen to guest demonstrators. The Club rooms became a home from home as they were furnished with a variety of surplus household furniture. The group would paint to around 9pm and often David, who had a shop where EWM is now, would bring food. Arthur made a pan so that chestnuts could be roasted on the open fire. On special occasions such as Burns Night or Christmas, meals would be cooked at home and taken to the Town Hall. No spouses were allowed to attend these functions!

Amusements were home-made. The 'pea in the corner' game still has to be satisfactorily explained, and Mary and David's dance of the little swans from Swan Lake had very little to do with art!

Meetings were held every week and were often outdoors at venues such as Benty and Ewes. Painting trips on a Sunday, David's day off, often ended up as far afield as Carlisle for a Chinese meal and a 'late night'. Jean's husband Kit gained his first experience of flying solo with young children during these years!

It was common to paint in members' gardens, for example at Broomholm and Terrona. Jimmy Paterson would meet

the arrivals at the gate with the quote 'A sae eer here tae paint, weel there's plenty o' yetts needin' paintin'"

At Longwood, Wing Commander Hargreaves entertained the group. In addition to being an artist and rather grumpy, the Wing Commander was distinguished by the fact that his mother was Alice Liddell who inspired Alice in Wonderland. (Authors note: Wing Commander Caryl Liddell Hargreaves was the third son of Alice Hargreaves nee Liddell. He died in 1955.)

The Duchess of Buccleuch's father John McNeill QC of Shortsholm invited the group to paint at Hollows Mill.

Outings

In the days before photography 'took off' and became a normal way of recording subject matter for paintings, outings were very common. The annual visits to Grasmere were one such example. On one trip to the Lake District, Mr and Mrs Barr (Mr Barr was a hairdresser in Langholm) accompanied the group. Their interest was such that they slept all the way there, again on the Ullswater steamer, and all the way back. The others had a great time!

Several members had cars and would ferry the group to places such as Kippford on the Solway coast for Sunday outings. Jean remembers that a friend of John Packer's had a house on the shore with a garden overlooking the sea, which was an excellent spot for painting.

Friendships were formed with other art clubs in the area, including Carlisle and Hawick. Some of the Langholm group, including Jean, joined the Carlisle artists in order to exhibit at the Fraternity gallery alongside the likes of Robert Forrester, Robert Rule and Ernie Glaister. There was no framer in Langholm unlike today so most members had their work framed in Carlisle.

The group was often accompanied by non-painters on outings such as Grace Baxter, Ella Smith and Mary Steele.

As the years went by and others, notably Tom Kennedy got involved, outings became more adventurous and eventually groups were travelling to the continent to paint, visit exhibitions and generally enjoy each other's company. With Tom as travel agent the first trip was to Paris, followed by others to Grasse, Bruges and Amsterdam.

The trip to Grasse is remembered particularly fondly by Jean. Staying at a rented villa, La Revolte, in lavender clad hills behind Nice, the group spent days painting while non-painting spouses used the swimming pool. Lunches were home produced and dinners, with wine of course, were taken at local restaurants.

Exhibitions

At first, exhibitions were held in the gymnasium at Langholm Academy. Jim



Jim Telford ~ 1959

Telford ('Teef') and Andrew Aitchison built frames to hang the pictures.

Once again through Rita's artist connections, surprisingly well-known figures agreed to open the club's exhibitions. Notable amongst these was the second Earl Haig who was a professional painter, although Jean didn't think much of his paintings!



Riverbanks by Earl Haig 1957

The end of the Town Hall

Over the years the condition of the Town Hall had deteriorated to the point that the noise of water running through the walls drowned out the voices of speakers. Renovations were planned and the group was asked what they would like. A room with cupboards was duly requested but in the end they were allocated what is now the Town Hall gallery, but without a sink, kettle or storage cupboards.

As a result the group reluctantly left the Town Hall and re-located to Langholm Academy. Closer association with the school had the knock-on effect of encouraging club members to attend art classes, led by the likes of Jim Hunter, Alan Duff, Alex Drysdale and Aeron Egerton who, in addition to being an art teacher, was Art Club President for a time.

Onwards and upwards

A number of members moved on from Langholm and the Art Club, often to participate in art on a professional or semi-professional basis.

Jim Kyle was one such example. Jean and Kit went one year to the Blue Mist at St Ives in Cornwall for a holiday. Jim and wife Madge decided to go with them and while Jean and Jim painted, Kit and Madge frequented the beaches.



Jim Kyle 1968

Jim and Madge fell in love with Cornwall and bought two shops and a house overlooking St Ives harbour where they lived for many years. Jim set up a gallery and Madge had a baby linen shop.

In the 1960s, Debbie Edelman developed an interest in art at school and at the Art Club. Vic Hayton of Border Fine Arts introduced Debbie to sculpture, eventually leading to

her setting up a modelling business, Teviotdale Arts, in Hawick.

Nan, mother of Margaret Walty was interested in art and the Art Club. Margaret, who lived at Cleuchfoot, was a silversmith who later became a well-known book illustrator and still works in Langholm. She is noted for her Gold Medal winning botanical paintings.

Jean so nearly made it! When she was still of school age, the Reverend Miss Bonner took some of her drawings to Scott Hay, who offered to send her (Jean) to Gala Textiles College to study design. Unfortunately family finances didn't stretch to a college education and the opportunity passed by.

Later however, Jean and Alison Bell decided they would study life drawing at Carlisle College. Alison loved to choose the most difficult subjects, and when another class was needed to fill out a full day per week of tuition, she and Jean decided on sculpture.

Despite lacking any previous experience in sculpture, Jean and Alison ended up exhibiting at the Royal Scottish Academy exhibition in 1972 and again in 1973. Jean even sold a sculpture from there in her second year and another at the Fraternity Gallery in Carlisle. Jean and Alison's life drawings went on to shock the townsfolk of Langholm.

Conclusion

The Langholm and District Art Club was characterised from its beginning by being a group of friends with a shared love of painting and drawing. Friendships crossed 'class' boundaries and the club has always been open to all. Costs were kept low as members shared their resources. Everyone was encouraged to follow their own interests in terms of painting subjects, style and media.

Now after sixty years of existence, the club still follows these same ideals. Even for founder member Jean, there is new inspiration to be found through demonstrations and interacting with a steady flow of new members. In a phrase that characterises the club; 'A fancy hevvin' a go at that.' Long may it continue.

May 2015 -The final footnote

Jean died in September 2014 at the age of 85 and after a good life, in part made so by her artistic interests, abilities and the friends she made as a result.

Many of her works reside with family and friends across Scotland and beyond and it gave Jean great pleasure towards the end of her life to be able to bequeath others.

When suitable gallery space is available in Langholm, it is hoped to present a retrospective exhibition of Jean's works in her memory.