

‘A bag with a pie and a bun  
and a bottle of milk...’



Memories of West Lothian Gala Days

Edited by Rosalind Gibb



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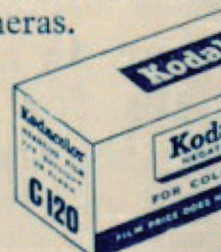
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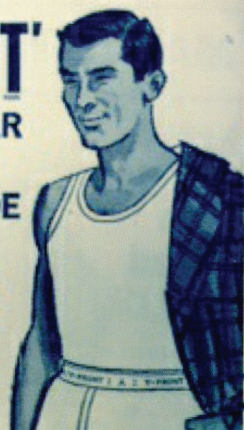
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## EVENING TIMES

BEST FOR SPORT!





# Introduction

Although The Living Memory Association is based in Edinburgh we have a long association with West Lothian. Indeed until the 1990s we had a West Lothian branch.

Four years ago contact was re-established when Elizabeth Henderson invited us along to work with the Council's Museums Service, and from there we developed the idea of a project celebrating Gala Days in the region.

We began work on this 18-month Heritage Lottery-funded project in April 2015. Working closely with West Lothian Heritage Services, it was decided we would concentrate on five locations: Armadale, Blackridge, Broxburn, West Calder and Whitburn.

This book gives a flavour of the many hours of interviews and memories we have gathered in. It's a rich and evocative subject. We hope you enjoy the read and may all your Gala Days be sunny.

*Miles Tubb, The Living Memory Association, August 2016*





# The beginnings

When and how did these now familiar fixtures of the West Lothian calendar begin? Museums Development Officer Emma Peattie had a dig through the archives.

## West Calder

The roots of West Calder Gala Day lie in friendly society demonstrations held in the 19th and early 20th Century.

The demonstration of 1901 included a good turnout from many of the local Orders. The societies represented included: West Calder Free Gardeners; West Calder Shepherds; Irish National Foresters and West Calder Rechabites.

The friendly society demonstrations gave way to the West Calder Games, which was referred to as the annual Gala Day by the West Lothian Courier in 1909. That year's event featured merry-go-rounds, stalls and swing boats from Thursday evening through to the Friday morning and one of the most popular attractions

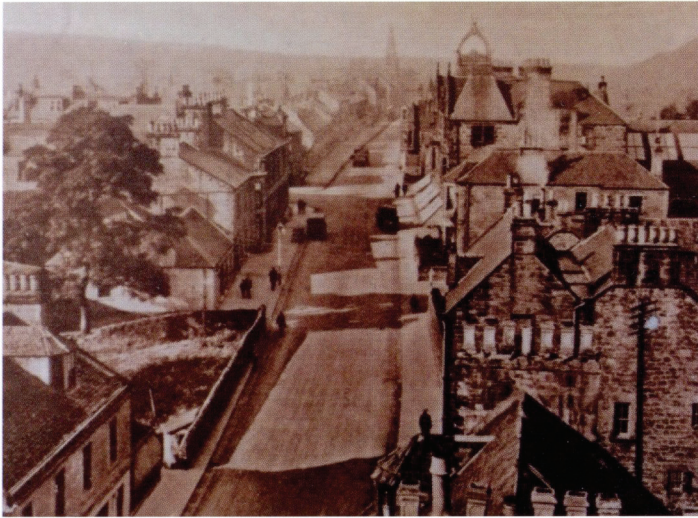
was Sedgewick's menagerie. The Gala Day itself contained a well-run programme of events including a two mile race and juvenile dancing.

Special Gala Days were held across West Lothian to mark Peace Day on 19th July 1919, including in West Calder. The day was bright and warm and children paraded through the village, led by West Calder Brass Band and the Pipe Band. After the procession children were entertained with milk, buns and an afternoon of sport. The celebrations culminated in a bonfire and a dance.

In the 1920s the Central Committee of the West Calder Co-operative Society began to run their own Children's Gala Day, the first taking place in July 1926. More than 1,000 children







to the seaside rather than a celebration in a local park. In 1955, the Gala took the form of a trip to Leven. The sun shone and children spent hours playing in the sand. Unfortunately the oil from passing ships left many with a sticky mass on their skin and clothes.

## Whitburn

In June 1907 a meeting was held by Whitburn Public Band to consider holding a children's Gala Day; it was decided to hold the first Gala on 6th July, 1907. The day was to be funded by public subscription. Whitburn was divided into collecting areas and 14 collectors were appointed.

Unfortunately the sun didn't shine for the inaugural event. Heavy rain ruined decorations in the morning and some had to be taken down. The weather cleared up and around 600 children assembled, carrying Union Jack flags and decorated poles. However, a programme of 48 events in the aptly named "Bog Park" was abandoned in favour of milk and cake at the school. Later in the afternoon, the Whitburn Silver Prize Band headed a procession of the children through to Murraysgate and back again to the school.

By 1908 the Gala Day had grown in grandeur. There were more decorations and the first ever Whitburn arch was erected in the West End of town, featuring a number of embellishments including suspended glass balls, crowns, fans and roses. The procession was led by Whitburn Brass Band, from the school to East Whitburn and back

marched from their schools to Burngrange Park and then onto Limefield. Local pipe and brass bands headed the procession and children carried banners and flags.

