



BLOOD ON THE STREETS

A-Z OF GLASGOW CRIME

ROBERT JEFFREY

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BLACK & WHITE PUBLISHING

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INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years, blood has been spilled on the streets of Glasgow – from the beer and bread riots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the gang wars of the 1920s and 1930s and on into the twenty-first century with its dangerous upsurge in the culture of knife-carrying and the disturbing rise in the number of murders. The gangs are still with us, albeit in a different form. The Redskins, the Norman Conks, the Billy Boys and their ilk have been replaced by drug gang-lords and mindless youngsters ready to fight over territory or to kill, assault or maim simply for the hell of it.

This book tells the story of some of the villainous happenings in the city. Here, you'll read about murders, bank robberies, poisonings and street fights involving gangs comprised of hundreds of armed men. Some of the most outrageous miscarriages of justice that form a blot on our legal and policing systems are chronicled too. Also spotlighted is the succession of hard chief constables and brave men on the beat who have fought the evil-doers down the years.

According to cliché, newspapers are the first draft of history. And, in its newspapers, Glasgow has followed the deeds of the wrongdoers in detail, day after day, in millions of words. The criminal archives are bulging. Yet, today, Glasgow is enjoying a renaissance in arts and culture. A city has many faces. Wars against crime have been won and lost. There will be more. *Blood on the Streets* recalls just some of the countless stories that form a significant part of Glasgow's history.

A

ACME THUNDERER

Every cop on the beat carried the tools of the trade – a notebook, a pen, handcuffs, a baton and his trusty Acme Thunderer, a heavy-duty police whistle which, when used by a constable with a healthy pair of lungs, could produce an extremely piercing sound. It was said that the whistle was so powerful that, in the right conditions, it could be heard as far away as 500 yards, even in busy streets. For many a young thief and gangster the noise of the whistle was background music to an ill-spent youth, a sort of criminal coda leading to the cuffs being snapped on and a night or two in the cells.

ALCOHOL

Anyone who ever doubted the role played by the demon drink in Glasgow and the city's association worldwide with crime and gangs should spend a little time in the city courts listening to the defenders' pleading. In case after case, from the dawn of justice to this day, the time-honoured phrase 'drink was a factor' and its many variants come into play. Indeed, the phrase has crept into the public consciousness in such a fashion that it is used routinely by many Glaswegians to explain unacceptable behaviour and not just of the criminal kind.

The Glasgow hard man may have moved from a 'hauf and a hauf pint' in some shady sawdust-floored drinking den to Bacardi Breezers, vodka and exotic cocktails in a chrome-plated, minimalist, trendy and highly expensive watering hole. But the booze still plays an important role – even in these days when chemical refreshment is a creeping danger – in the planning of law breaking. Down the years, the pub has played a pivotal role for those hell-bent on nefarious business of all sorts. In the heyday of the old-fashioned gangs in the 1930s, licensed premises often exacerbated the religious divide – the Catholic gangs had their favourites, the Protestants had theirs and it was dangerous to drink in the wrong pub. These pubs had none of the cosy cheeriness of TV's *Cheers* but they were the sort of places where everybody did, indeed, know your name. And, in an era of damp, unheated and unwelcoming housing with tenement stairs to be climbed and outside toilets, the pubs provided some warmth and comfort.

As well as acting as a stimulant for criminal adventures, booze rubbed off some of the rough edges of life in a hard city. The shipbuilders had their favourite bars, as did the dockers and the foundrymen. In this, usually, all-male environment, it was easy for gangs of like-minded and often wrong-minded men to bond into groupings and 'teams'. It was also easy for friends and acquaintances to fall out and for weapons and

bottles to be used. Drink was the cause of many of the chib-marked faces in the tougher bars. One solution to the smashing of glasses on to the table and hence in to the face of an enemy might, at one stage, have been plastic bottles and glasses when they became available. Much stitching by surgeons in the city's hospital emergency departments could have been avoided. But, even in the twenty-first century, that particular solution is still largely just a talking point.

One legendarily infamous place where drink was a factor in the plotting of much villainy no longer exists, having been bull-dozed in mysterious circumstances. The Caravel was a pub in **BARLANARK** and it is believed by some to be the reason for Tam McGraw acquiring the sobriquet 'The Licensee' in the underworld, even though it was his wife who was the actual owner of the establishment.

An alternative explanation of the nickname is that it came about because McGraw was 'licensed' by the cops in some of his activities as payback for tip offs on the underworld action. This was not an explanation much used in the press when McGraw was alive, such was his fearsome reputation, but on his death some writers began to find the courage to make that allegation.

