

Mauchline and the Rosneath Peninsula

In Journals 65 and 66 there are lists of Mauchline Ware suppliers. Recently I came across the advertisement reproduced below in a book called 'A Victorian Burgh' by Richard Reeve.

WHITE-WOOD SOUVENIRS, with photographs, - Just received a Large and Varied Stock of Souvenirs in White-wood, with new Photos of Cove, Kilcreggan, Rosneath, and Clynder, from 6d upwards. - ROBT. HARVEY, POST OFFICE, COVE.

From the *Helensburgh and Gareloch Times* of 1st September 1886

The Burgh is Cove & Kilcreggan and since 1974 I have lived there. These villages are on the Rosneath peninsula, which is roughly 10 miles from north to south and in width about 3 miles across. It lies between the Gareloch and Loch Long. It forms a high ridge with steeply sloping fields grazed by sheep and cattle. There is regular planting and harvesting of fir forests and virtually no industry, apart from two yacht yards, a sail-maker and two small hotels.

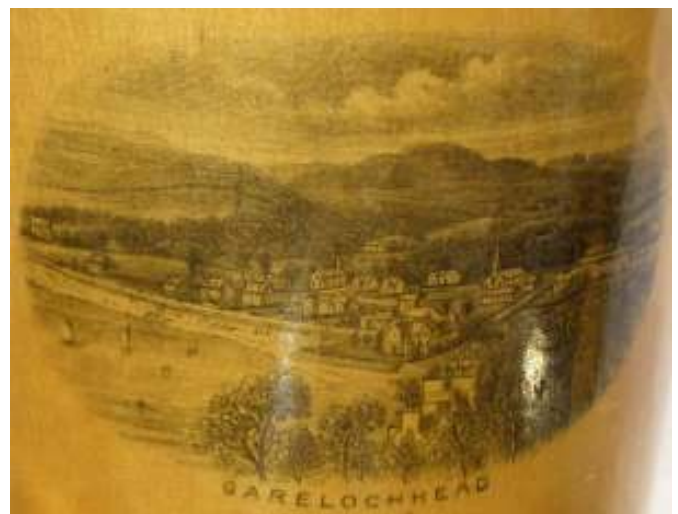
Robert Harvey's Post Office at No. 1 Clifton Place, still exists and is now a grocer's shop selling newspapers and anything else the owner thinks will attract buyers, such as woollen hats and gloves. Sometimes these sell out swiftly when the peninsula gets cut off from the rest of the world by the two roads from the 'mainland' becoming impassable with snow a few inches deep on the steep hills, and the gritting lorries nowhere to be seen.



The photo of Harvey's shop (on the right of the picture above) shows it has hardly changed, but it is no longer the Post Office. The whole peninsula has not altered a lot over the past two centuries though the roads are now tarred full width, (apart from the innumerable pot-holes) whereas up to about 1939 they were just narrow strips of tarmac with weeds growing between. The upgrading occurred when a flotilla of United States submarines was based at Rosneath during World War II.

I have Mauchline pieces showing Cove, Kilcreggan, and Garelochhead, but none of Rosneath, which is sometimes incorrectly spelt Roseneath. So anyone wanting to dispose of a piece showing this village should please get in touch with me. The Rosneath church is beside the ruins

of an older church where there has been a place of worship since at least 1199. The current church is a fine old stone building with a slave's gravestone adjacent. The slave followed his master, Stewart Ker from South America and was freed by his master. He died in 1848.



In the 19th century the peninsula was 'feued' by the owner, the Duke of Argyll. This meant that wealthy Glaswegians could buy parcels of land and build summer



Box lid showing photograph of Cove

homes for themselves, but they had to pay an annual 'tax' or feu-duty to the Duke. This system of landowners' tax only disappeared from the Scottish scene in my early married years. My husband and I had to redeem our feu duty by paying ten times the tax one year, to end our annual obligation.

When these summer villas were built, fast steamships plied the Clyde, giving frequent cheap links between the towns and villages on the Clyde and lochs, from Glasgow all the way down the Firth, also far down and up the west coast. Each weekday morning the men left these new summer residences and went to work in Glasgow by steamer, sometimes having breakfast *en route*. In the evening, they returned to the 'sunny' peninsula, fortified by an occasional dram before disembarking. No wonder many of us mourn the old days when people got to the big city of Glasgow faster and in better fettle than now, when traffic is often so slow - and, as we have to drive, we cannot enjoy a tot on the way home.

Mauchline pieces of the peninsula villages often depict the local piers where the steamers berthed. These piers were in effect maritime bus-stops or railway stations. With a magnifying glass on the transfers it is sometimes possible to detect the signal pillar on the outer end of a pier. This had three cut-out circles about 18 inches or half a metre in diameter on a broad high plank. In each circle was a reversible disc painted black on one side and white on the other. The various steam ship companies almost literally fought each other to gain as many passengers as possible, so increasing their income. One result was that ships' captains used to race each other from pier to pier. The passengers egged them on, not least because every steamer had a bar or two and what was one to do if not have a few drinks while racing along with the vast steam engine shaking the whole ship, and black coal smoke swirling copiously out of the funnels. As these steamers had paddle wheels sticking out each side, the bumping and barging as a pier was approached was akin to the Roman charioteers locking wheels at speed. After a few accidents, order had to be restored and so these signal pylons were put up on the end of each pier. By showing a black or white disc on each of the three signal circles the pier master indicated which of three

fast approaching steamers was to berth first.

The steamers plied their trade all week so, at weekends, people from Glasgow and all the towns round the Clyde made day trips hither and yon. There was a tradition that the men would leave their wives and daughters on deck or in one of the saloons and say 'We are just going to look at the engines'. The massive heavy steam machinery, one of the prides of the district, could be seen through special viewing windows, rotating in majestic synchrony - and nearby was a bar which made lots of money. These tourists bought Mauchline Ware all round the greater Clyde estuary, including from the Cove shop, as the advert shows.

The Duke of Argyll in the 19th Century had a son, the Marquis of Lorne, who married Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, and they lived for part of each year at Rosneath Castle. The castle was largely torn down after 1945. Has anyone seen portraits of the Lornes or Rosneath Castle on any Mauchline pieces? Please tell me as I have saved some house-keeping money and you need not tell Ian!! I do have a page turner with the dark green 'Louise' tartan on both sides. The word 'Louise' is written in gold at the top of the handle and at the bottom there is a registered design 'diamond' also in gold.

In the advert, the price of a souvenir is 6d, which is the equivalent of 2½ 'new' pence. Before 1900, my great-aunt-in-law was living near Newcastle-on-Tyne. She told my husband (many years later, I hasten to add) that working men's wives went to a green grocer's shop wearing a big apron. For 1d, that is one 'old' penny, the greengrocer filled the outstretched apron with enough root vegetables to last a family a week, so that indicates the 'value' of a new piece of Mauchline Ware before the Boer War.

A large number of sycamores grow on the peninsula. This was the wood used to make Mauchline Ware but now, around Rosneath, they are seldom allowed to grow to more than 150 mm or 6 inches diameter, since over that size one must have planning permission to cut them down. Just under that size they make good fuel for the many new wood-burning stoves being installed on the peninsula.

Morag Nicolson

Thanks are due to Richard Reeve for permission to use the photograph of Harvey's shop and to quote the advertisement from his book 'A Victorian Burgh'.