On arrival the children were supplied with refreshments before participating in a programme of sporting events. A large marquee was set up in the field and the public could buy tea for 6d. The tables were attended by young ladies who worked for the Co-operative Society. There was a stall selling lemonade and ices and swings set up for the younger children.

In 1930 the children marched from their local schools to the sports park, where there was a large crowd assembled. The afternoon's events included races, sports and jumping.

And in 1948, 1,500 children participated in the Co-operative Gala Day, accompanied by West Calder Public Band and West Calder Pipe Band. In the 1950s 'The Store Gala Day' was a day out





again. The younger children joined the procession at this stage and it made its way to a field kindly provided by Councillor J. Bishop. Around 1,000 children took part. Carrying flags, they were greeted along the way by the cheering crowd and supplied with milk and buns upon arrival.

In 1909 prizes were offered to encourage the building of arches, with a prize for the best decorated flag or pole; a brooch for girls or a watch for boys. There was also a grand fancy dress cycle parade in the evening. A fine day combined with an increase in public contributions helped to make the event a success. East and West Main Street were decorated with suspended streamers, flags and bunting and there were two large decorated arches at either end of town.

The Gala Day remained an important part of the Whitburn calendar. The 1931 event began

with around 1,300 children assembling in the playground of the Public School; they were placed in processional order by committee members and school staff before being presented with crepe hats and flags.

The procession was led by Whitburn Public Band and a red, blue and gold banner which bore the Burgh Coat of Arms. There was also a packed sporting programme. Boys' events included a pillow fight, 100 yard race and a sack race. Among the girls' events were

skipping, netball and a 100 yard race. A fancy dress parade was later led by Harthill Pipe Band. Prizewinning costumes included a gypsy queen, Robert Burns and a Red Cross Nurse.

## Armadale

As with West Calder, the Armadale Gala Day has its roots in local events held by friendly societies towards the end of the 19th Century. In 1897 an Armadale Gala Day was held by the various societies in the district. The procession was led by Carron Band, followed by friendly society officers and boys and girls who were younger members of the Order.

The day's proceedings included a display of a detachment of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who gave a display of physical drill and bayonet exercises.





The day's celebrations were held on the official opening of the public park that was gifted to the people of Armadale by Mr Wood of Bathville. Those children who hadn't received it at school were awarded a Coronation medal. The procession was headed by committee member John McKinnon, who was on horseback, and they marched to the music of Armadale Public Band.

The planning of these early Gala Days was to an extent restricted by the school calendar. In May 1908 a date for the Gala Day couldn't be set; the education authority were yet to set a date for the school holidays.

In the same year Armadalians also learned about the effect that the weather could have on celebrations. The rain poured down and some elements of the programme had to be abandoned.

The first Armadale Children's Gala Day was held in 1900 as a thanksgiving for the entry of British soldiers into Pretoria. In 1901, 1,600 children formed part of this procession and each child carried a flag.

On arrival at Volunteer Park, 1,540 children were served with an orange and a bag of pastry in 22 minutes!

The festivities stepped up a gear in 1902. Originally they had been planned to be part of the Coronation of the King, but this element of the festivities were postponed due to the King being ill.





Nonetheless, festivities continued; within the school Camelon bandsmen took turns at playing solos, while a number of children entertained one another with displays of songs and dancing.

The Gala Day gave local girls and boys a chance to dress up in their finest clothes. In 1909 J. McNaughton's placed an advert in the West Lothian Courier advertising Children's Day merchandise: "pretty dresses, hats" for the girls and "nice suits, caps" for the boys, with fruit being supplied by Mr Russell.

Local bands were an important part of the Galas. In 1913 the Armadale Silver Band and the Westrigg Flute band led 800 children from the Public Hall through the village to the field.



During the First World War a number of communities put Gala Days on hold. In Armadale the celebrations continued and soldiers wrote home about the importance of giving children their Gala Day.

In 1918 Father Rattray told the story of an Armadale soldier stationed on the Front who had sent for a bill and put it up in his dugout.

*'After such a scene as witnessed last Saturday, the unanimous cry is "Long Live Children's Day." It is good to have this annual outing, not only of the bairns, but also for the older folks, for such a day means a gathering together of old acquaintances, and such intercourse cheers one in this work-a-day world of ours. Such gatherings are red letter days for the children, they are also beneficial to their elders, because they enable them to enjoy themselves that they go back to their labours refreshed and with a happy song on their lips.'*

*West Lothian Courier, 1909.*



## Broxburn

While Broxburn was not to have its own Gala Day until the 20th Century, annual athletic games were held in the last quarter of the 19th Century, laying the roots of the popular Gala Day sports that were soon to become an integral part of the celebrations. The athletic games in 1897 included various sporting competitions including “Throw the Hammer” and the “Old Man’s Race” for men 50 years and up!

The modern Broxburn Gala Day emerged out of the Coronation celebrations held in 1911. Most of the employees of Broxburn Oil Company were on holiday for the first Gala Day in 1912. Local children assembled at the Senior Grade Public School, with teachers giving up the first day of the school holidays to organise the children. The procession left the school at 2pm, led by Broxburn Public Band.

Dr Kelso’s Lothian Pipers and children from the Roman Catholic School also joined the procession. In total, around 2,000 joined in. The children were dressed in white dresses decorated with ribbons and sashes.

Within a couple of years, the Gala Day had emerged as an important part of the local calendar. In 1913 the Gala Day committee engaged in discussion about how they might make the event more elaborate in future years, making it more similar to the Galas held in neighbouring towns and villages.