The chat across this particular bar seldom concerned the latest hot tickets in the art world and nor would there be much polite discussion of cultural events like the reviews that fill so much space in the papers these days. In the Caravel, crime, gambling and serious drinking were the things that mattered. Indeed, during the investigation into the murder of Arthur Thompson Jnr, underworld sources suggested to the police that the bar had played a role in the murders of Joe 'Bananas' Hanlon and Bobby Glover, who were suspected of being involved in the killing of Thompson Jnr, who was usually known as 'The Fat Boy'. But there was to be no forensic examination of the site. Before the police moved in to search for clues at the pub, a significant east-end landmark, it was demolished in sudden and unexplained circumstances.

Too many pubs in an area can cause problems but, paradoxically, there is also a theory that the lack of pubs contributed to crime in the huge housing schemes. Licensed premises, like other amenities such as swimming pools and libraries, were few and far between in the huge post-war housing schemes that sprung up around the city. Those that did exist attracted any desperate hard tickets in the area, which made such hostelrys far from the family-friendly, food-serving bars that are so commonplace now.

Mind you, the old crime-ridden inner-city areas certainly could not complain of a lack of watering holes. Although there were plenty of them, many became known as what the locals call 'stab inns'. Walter Norval, infamous as the city's first Godfather, remembers growing up in the **GARSCUBE ROAD** in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Norval actually lived over a pub – Duffy's – and, within a few hundred yards of his home, there were around fourteen pubs. The pubs recalled by Norval are: Round Toll Bar, Milestone, Duffy's, Ventner and Barge's, Woodside Bar, Number Ones, Jack's Bar, the Bear's Paw, Wangie, Tam O'Shanter, Griffen's, Scotts, Fallons, Glen Lyon. He recalls looking out from his tenement flat windows across the road to Scott's pub and watching the blood being spilled. As Friday and Saturday nights drew to a close, violence would erupt as customers fought with each other, mostly with their bare fists. But the bottle and the tumbler also came into play regularly and the scarred faces of fighting men caused little comment among their mates or their women. Scars – or

‘Mars Bars’ as some called them – were a fact of life. On the subject of scars there is the chilling story of a youngster who allegedly slashed a girl with an open razor. The accused claimed in court that the victim had asked him to do it in order to scar her and make her look like a hard case.

In those days, apart from playing a role as the natural HQ for men to hang out in, the pub was also a handy place for the disposal of stolen goods. During the Second World War, it was here that scams involving ration books took place. And it was in the pubs that farmers or farm workers, out to make a quid or two on the side, in desperate times, brought such rare wartime treats as eggs and butter. To the folk in those bleak tenement canyons that surrounded the pubs, such everyday produce was very welcome, no matter where it came from or how it was obtained.

But not all the pubs, even in the 1930s, were criminal dens. Many were honest and cheery places of escape for the working men who toiled hard in the shipyards and foundries. The thirst they developed by day would be slaked in the bars in the evening. And the role of drink in youthful crime, in the early days of the gangs, has also been overstated by some. The fact that, in the 1920s, many youngsters got into a great deal of trouble is undeniable but it was not always booze fuelled. Some commentators at the time thought the city’s youths were a relatively sober generation and put this down to the proliferation of movements like the Band of Hope, juvenile temperance societies, kirk Sabbath schools and even the anti-drink teaching of ordinary schools.

A remarkable investigation was carried out by the Scottish Temperance Alliance into what part drink played in the teenage gangs who were clashing on the streets. Their investigator, Robert Spence, reported that many of the young gangs were not formed for criminal purposes but had a religious bias and that often the trouble between them was sparked off by disputes over girlfriends. Most gang members, he found, were unemployed and had little satisfactory outlet for their energy. But drinking, he declared, ‘played little part in gang life and in no case was it said that alcohol exerted any decisive influence over lives at the present stage’. Interestingly, Spence blamed lack of parental control for the young gangs. And it was noted that alcoholism played a major role in that lack of control – so, in a slightly indirect way, the demon drink actually *was* guilty again.

Like the unlamented Caravel and most of the Garscube Road pubs, the spit and sawdust howff is long gone, to be replaced by expensively decorated theme bars, wine bars and bars pretending to be airport lounges or wooden-panelled men’s clubs. The temperance movement is now at a low ebb and, perhaps as a result, the accident and emergency departments of our great city hospitals are busier than ever, dealing with the headbangers who get blitzed on Fridays and Saturdays in particular. Visit any accident department as a patient after closing time and, before the hand you cut doing a bit of do-it-yourself is treated, you will most likely have to wait in a queue of the injured, smelling foully of booze or ranting and raving in drug-induced tantrums. It is bad enough for the patients but for the doctors and nurses it is an ongoing nightmare, with weekend nights only marginally worse than the rest of the week. So bad is the problem that *The Sunday Herald* could report that, in June 2004, a senior accident and emergency consultant urged police to abandon ‘wimpish’ treatment of football hooligans, draw their batons and ‘knock the f**k out of them’. The campaigning Sunday reported that Ian Anderson, who is based in the Victoria in the south side and

who is a former president of the UK's Faculty of Accident and Emergency Medicine, believes society has become 'overly politically correct and wimpish' in the way it deals with drink-fuelled loutishness. He was to have expanded on his views at a conference attended by top policemen (including the then chief constable, Willie Rae) and politicians but his outspokenness and the media storm it caused resulted in his non-appearance at the event. However, he could count on many supporters as well as critics.

Anyone who thought the problems created by abuse of alcohol in the 1920s and 1930s has gone away, or has moderated, is living in fantasyland. Dr Anderson said:

This country has a serious problem with antisocial behaviour and violence. There is a potent cocktail in Scotland – West of Scotland genes, testosterone and alcohol – and it is a potential powder keg. More and more ladies are getting on it so you could include oestrogen as well.

The very fact that a seminar, entitled 'Scotland's Hangover: wake up to the problem', had to be held in the offices of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons is dispiriting. Anyone who has read the papers regularly or has made any study of Glasgow's crime archives should be well aware of the problem, even if only at second hand. Dr Anderson was quoted as saying:

Alcohol is a very useful drug and a valuable tool at social occasions but some of the people we had in the department at the weekend should have 'Don't serve me drink – I am a nutter' tattooed on their forehead. I have been doing emergency surgery for twenty years and last weekend was as bad as anything I have seen.

He added that the profession was sick and tired of picking up the pieces of drink-related attacks and he believed that west of Scotland men should abandon the idea that our hard-drinking tradition is something we should be proud of.

He went on to say:

I saw people at the weekend whose lives have been ruined by some nasty little ned who will probably go to court and they will ask for background reports. I would take the neds round the back and give them a good kicking. We have got to sort these guys out. They have got to know there will be consequences to their behaviour.

These forthright opinions, which, no doubt, are also held by many who work at the coalface in the fight against violence, started a media stooshie. Far from being wimpish, the remarks were the kind of medicine that is too strong for some to take.

This tough talk harked back to the days of Percy Sillitoe who, as a pre-war chief constable, encouraged his tough anti-gang squads to retaliate first and had considerable success in curbing gang violence. But, however desirable an option it may seem to the victims, that is not a viable way of operating in today's very different climate. Norrie Flowers, chairman of the Scottish Police Federation, agreed that alcohol abuse was a major problem but rejected arbitrary justice as a solution, saying, 'I am sure many officers would like to do that but we have to work within the law.'

And John Brady of Alcohol Focus Scotland said that our drinking culture has to change. For Brady, ‘going out to get drunk is not acceptable’. Leader writers, too, seemed unanimous and they reluctantly agreed that, in 2004, the law had to be followed whatever the provocation.

As always, disagreement and differing views on how to deal with the drink dilemma abound, but what there is no argument about is the scale of the problem. Of the record 127 murders in Scotland in 2003, 44 per cent of those accused were drunk at the time of the offence. And more than a third of all accident and emergency admissions to hospitals are drink related. Down the years much blood has been spilled on the streets of Glasgow and much of it was laced with large quantities of cheap liquor. Time to wake up indeed.

ALIBI

This is the defence of being somewhere else at the time when a crime was committed and being able to prove it. It is a staple in the plots of crime novels and B-films but it does not surface too often in real life enquiries – at least not in court. ‘I wasn’t there when it happened’ is a tale detectives hear more often than they want. But anyone with a genuine alibi is usually quickly smoked out by the police and eliminated from the investigation. Occasionally, there is a case where the defence of alibi is heard in court but it is unlikely that one like that involved in the Oscar Slater case will ever be heard again.

Slater was, of course, almost hanged for a murder that he did not commit, having been stitched up by the Glasgow police in 1908. He was sentenced to death but, mysteriously, the sentence was reduced almost at the last minute and he went on to serve nearly nineteen years in prison before being freed. This case is dealt with in some depth elsewhere in this book but a factor that was obscured by all the double-dealing and the police frame-up was that Slater actually had TWO rock-solid alibis. If anyone needed proof of his innocence, there is the fact that Slater didn’t even know the correct date of the murder of old Miss Marion Gilchrist, a murder he was supposed to have committed. Slater, who had only read about the murder in the papers, thought it had taken place on 22 December 1908, the day the news of the killing in **WEST PRINCES STREET**, which had shaken the douce west end of Glasgow, became public knowledge. Slater, who was arrested in New York after crossing the Atlantic on the *Lusitania*, was so confident of being cleared that he returned to Glasgow voluntarily. One of the reasons for this confidence was that he said he could ‘prove with five people where [he] was the night the murder was committed’. However, that alibi was for the wrong night but, in a strange twist of fate, it was later found that he did have a watertight alibi for the actual night of the murder. That was never brought out in court.