At this point decorations did not form part of the Broxburn Gala celebrations, although in the Old Town paper garlands were suspended over the road.

More than 2,000 children attended the Gala Day in 1913. The girls wore white dresses and held Japanese parasols whilst boys carried flags and dressed in their best attire. On arrival at the park the children were served with tea and a bag of “eatables”. Later in the proceedings they were given fruit and sweets and a shiny new penny.

## Blackridge

Blackridge Gala Day appears to have been established in 1908. Interestingly, while Gala Day planning can take several months, in 1908 the first planning meeting was held in the same month as the event. Around 900 school children took part in August 1908. Music was provided by Harthill Pipe Band, refreshments were served and



there was a long programme of sports for people of all ages to enjoy.

A fancy dress competition was added to the festivities in 1919 and the local children embraced the new addition with great enthusiasm. A baby competition was another new addition. The first prize was awarded to five-month-old James Hardie. Father Rattray addressed the 1919 Gala. He mentioned his hope that teachers would get involved in the Gala Day as they were better able to work with children than the committee.

In 1931 the Blackridge, Westrigg and Westcraigs Gala Day was held in Westrigg Recreation Park. Miss M Bryce of Mosshouse led the parade on horseback and wore a jockey

costume. She was followed by Mr H Deans, the Gala Day president; then eight schoolboys carrying the Gala Day banner, the Harthill and District Pipe Band and Professor Findlay and his troupe of dancers. The children in the parade were accompanied by motor and horse drawn lorries, Prestonlinks Colliery Silver Band and Stewarts and Lloyds Pipe Band. The children carried coloured balloons and flags and streamers were hung over the road.

The ladies of the Eastern Star served milk and eatables to children arriving at the field. An afternoon and evening of sports, cakes and dance displays followed.





# Excitement mounts

Since those early years Gala Days have been a major part of summers in West Lothian. And while times and trends change, interest peaks and wanes, when a Gala Day happens one thing is sure: months of preparation will go into organising for the event, from raising funds to choosing the pageant characters, to creating procession floats, costumes and decorations.



**BROXBURN'S FIRST GALA  
QUEEN**  
**Spectacular and Successful  
Festival**  
**GREAT ENTHUSIASM**

All week Broxbournians have been searching their memories to find a parallel in history to Broxbourn's first Children's Gala Day and Coronation of the Gala Queen, which was held on Saturday. They have failed, because Broxbourn has never before had anything approaching it in civility, in spectacle or in sheer co-operative effort and enthusiasm on the part of the public. Consciously or unconsciously, Broxbourn has been in recent years rather ashamed that it had no children's festival to compare with the efforts made by neighbouring West Lothian towns and villages. The feeling has now passed, because Broxbourn now has a festival comparable with the best, and superior to many. The public loved it, and the general opinion was that they had seen the birth of a tradition which will develop with the years into something akin to that associated with Bathgate Newland's Day or Dooness Fair.

[illegible]

MRS. M. SHIELDS CROWNS QUEEN MYRA

South Queensferry, who had written the script. In all, the ceremony opened about an hour, although nobody was conscious of the passage of time, so absorbing was the spectacle. It came to a triumphant conclusion when the newly crowned Queen and	Lewis, R. T. Hughes & J. R. Novelty Racer, Bandman Woods, R. D. Mitchell, J. W. Boys' High Jump - J. W. son; J. J. Cerepanovich, J. R. R. Flaw Dicycle Race - J. M. R. T. Deane, & J. R. Fingler.
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for action descended from the stage to hand the proclamation through the crowd. Kathmanam was now at its highest, and everything and everybody were loudly cheered.

THE PROCESSION

[illegible][illegible]



“The earliest Gala Day I remember was 1960. It used to be so different because they had the crowning at Wood Park, just near the bowling green, but then I think they got wet so often they decided to move it to Watson Park.

Everything took place there on the Saturday after the crowning, even the races. Everyone stayed up there, where now they have all the different things during the week. I suppose it’s become like a Civic Week.

People say it was better up at the top but you can understand it if everybody’s going to get wet through! At Wood Park there were sideshows and the bands all stayed up there and had their turn at playing all through the afternoon. I preferred it but you’ve got to move with the times, I suppose. I used to help decorate the float when I worked at

Armadale Primary School. I didn’t see much of the Gala Day because I was up all night dressing the float! Now they have these floats from Drummonds and they’re probably undercover and can do it beforehand.

We dressed the float in Armadale in the school playground. You made different things during the week with the children, flowers and what not...but, of course, the lorries were being used, you couldn’t have them any sooner than the night before. I remember spending hours at the nursery making riding hats, covering balloons with papier mâché. The children helped with that and the mothers helped with the costumes. It was very enjoyable. It wasn’t just myself, more or less the whole staff would come and help.”