Glasgow’s criminal archives also provide a classic example of the alibi that eliminates a suspect in the tale of Walter Norval and the death of his stepfather, the vice king Joe ‘The Pole’ Kotarba, in the 1970s. Norval, generally regarded as the city’s first Godfather and a dangerous and violent hard man, was known to hate Kotarba and, when the brothel keeper was viciously stabbed to death, suspicion immediately fell on

Norval, but the gangster had the perfect alibi. He wasn't even in the country at the time of the killing – he was with his glamorous mistress, leading the good life of vodka and sunshine in Tenerife, an island that is no stranger to the criminal fraternity. The cops had to remove him from the number one spot on their list of suspects. Eventually, one of Kotarba's call girls was charged with the bloody stabbing but she was freed after a trial, during which she pled self-defence.

ALLISON STREET

This south side haunt is famously where one of Scotland's best fish-and-chip shops is to be found – it has even been praised by no less than Rick Stein, the culinary sage of Padstow. And, nearby, are the pubs of Victoria Road. But it also has its share of infamy, having been the scene of one of Scotland's most notorious crimes. It was here, in 1969, that a former police inspector, Howard Wilson, shot two police officers after a bank raid he had taken part in. Wilson's attempt to kill the officers' inspector as well only failed because his gun jammed.

Wilson had left Glasgow's finest, soured by lack of promotion. Some had thought him a good beat cop though and he had used his off duty time to teach Bridgeton youngsters, including future boxing promoter Tommy Gilmour, how to swim. After his time in the cops he opened a greengrocer's in Allison Street but he was no more of a success in commerce than he had been as a cop. Quickly deep in debt, he joined with two other members of a gun club and started a new career as a bank robber. Desperate for cash, the robbers carried out an ill-thought-out raid on a bank in Linwood which led to them being spotted as they returned to Wilson's flat, above his shop in Allison Street. The shop was close to a police station, allowing the cops coming and going to work to keep an eye on what their old colleague was up to – not the cleverest choice of home base! The police went into the flat but Detective Constable Angus McKenzie and PC Edward Barnett were killed by the cornered ex-cop. Cop killers are reviled but an ex-cop who turns killer is bottom of the heap. Wilson served thirty-two years in jail.

Early in 2004, the street was back in the headlines when a young local was murdered.

B

BAKSI, JOE

Joe Baksi was a famous American boxer who, courtesy of rhyming slang, has become a byword in Glasgow for taxi – ‘I’ll grab a Joe Baksi home.’ is frequently to be heard at the end of a night out. Cab drivers ease life in a city where public transport can often be difficult and, on occasion, dangerous. The drivers take old ladies to the shops, make sure drunks keep their licences by whisking them home when they get bloated in a howff some distance from their abode and take relatives to hospitals to visit the sick. Mind you, certain taxi companies have run foul of the law from time to time and have been accused of being a front for criminals laundering money or distributing drugs. But, by and large, they are an important ingredient in smoothing life in the city.

The men and women who drive the cabs, however, often have a lot to put up with. They are frequently subjected to attacks by missile-throwing vandals, a problem that tends to rise and fall with the periodic crime waves that afflict the city. A favourite ploy of the young neds is to attack in areas where some of the roads have been blocked off, making escape easy for themselves but difficult for the driver. The problem was so serious and the Taxi Owners Association was so fearful of injury to drivers that, at one stage in the 1990s, no-go areas were declared. However, this, in fact, is a bit of window dressing and perhaps unfair on the areas singled out. I have been in a taxi attacked by teenagers throwing water filled balloons, a surprisingly dangerous weapon, in a most respectable south side main road – it was no new experience for the driver who had to swerve and narrowly missed solid contact with a lamppost. The thugs are not beyond erecting makeshift roadblocks to make attacking their targets easier. For the record, the danger areas that the TOA listed, some years ago, were **EDGEFAULD ROAD** and **CARLISLE STREET, GOURLAY STREET** in Springburn, **ROYSTON ROAD** in Townhead, **MAYFIELD STREET** in Ruchill, **PANMURE STREET** in Possilpark, **SPRINGFIELD ROAD** in Parkhead and the **TOLLCROSS PARK** area.

Sadly, being of service to the public in Glasgow is no guarantee that you can go about your business in peace and taxi drivers were not the only ones to suffer. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was an upsurge in gang violence and an outbreak of the sort of attack that was seldom experienced before, even in the 1920s and 1930s when gangs knocked hell out of each other on a regular basis. Council workers going about their business were attacked. In Pollok, where there was a considerable amount of random violent vandalism, workers even threatened to boycott upgrading work on houses in **LINTHAUGH ROAD** and **CALFHILL ROAD** after a number of attacks. Council employees, tasked with improving life in a tough area, found that the vandals

and thugs were more than ready to bite the hand that was feeding them – thousands of pounds worth of damage was done to council workers' cars parked at a local repair centre.

Firefighters are not immune either. There were disgusting reports of fire engines being ambushed by street gangs while they were on their way to fires and even when they were actually in the throes of tackling blazes. Officers frequently met with verbal abuse and worse – bricks were regularly thrown at them. A fireman was even hit by a brick when he was giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to an injured man on **GLASGOW GREEN**. There were reports of an officer, wearing breathing apparatus and fighting a fire, being bombarded by stones. In Pollok, one fire officer was quoted as saying:

In the run up to Guy Fawkes, it was murder in here. It has been happening regularly. It used to be that firefighters could go into the roughest area freely because they were helping the community – now it seems we are fair game.

The problem has eased slightly in the twenty-first century although, in 2001, more than 150 attacks on firefighters on duty were logged and many attacks go unreported in the press.

BANISHMENT

This was the hard punishment meted out by cities, towns and villages until around the mid eighteenth century. It was last applied in the Glasgow area in 1755 when James McArthur and his wife Jean were brought before the Gorbals' bailies charged with being proprietors of a disorderly house. Witnesses testified before James Maxwell, Procurator Fiscal of the Barony and Justiciary of Gorbals. The magistrates found the offence proved and:

adjudged and decerned the defenders to be carried from the bar to the common prison in the chapel of the Gorbals and there to be detained until the sixteenth of September current, at 12 o'clock on which day ordained and hereby ordain that the defenders be carried from said prison, and by tuck of drum, with their heads bare and uncovered, to be banished and hereby banish them from the village and the barony of the Gorbals during the whole of their natural lives; with certification to them that if they, or either of them, shall return after their banishment aforesaid or be found in the said village or barony, they shall be apprehended and imprisoned in prison aforesaid and publicly whipped through the said village of Gorbals on the first Wednesday after their imprisonment; and so often as the offenders return, or be found in the said village during the space of banishment and hereby grant warrant for the apprehending, imprisonment, whipping and banishment of them.

There was no room for any ambiguity regarding that sentence on the errant McArthurs!

This happened at a time when more liberal views were beginning to impinge on

criminal matters and reformers were campaigning for the end of the punishment. Indeed, the magistrates in Glasgow itself had almost abandoned the old penalty of banishment. In fact, the legality of the sentence that the brothel keepers received was challenged on the grounds that, although the magistrates in the city itself might enjoy the right of exiling criminals on the strength of it being a Royal Burgh, the same did not apply to Gorbals which was, in those days, merely a burgh or barony. In favour of this line of thought was the fact that an Act of Parliament passed in 1748 repealed heritable jurisdictions in Scotland. Even earlier, when the Barony of Gorbals was transferred to the city of Glasgow in 1647 by Sir Robert Douglas, a special bill was passed confirming to the Glasgow magistrates 'All and hail the six pound land of old extent of Gorbals and Bridge-end with the heritable office of bailiary and judiciary within the said bounds.' This seems to make clear that, from that date, the Gorbals magistrates should have accepted that their jurisdiction in serious cases should bow before that of Glasgow. But the McArthurs were, none the less, shown the door regardless of the legal semantics involved. However, the act did mean the end of banishing criminals 'furth of the Gorbals' and indeed from Scotland.

Whipping through the streets was also stopped though I have no doubt that some of those on the right in Glasgow local government would still make a case for its return. Another rather barbaric form of punishment in use at this time was the stocks. These were for minor crimes and delinquents were only forced to spend three hours at a time, in daylight, in this form of cruel name them, shame them and put them on show punishment. From then on, the guilty faced fines, the jail or the rope.

BARLINNIE

Known on the streets as the Bar-L, Barlinnie Prison is one of the most iconic jails in the world. The building was completed in 1894 and it is now at the centre of controversy and criticism for the appalling standard of its accommodation.

During the early nineteenth century, Glasgow had eight prisons of varying size but, by 1840, only the Burgh at **GLASGOW GREEN** and another jail at **DUKE STREET** were open. To ease prison overcrowding, a farmland site in the east end, Barlinnie Farm, was chosen in 1880 for a new building. It was designed to hold 1,000 prisoners in five four-storey blocks and it has been full to overflowing ever since it opened. The population is made up of male prisoners on remand, prisoners serving fewer than four years and prisoners waiting to go to another institution with a different category.

Hangings took place in the prison until 1960. It is everyone's picture of a grim Victorian jail with little to commend it to penal reformers or modern penal practices. Even the pioneering Special Unit, dealt with elsewhere in this book, closed in the early 1990s.