*Brenda Sneddon, Armadale*



*“Aye, the Gala was exciting. When I was a boy there was no television and there was two things in the town: the Gala Day and the church did the Sunday School picnic. They were the highlights of the year and the rest of it was just boring!”*

*Thomas Smart, Armadale*



## Putting the hours in

“There’s a big difference in the Gala Day from when I was a kid. You used to get loads of folk taking part, loads of floats, sweeties being flung, everybody having a great day. Now nobody can be bothered with it. I got involved with organising the Gala Day for my kids. I had it all through my growing up – my mum was on the Gala committee – and I want them to experience it too. The first year we had 16 weeks to do it and £3,000 and none of us knew what we were doing. I didn’t realise how much hard work went into it, how much there is behind the scenes. When Jacqui [Martin] is emailing, I’m on the phone; we’re trying to get bands, or more people walking, people to take stalls, or trying to get the street fair arranged, get the medals for the races, or fundraising ideas. If it wasn’t for neighbours and friends like Jacqui, I wouldn’t be able to do it.” *Cheryl Miechowian, Blackridge*



“Everything for the float was in my house, so I could draw, paint, mark out. There’s been knitting, sewing. One year the theme was Space. We stitched backdrops, all the planets and stars, I sketched out some space children in spacesuits, flying, onto some plywood. One of the members’ husband is a chippy so he cut them out. We had an alien spacecraft and a rocket ship. Then we had to paint them all.”

*Jacqui Martin, Blackridge*







*“...they kept phoning me up and saying, “We’ve got an open day here or an open day there, can we borrow your shark?!”*”

### **All hands on deck**

“I got involved from the early 1970s. Local firms were asked to put in lorries, not decorated or anything, but just to carry the kids. I worked for Menzies and we decided that we’d decorate the lorry too. I had all these different contacts and used to get everything for free: cardboard, wire meshing, spruce, paper for doing flowers and things; used to get it all free off local firms.

We had some excellent helpers at the time, including a local blacksmith, and I’d tell him I wanted brackets or whatever and he’d come and look and with no measuring, go away, come back and say, “will they do?”. And I never got one that didn’t fit! He was brilliant.

We had themes like ‘Old Woman in a Shoe’ and ‘Jaws’, with a 27 foot shark done in papier mâché. I had it on steel brackets and everyone said, they’re too weak, that won’t last. Because this thing was heavy. It was so big. It was actually jumping over the back of the lorry. The lorry was done as the boat and it was brilliant. It had an arm dangling out of its mouth, blood running down. People were coming up and putting their head in it to get their photo taken.

I committed myself to the whole row of Gala Days and then they kept phoning me up and saying, “We’ve got an open day here or an open day there, can we borrow your shark?”!

*Kevan White, Armadale*



## Reviving the tradition

“The Gala Days had fallen aside and they tried to revive it and we were asked to put a float in, Westmuir Road was asked to put a float in. I got involved in it, this was the late 70s and 80s. My kids enjoyed dressing up in the fancy dress parade and they liked the races, the egg & spoon race, the three-legged race. My son was Pinocchio one year and my daughter was Little Miss Muffet. The theme was usually nursery rhymes. Everybody in the street got involved in the Gala, decorating the float. It was a way for everyone to meet, to get to know one another. It was good times. It faded away as the kids got older and didn't want to get involved any more.”

*Shirley Macrae, West Calder*



*“Everybody in the street got involved in the Gala, decorating the float. It was a way for everyone to meet, to get to know one another. It was good times. It faded away as the kids got older and didn't want to get involved any more. ”*



## Pageant preparation

“What happened was the queen came from the Protestant school, the next year from the Catholic school and that’s how they did it. They went round all the different classes. Maybe the teacher chose them, I don’t remember, I wasn’t wanting to be in it! I was like, I didnae like this, everybody looking at me! I was too young. I was only 13. And I was a quiet person, you ken what I mean... I don’t know how I got picked! I was one of a big family, one of 11 children. I was very nervous, aye, but my mum and dad were excited, which was natural.

The dress was made in Smiths in Broxburn. I went down and got fitted, had to pick the materials. The ladies in waiting picked the materials they wanted, all the colours, and they made the dresses for nothing. I had to go into Edinburgh, to a shop down in Stockbridge, to hire the crown.”

*Betty Glen, nee Curran, Broxburn*

“Getting ready for the Gala Day was a communal activity. The men cut ferns for the arches and the women made tissue paper flowers to put on them. They were up the whole night before. You got a new outfit from the the local Co-op, which in Broxburn had a haberdashery department and there was a system, ‘appro’, where you could get the outfit and pay for it at the end of the week.”

*Tom Richardson, Broxburn*



“One year they decided to revamp their Gala week. A Civic Week leading up to the Gala Day. A friend and myself made all the flags. We cut up material, sewed them up on the sewing machine, all the flags for Main Street. They had a Gala queen. I won the Ladies half-a-yard of ale competition.”

*Liz McKinley, Whitburn (remembering West Calder)*

“Mum did the catering and dad did the sports, he was the sports convenor. I remember him being away at half five in the morning to the field to hammer in the posts and put up the ropes and all the rest of it.”

*Linda Clarke, Broxburn*



"I can remember when I was getting married in 1954. My brother was in the merchant navy and I sent him an invitation and he wrote back and said, I hope you realise that's Broxburn Gala Day. And we hadn't. We got up to the church on Station Road and it was packed. There were crowds there. And my husband played football professionally. He played with Aberdeen and Dunfermline. And so there were crowds of wee boys there."

*Norma Samuel, Broxburn*

"I was a park convenor. I was there at three in the morning getting the fencing up. We'd do it on a Friday but all the young ones would knock it down so we'd to do it again. We'd put the tents up too. This is in the early eighties. Its heyday

was the fifties for the Gala.

They had races with the rubbish bins. Somebody was in the bin and somebody would push it to the pub then push to the next one.

They had a bogey race for the kids but it stopped when a laddie broke his leg."