However, one touch of sanity and an acknowledgement of the fact that the world had changed came in August 2004 when it was reported that the practice of slopping out had finally ended in this Scotland's oldest prison. The authorities had found themselves in a legal corner. Slopping out had ended years before in prisons in England, having been outlawed in 1996. Eight years later a Scottish prisoner, jailed for armed robbery, won a landmark case. Robert Napier was awarded £2,450 because the

practice had worsened his eczema. Ministers decided to appeal the decision after Lord Bonython, the judge in the case, said the practice was degrading. This meant that the prison service faced the possibility of thousands of actions from cons forced to share toilet facilities – in the form of chamber pots – in crowded cells and made to slop out on a daily basis. The rush to provide in-cell sanitation was on. The practice of slopping out in Barlinnie had been planned to end in 2004 but the target date was pushed back to 2008 because of the practical difficulties – which were exacerbated there because of the age and design of the building. The thought of prisoners rubbing their hands at the prospect of suing seemed to have galvanised the authorities and in 2004, after all, one dreadful part of the history of Barlinnie had ended. But, glimpsed from the modern motorway that sweeps past it, the jail can still send a chill through you – its grim history and atmosphere somehow seeping out of the stone walls and over the high fences that cage the desperate men of Glasgow.

BARLINNIE HOTEL

To describe the grim fortress that is Barlinnie Prison as any form of hotel is surprising – just as surprising as the notion that anyone in a cell behind the high walls of this infamous place of incarceration ever had anything to sing about. But, while researching the life of Walter Norval for a biography, *Glasgow's Godfather* (Edinburgh: Black & White Publishing, 2003), of this infamous gangster, the old villain surprised me by giving me a rendition of a song called 'The Barlinnie Hotel'. Walter Norval does not know who wrote it or when but the words are as clear in his head as when he first heard them many years ago. The curiously romanticised refrain must be familiar to many a Glasgow criminal who did time in a building still criticised by prison campaigners. But, for all its unenviable reputation, the 'hotel' is never short of customers!

In Glasgow's fair city,
There's flashy hotels.
They give board and lodgings
To all the big swells.
But the greatest of all now
Is still in full swing –
Five beautiful mansions
Controlled by the king.
There's bars on the windows
And bells on the door,
Dirty big guard beds
Attached to the floor.
I know 'cause I've been there
And, sure, I can tell
There's no place on earth like
Barlinnie Hotel.
I was driven from the Sheriff,
And driven by bus –

Drove through the streets,
With a terrible fuss.
Drove through the streets,
Like a gangster at state.
And they never slowed up,
Till they got to the gate.
As we entered reception,
They asked me my name,
And asked my address,
And the reason I came.
As I answered these questions,
A screw rang the bell –
It was time for my bath,
In Barlinnie hotel.
After my bath, I was dressed like a doll.
The screw said, ‘Quick march,
Right into E-hall.’
As I entered my flowery*, [slang for cell ‘flowery dell’]
I looked round in vain –
To think that three years, here,
I had to remain.
For breakfast, next morning, I asked for an egg.
The screw must have thought
I was pulling his leg.
For, when he recovered, he let out a yell –
‘Jailbirds don’t lay eggs,
In the Barlinnie Hotel!’
The day came for me,
When I had to depart.
I was as sick as a dog,
With joy in my heart.
For the comfort was good,
And the service was swell,
But I’ll never return
To Barlinnie Hotel

BARROWFIELD

On dark winter midweek nights, the sky of the east end of Glasgow often shines with the reflection of the powerful flood-lights of Celtic Park. The rebuilt stadium is a palace of football, one of the finest in Britain. Celtic’s success brings thousands of football fans from the glamour clubs of Europe – Rome, Paris, Milan, Madrid – to see their heroes take on ‘The Hoops’. One wonders what these visiting fans make of the neighbourhood or what they know of its history. Almost in the shadow of the gigantic stadium lies the Barrowfield, a housing scheme that is now, at last, showing some

signs of regeneration. But, in the early 1970s, this was one of the hardest places in Glasgow and home to two of the most infamous gangs – Spur 78 and Torch, who were originally from Calton. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in this part of the east end, it was like the Wild West. The respectable folk who found themselves in such a place because of cruel fate – and an acute housing shortage – were deposited in a living hell.

The newspapers made regular, if fleeting, visits to highlight the troubles of the scheme and found the locals ready to talk in detail about the way their lives were blighted. What they would not talk about, however, were the neighbours and gangs responsible for such a state of affairs – fear saw to that. Some of the tales were harrowing in the extreme. And reporters visiting the schemes realised quickly enough that it took bravery on the part of people to be willing to talk to them even on a basis of anonymity. ‘Don’t identify us – we are afraid of what “they” might do to us or the kids,’ they’d say. Back in the 1970s, one member of a local family put it this way:

You take a chance every time you walk down the road. We used to go out every Saturday but now we are afraid to cross the doorstep. There are two gangs in one street, the Torch and the Spur, and, when they are on the prowl, life is just not worth living.