*Clifford Wilson, Armadale*

"The Gala Day was something you really looked forward to. I had to have a blazer and the short trousers we wore in those days, right up until I was about 13. We always had a collar and tie. Then we went back to the house and changed into athletic gear for the races. It brought the whole community together, people wouldn't go on holiday until after it was over."

*Robert Cook, Whitburn*





## Make do and mend

"I moved to Blackridge in 1968 and the first year I was working the Saturday of the Gala Day. Bill took it on Cine film, let me see it when I got back home and I thought, 'is that it?!' One blink and you've missed it! No realising so much went on along in the park.

Then our children came along and I thought, it's no my Gala Day but it's going to be my children's Gala Day. In the early seventies there was a lot of young mums like myself, and we said we need to do something for the Gala Day. We started a knitting bee. Thursday night, house about, eight to ten young mums. We put away 10p a week to collect money for crepe paper and all the things we needed to decorate a float.

For the first one we knitted tank tops for the parents and the children to wear in the float.

We gathered the kids' cast-offs, the men's shirts that had lost a button or something, and cut them into triangles and stitched them onto tape and made our own bunting. Back then people didn't have a lot of money to spend so you did what you could."

*Sadie and Bill Montgomery, Blackridge*

"You used to have a tinny, a tape on a tin cup. It was the Co-op did the purvey then. You got a pie and a sandwich and you got milk. The streets used to have an arch. The men started it on the Friday night. And the men used to get up early on a Saturday morning and away out to the fields gathering wild flowers to decorate; it was all ferns, rosebay willowherbs... it must have been just after the war."

*Norma Samuel, Broxburn*



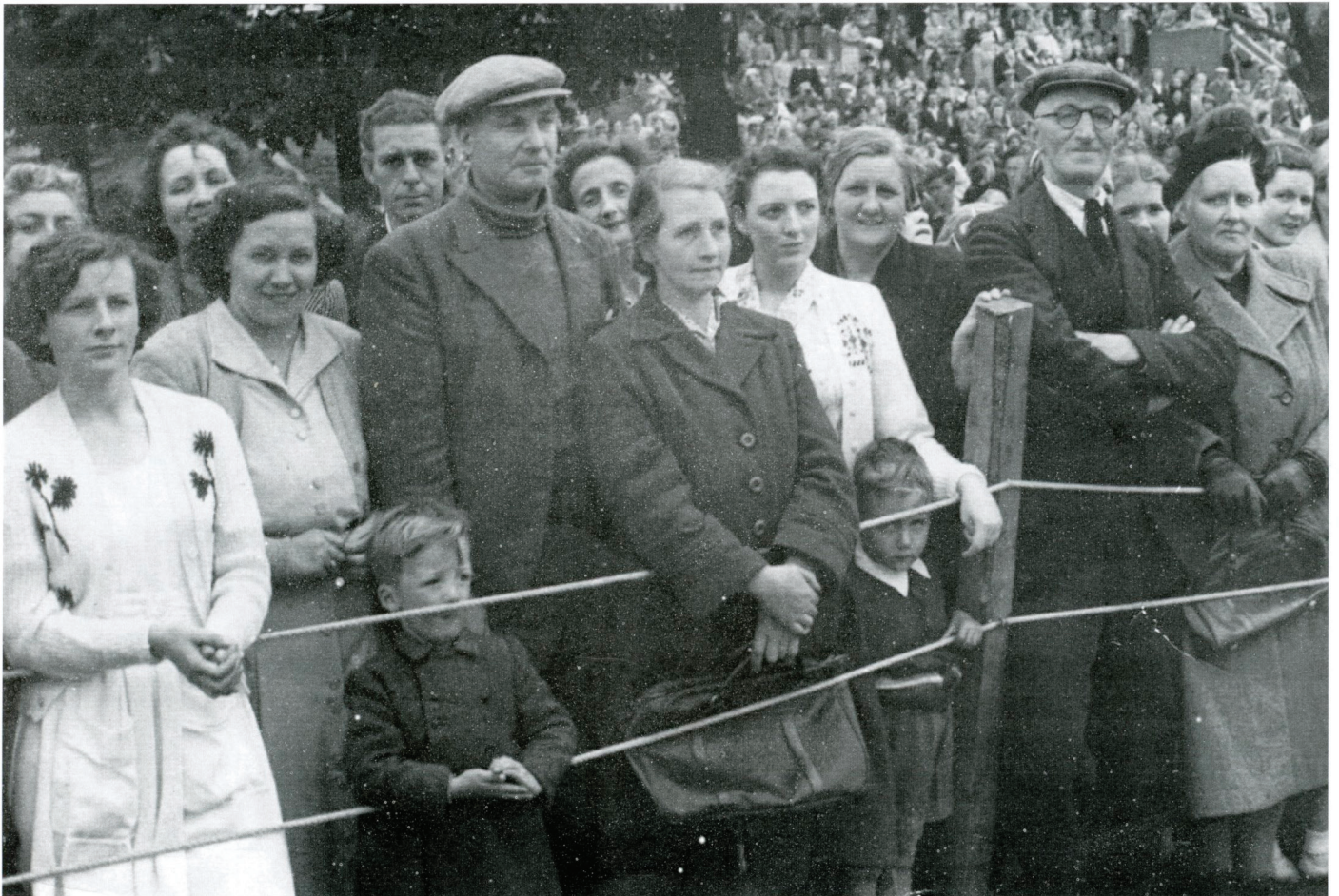
*"They realised they hadn't taken a photo of everyone in the Gala. So a week later they staged another photo in front of the Regal Cinema, but by then the flowers had all wilted."*

*Elaine Douglas*



# The day of the year arrives!

The decorations are up, the costumes are made and the 'tinnies' are prepared. There's a definite buzz in the air as the special day dawns for each town or village. Anticipation mounts for those participating in the pageant, the races, or pre-Gala Day activities, while spectators and proud family members look forward to witnessing moments they won't ever forget.





# The Pageant





## Treated like royalty

"The queen was secondary, fourth or fifth year. I was only Primary 4; aged eight or nine at the time. I was queen of the flower girls. We had an arch outside my house. The herald was Tom Williamson. The first year the queen was from the Protestant school, the next year she was from the Catholic school.

We gathered in the wee school playground and the people were standing on the air raid shelters in the back. It was 1952. Myra Hardy was queen [right], she was from Broxburn High School.

The turnout was unbelievable for the first one after the war. Every band



you could get a hold of. The Catholic band, all in green, the flute bands, all the bands. I had to give a speech to make which I remember: 'May it please Your Majesty, we your loyal subjects greet you and wish you all happiness and prosperity, may your path through life be strewn with roses and long may you be spared to set an example of faith, trust and goodwill to your subjects.'

I can still do it and I'm in my 70s!"

*Elaine Douglas, Broxburn*





"I remember Jessie Dougan being Gala queen. That was 1953. She lived upstairs from us and when they decorated her house they decorated our house as well. There was a big procession. The Gala Days were better then.

We always stood at the Bucks pub to watch the procession. There were double steps.

My son was in the Pipe Band. He was dressed up in the busby hats and kilts. I was there with my sisters and we were all greeting when we seen him marching.

Madison Fraser, my great granddaughter, she was queen in 2013."

*Nan Erskine, Armadale*

"When I was young all the schools walked. The brass band was always there. Armadale Juveniles; the kids in the Orange Lodge. We made a float three years in a row; The Flintstones one year, the pirates another, and the Hillbillies. I remember the flute band and the shows were up at the top park."

*Margaret MacDonald (Nan's daughter)*

"It was better then. That was where the crowning and everything was. The races as well. They got money if they won. The shows were there, the dodgems, the big wheel. Everything was in the one place."

*Nan Erskine*





# Eastertoun Primary

## School Interviews

“I can remember seeing Blackridge Gala Day when I was four. The floats had people in fancy dress and there was music. We always got a Gala Day bag with pies or sausage rolls, sandwiches, crisps, sweets and juice. The races were in the park, there were the egg & spoon race, the three-legged race, all the different races for the different ages, the pensioners’ race. The Gala Day used to bring the community together but I don’t think it does as much now.”

*Ann Margaret Murray*

“We had the queen at the school one year and we had to be cheerleaders in front of the floats, probably in Primary 6 or 7.

Everybody would always go back to the park and there were sports and races. Running races, all different ages, the sack race and you’d have the marathon. There were trophies and medals. For the top three. The trophies, you would hand them back at the start of the year.

The pram race was on the Friday before the Gala Day and everybody came out to watch. It wasn’t always a pram, you’d have your wooden go-cart with pram wheels on it and a bit of rope was your steering wheel. And it was hilarious, people would dress up as babies in nappies. That used to be the start of your Gala. It used to be all traditional decorations with the spruce. No cartoon characters like it is now. You used to have to go the week before and cut down your spruce to decorate your arches.”

*Carol Gosden*

“The first Gala Day I remember seeing I must have been about 10. The first one I took part in I would be about 14.

You went to the party and you took your ticket to the wee box and they handed your bag out.

We used to go up on a Friday night to watch the pram race coming down the hill from the old bank past Arnold Clark’s.

Everybody decorated their houses with flags and paper roses made out of toilet paper or crepe paper.

The Gala needs to try a bit harder nowadays because there’s so many incomers to Armadale, it needs to do something to help them integrate with all the Armadale people.”

*Catherine Furness*

“I remember when I was at primary school when I was a wee boy about six years old seeing my first Gala Day. We got funny prizes, maybe if you were good at a certain event you got a prize of a pair of skipping ropes or a ping pong bat and ball.

There were races, the egg & spoon race, the sack race, jumping races, sprints, hurdles. You took part if you

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*“....The pram race was on the Friday before the Gala Day and everybody came out in the street to watch. It wasn’t always a pram, you’d have your wooden go-cart with pram wheels on it and a bit of rope was your steering wheel. And it was hilarious, people would dress up as babies in nappies. That used to be the start of your Gala.”*



wanted to or you just watched. There was bunting up in between the lampposts and there was a Gala queen. It's definitely a good thing. The atmosphere of a Gala Day is brilliant. If you're young, old or a baby, it's good for everyone and if the sun shines, it's even better."

*Chris Gosden*

"I was about five years old when I saw my first Gala. The floats were very good. I took part when I was older. I got a bag with a pie and bun and a carton of juice.

There were all kinds of races, fun and serious. There was a race called the schoolboy marathon for under 16. It was a mile and the winner got a big trophy and a watch. And I won it when I was 14.

The shows would come. They used to be where St Andrews Primary is. That was the showground.