Many families told reporters they would like to continue to live in the area if only the violence was eradicated. But, even if you wanted to leave for a quieter life further out of town, there were difficulties. It was said that a Barrowfield address on an application form for a move to a council house elsewhere often meant automatic refusal, even for those who had lived for years in the area and were only trying to escape the mayhem.

One family of long-time residents told of returning home from holiday to find every window in the house broken. ‘They don’t care who they do it to. You could have known them for years and they would still do it to you. It’s bedlam at times. What can you do?’ No wonder that, at this time, **BARROWFIELD STREET** and the streets off it, such as **FRAZER STREET, DAVAAR STREET, KERRYDALE STREET** and **STAMFORD STREET**, were no-go areas after dark.

The battles between the Torch and the Spur reached new heights in 1977 after the departure of Chief Constable David McNee to London to run the Met. These were dangerous times, when guns were taking over from knives and razors as weapons of choice. Some of the weapons even found their way there from Russia.

The gang wars in the scheme made headlines when two Barrowfield teenagers were jailed for having guns and ammunition with intention to endanger life. Led from the court, they were defiant, shouting threats about what they would do to the detectives who had arrested them when they got out. There were scuffles outside the court between supporters of the accused and cops.

The court reports revealed a scheme awash with guns. The arrests had resulted from a raid on a derelict tenement on the outskirts of the scheme. One of the youths had a gun broken down into three pieces and the other had the ammunition. One of the youths told detectives, ‘We are getting hammered by the Spur. You know what they did to my brother.’ The jury were shown the gun involved which had a swastika on the butt and was engraved with the words ‘Torch kill for fun’. The barrel was likewise

engraved, this time with ‘To Spur from Torch – boom ya bass’. The raid on the house followed the firing of a gun in a taxi in the Barrowfield area and spent cartridges being found lying in the street after gang battles. This gun had been made in Russia and the police were at a loss to explain how it had ended up in the east end of Glasgow.

No wonder the area’s reputation was such that stories of washing machines etc. having to be delivered with police escorts were often recounted in the local pubs! The council did try to put matters right with plans costing millions to refurbish the housing stock of the scheme. But, as soon as the improvements were made, the houses were vandalised, set on fire or otherwise damaged and, although some of the homes were improved, the area was still no safe haven. And it wasn’t only because of the guns.

In 1975, Lord Wheatley warned that members of gangs would find their sentences on the increase. Like Lord Carmont before him, he realised that, while harsh sentences may not result in much redemption, at least they made the streets safer for a period. Addressing a teenager accused of a knife offence, he said:

This curse, which is afflicting the country at present and is particularly acute in Glasgow, has got to be wiped out. At one stage in the history of Glasgow, razor slashing was common. To a great extent the use of the razor has been eliminated – unfortunately to be replaced with an equally dangerous weapon, the knife. But, if there is any danger of razor slashing rearing its ugly head again in Glasgow, the sooner it is stamped out the better.

This stern warning was delivered to the youth who had had the temerity to appeal a six-year sentence imposed on him for assaulting a man. The victim, who was permanently disfigured, had needed no fewer than forty-nine stitches in his head.

The name Barrowfield may be writ large in the criminal history of Glasgow but there were some bright moments of hope. In the mid 1950s, there was a successful eight-day community festival, run by social workers. It was an attempt to turn around attitudes to the scheme and improve things for those who lived there, trying to earn an honest crust and bring up law-abiding families. Jock Stein, the Celtic manager who made his name ‘immortal’ when his Lisbon Lions became the first British team to win the European Cup (at least that was the oft-quoted verdict of Liverpool manager Bill Shankly), gave his services to the festival. And so too did writer Cliff Hanley and disc jockey Tiger Tim Stevens. The festival included a celebrity football match, a talent contest, a street play involving local children and a parade through the streets – it was all a far cry from blood, guns and no-go areas. It was certainly a brave attempt at trying to change things and perhaps it did have some far-reaching effects.

A few years later, the silent majority in the gang-ridden area were praised in the papers for standing up for themselves. A court report said that ‘for years families in Barrowfield have kept a frightened silence about the vicious thugs on their doorstep’. A wild night of terror did something to change that, at least on this occasion. The police were called to the scheme when cars were wrecked, house windows and doors smashed and members of the Spur ended up in dock. The sheriff who dealt with the case, Norman McLeod, was forthright. ‘This uncivilised savagery is the sort of misfortune the decent folk of Barrowfield have had to suffer for too long and too often.’ He praised locals for speaking out. The youths before him had admitted to

being part of ‘a riotous mob which conducted itself in violent and tumultuous manner to the great terror and alarm of the lieges and that they brandished swords and other weapons’. Apart from the swords, other weapons brandished included pickaxe handles and sickles. An invalid car was among the vehicles wrecked. The mob had marched along the streets hammering at the doors of houses with their weapons. Although this was in Barrowfield, the law noted that similar things happened in other areas in the city – such was life around forty years ago. Today, there are at least some new houses and some well-kept front gardens with flowers but there are still some areas that offer a visual memory of the bad old days.