I remember the pram race. It would start at the top of the hill at a pub called the Bucks, it came along the Main Street and turned left at the Cross.

People decorated their houses. It was very competitive. They decorated with spruce and paper flowers."

*David Furness*

"In 1965 I was a fairy. We got a bag with a pie. There were races in the park after the parade and there were prizes handed out at the end. The shows came for the week of the Gala. I remember the pram race. People would decorate their houses.

It brings everybody out in the community together."

*Jean McCorrie*

"The first one I remember was back in 1975, I was five years old and my brother was in the Gala. I took part in three Gala parades.





I remember some floats. It was always the Balbardie float that stood out.

The races took place in the top park after the parade, Wood Park. There were sprints and marathons. You used to get medals.

The shows came every year for the Gala Day. I remember the pram race. I used to love it. The Gala's good. Course it is. You see people you've not seen for ages so it's a good thing for Armadale."

*John Kerr*

The first Gala Day I remember seeing was actually one that I participated in. We'd moved through from Glasgow where we didn't have anything like the Gala Day. I was in Primary 3 and I decorated my bike. There was quite a few of the class that had decorated

their bikes. We got to do that at the school. My bike was decorated as a boat.

There were always lots of floats at the Gala Day. People had put in lots of work. There were trucks that were decorated, there were tractors as well. People had decorated their bikes, their prams.

Everybody used to go along and do all the races in the park. There was the three-legged race, the egg & spoon race, the wheelbarrow race, the ordinary running race. Lots of races and everybody participated. I think I got a medal from the Gala Day races."

*Linda Smith*

"We never used to have Gala Days in Livingston so we used to come through to my Aunt Margaret's house in





Armadale and we used to take in the Gala Day with all my cousins and aunties and uncles, it was very much a family affair.

I remember the floats because that was one of the high points, they used to throw sweets at us and I used to get quite excited about picking them up.

I always remember we used to arrive early in Armadale and me and my cousins would always walk around the area that was round about my aunty and uncle's house and we used to look at all the houses that were decorated."

*Mark Gosden*

"The first Gala Day I can remember I was a fairy in and I must have been five or six. I got a bag with a pie and a bun.

It was always lovely weather at the Gala Day so there were always races after the parade. That's what I remember, lovely weather. In the park I remember it was dead exciting and loads of folk taking part and different age groups. It was good."

*Mary Weir*

"When I was in Primary 1 I was a fairy. I remember the float I was on because it was a bare lorry because the school didn't decorate one. The Gala Day committee just got a bare lorry with nothing on it apart from chairs and tried to hang a few flags on it. The chairs weren't even on it properly because at one point we stopped at the traffic lights and some chairs fell off."

*Rhona Waddel*

"I took part in the Gala Day lots of times. I remember dressing up with the school quite a few times and I walked with the Brownies and I was also a maid of honour in Primary 5 as part of the pageant.

*"I remember the floats because that was one of the high points, they used to throw sweets at us and I used to get quite excited about picking them up."*

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On the morning of the Gala Day all the floats used to pass our house and you could hear all the noise and the bands so you used to get really excited seeing them all before they lined up in the parade.

The pram race was on the Friday night. It was so good. The streets were packed with people and lots of prams entered and stopped at tables along the street to take a drink and then they used to go down the hill and I remember sometimes the prams would fall over and the people would fall out.

Only a few people decorated their houses back then but now lots of people do.

I'm a member of Armadale Gala Committee and I know how much time and work goes into putting on the day.

Every year we have more than 400 kids taking part in our Gala Day sports and this year we have more than 130 kids in our pageant. Lots of people get really involved and make such a big effort and people always say Armadale Pageant is the highlight of their year."

*Zoe Woods*

*Parents and Grandparents interviewed by pupils in Miss Weston's Primary 7 class at Eastertoun Primary School, Armadale.*



## Etched in the memory

"I was picked up on the day about 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock.

I remember it all, I really do. My mum and dad. The arch. Our house was decorated a couple of days before. My dad was a keen gardener and I can mind him getting bits of greenery and getting it all decorated. And the night before the band was up at the house, the public band.

We walked round the park and that, got crowned and that, met a' the different people that were

presented to me, up on the stage. There was quite a lot of them.

My brothers and sisters were all there, my mother and aunties and uncles. My mother got a new outfit, and my dad.

I went to Bangour Hospital on the Sunday, went round all the wards.

When I look back I'm quite proud. At the time I was a bit nervous but I done it all."

*Betty Glen, Broxburn*





## Tomboy troubles

"I was chosen to be a fairy and I was quite horrified because I was a tomboy, always in dungarees – I inherited my brothers' old clothes – short bowl cut, always out playing in the garden. Hide and seek, cricket with the boys, snooker with my brothers, fishing – you name it. Girly things did not exist! My sister was ten years older than me and very girly but I was a tomboy. And I was going to be in the Gala Day as a fairy. My brother was a halberdier, I thought that looked quite interesting with the sword and flat cap. That I wouldn't have minded but a fairy was quite horrific.

I vividly remember getting taken to the hairdresser in Armadale. My dad's sister was a machinist for Marks & Spencer and she made my dress. My shoes were from Dolcis on Princes Street in Edinburgh. I got these white sandals and that was me... completely traumatised! There were a lot of girly girls in the class that absolutely loved getting dressed up but I wasn't in the least interested. I don't think I wore a dress again until I was a bridesmaid and then when I got married! We did the whole parade and then up to the park. That was the good bit, you got your box with your Tunnock's caramel wafer and a pie. And my mum never got pies so that was amazing for me – it was an education getting a Scotch pie. That kind of thing was nice. But I was quite upset at everyone commenting on how nice it was to see me out of dungarees. I was a grumpy fairy.