BARROWS, THE

Clichés can become clichés because they are simply the best way of expressing something and there is no more accurate description of The Barrows – or The Barras, as the more gallus prefer – than to say this world-famous market is a Glasgow institution. The stalls are packed together under the Barrowland Ballroom, where Bible John once hunted his prey and which is now a regular venue for the biggest stars in pop. A visit to the market is still a weekend must for Glaswegians in search of a bargain or a spot of fun, mixing with the rich collection of characters who have set up stalls to sell everything from the latest carpet cleaner to an antique commode. The patter of the salesmen – and women – is legendary and it is worth a visit just to hear this, even if you buy nothing.

What was started as a few market stalls by old Maggie McIvor has grown into a large covered market under the ballroom and spread into many of the buildings and spaces between the **GALLOWGATE** and **LONDON ROAD**. It is mostly innocent fun with the punters mobbing the place at weekends, especially at Christmas time and holidays. The traders are legitimate and now, in a concession to modern worries, even wear identification badges. But, Glasgow being Glasgow, any gathering of folk in the mood to spend hard-earned cash, hunting for stuff not available in regular shops, attracts the attention of the scam merchants.

In the early years of the new century the Barras area, if not the barrows themselves, has become a major outlet for pirated CDs and DVDs and electronic porn. The most disturbing aspect of the growth of this trade is that it is being carried out largely by school-children and youngsters. They mingle with the crowds, offering their wares, and disappear into the shadows when a sale is made. It’s a long way from the old fun of The Barras when folk hunted for dolls as Christmas presents, sought out brightly coloured towels for their new high-rise council flats that came complete with inside toilets or watched a remarkable collection of street entertainers. One much-remembered act was that of the muscled and bare-chested Ivan Orloff who attracted huge crowds. He had originally been an officer in the Tsar’s army but found his métier in entertaining at The Barras.

On the new crime wave, Robert O’Neill, then the city’s environmental protection director, said:

Our trading standards officers are continuing to have success in confiscating illegal goods and stopping illegal trading at The Barras. We have made it clear,

through our well-publicised zero tolerance policy, that we will not condone that kind of activity.

For their part, the police issued a statement in July 2004 saying, ‘We are working closely with the council and other agencies to combat illegal trading and criminality associated with intellectual property theft.’ The size of the problem is illustrated by the fact that, in one weekend, undercover operators seized more than 6,700 counterfeit DVDs and CDs, some of them of films that had not even been released in the cinemas, and clothing carrying fake designer logos.

Those involved in the war against this illegal trading, including the Federation Against Copyright Theft, worry that a knock-on of all this will be that such scams will set hundreds of youngsters on the road to lives of crime. Everyone wants this mess cleaned up so that the institution that is The Barras can carry on as it has over the years – providing a fun outing for punters on the hunt for legitimate bargains and maintaining plenty of the entertaining old patter.

BAR-STICK

This is a specially designed implement that is superior to the ordinary crowbar and which was frequently used for break-ins. Burglaries and raids on shops with cash or large quantities of cigarettes, drink or other easily resalable products were rampant in many areas. In the days before hi-tech electronic security arrived on the scene, the prudent shopkeeper invested in iron bars to cover the windows of his premises and keep out the thieves. In the schemes and many areas plagued with crime, the bars, for all the world ironically like those on a prison cell, were a highly visible and common part of the scenery. The bar-stick – made of extremely strong iron and shaped like an elongated letter U with ends that could be grasped – could be forced in behind such bars and a couple of strong hoods could lever the protection off noiselessly in seconds and get in through the window.

BEATTIE, COLIN

He was one of the old-time street-fighting men of **PARTICK**. Known as ‘Collie’ or ‘The Big Man’, in his heyday, he was not to be tangled with.

BELL, BAILIE

Mrs Bell added a gruesome footnote to the history of the emancipation of women in 1925 when she became the first female Glasgow magistrate to witness a hanging. In 1918, the right for women over thirty to vote was won but it was to take eleven more years before women joined men in being able to vote on reaching eighteen. During the intervening years, women had begun to take a more important role in public life. One of the onerous duties of magistrates in the city was to make a dark early morning journey to witness the despatch of some murderous villain or other. In 1925, Mrs Bell travelled to **DUKE STREET** Prison to see the execution of one John Keen who had