Miss Glum! After we got up to the park I went home, put on my trusty dungarees and went up to the shows."

*Christine McGhie, Armadale*

*"Hide and seek, cricket with the boys, snooker with my brothers, fishing – you name it. Girly things did not exist. My sister was 10 years older than me and very girly but I was a tomboy. And I was going to be in the Gala Day as a fairy..."*





## All the fun of the fair

"I can remember going to Burngrange Park and parading up the street. You got a new dress. Codona's Shows came after the Gala. Going to the shows was a big thing.

The cubs, the scouts, the brownies and schools were in the parade. My father played the cornet in the brass band. You got your bag and a 10p piece to spend. You got a pie and a cake and biscuits and an orange and an apple. Pie Jock's was a pie shop in West Calder and they gave the bags.

It was a miner's village and didn't have much money. There weren't a lot of decorations. They had flags and bunting across the streets. It was a big family day.

We marched up the street from the library to Burngrange. They had races at the park. I liked the egg & spoon race. All the wee places round about came to the Gala and marched down the street."

*Gladys Hartley, West Calder*



"My first Gala was at Polbeth. West Calder had their own Gala but that was up at Burngrange. It was a family event. Potters lorry was used for a float and the school done it up every year, a different theme every year. The crowds would line the streets. It was only up to 15 that you would go on the parade.

Finlay's was our shows. He was a local man and he started up the shows. He had the carousel with the horses. Sometimes it was a week, sometimes just for the weekend.

The bands played in the park. We got pallets and made them into arches. They'd decorate the houses. People would try to pinch the pallets for bonfires."

*Bill Mackenzie, West Calder*

"One of the main organisers at one time was Major Walker. He was brilliant. They reckon the Gala Day here in Broxburn 1953 was better than the Coronation down in London. He had Rolls Royces – two of them. That was way back but the Gala faded away.

They revived it years later. A councillor called Joe Cummings did it. They made it a Civic Week. They had show jumping and concerts in the Regal Picture Hall. Since then the Gala has faded away and then come back again. And this crowd now are arranging it again. They're doing a good job and good luck to them."

*Pat McCue, Broxburn*



“We never had shows at our Gala Days when I was young. What we had at night was a concert and a dance in a big marquee. Just in a field. It was fabulous, like. Now the day starts with the crowning of the queen at half past 11. Then there’s a procession to Hermand Football Park. That’s where the races are, all kinds, wheelbarrow, three-legged race. We go round the doors collecting for it. We run bingo on a Monday night. We run dances and the like. West Lothian Council has helped us a lot. We get the school for nothing and we beg everywhere.”

*Maureen Buchanan, West Calder*

“Before, you used to go to the public park which was across the A89. You had races and you got a bag. Then I think it had to do with the Coronation in 1953, they started the Gala Days with the queen. And then you had your fairies and your knight on the white horse, and that was when a’ the pageantry came in. Ladies in waiting, pages, flower girls. I really wanted to be a fairy ‘cause they had white dresses, net dresses, a wee wand wi’ a star on it... but they put the names in a hat and mine never came out!

It was the highlight of the year. You always got a new dress for it. The parade came along the auld toon and my mum and dad stayed there, and my mum she used to have a full house on the Saturday; folk from a’ roond aboot came up and watched the parade.”

*Mary MacNeish, Broxburn*



“The Co-operative helped the West Calder Gala Day. It was the biggest Co-operative around. In the early days we didn't have a queen. But it was a good Gala Day.”

*Netta Kennedy, West Calder*

“You’d have got a bag with a pie. You got a wee tin mug with a ribbon to go round your neck for your milk. The schools marched in the procession. There’d be bunting up on the street.”

*Marion Miskelly, West Calder*





## Like Christmas Day

My earliest memory of the Gala Day is the excitement building up to it. I can remember the money being put away every week for the milkman and the coalman. You got your programme and you could see everybody that was taking part. There was the queen and her escort and they were chosen by the pupils at the school.



It alternated between St Nicholas and the public school. The parade started at Uphall and they walked all the way down to the school. There was a special stage set up. The escort always came on a horse and the queen was in a carriage pulled by horses. I was picked to be a fairy with a wand. I would be about seven.

We were on a float, a lorry, and we waved to everybody because everyone in Broxburn came out to see the parade. It was wonderful. We always had out flags for the Gala. The year I was a fairy we'd made what seemed like millions of flowers to decorate the house.

We got a new dress and new sandals, Clarks. I always got red sandals, I loved red sandals. You stroked these garments every night before you went to bed, you couldn't wait to put them on. It was almost like Christmas Day, I don't think you slept the night before."

*Kay Denholm, Broxburn*

*"We got a new dress and new sandals, Clarks. I always got red sandals, I loved red sandals. You stroked these garments every night before you went to bed, you couldn't wait to put them on."*



"We had a pie, a German biscuit and cream cookies, it was split in the middle with cream. It was Whitburn Gala. We all made our way to the school and we stood in our class, the wee ones first then the bigger ones at the end. The Whitburn Brass Band led the parade and there was East Whitburn Pipe Band.

1934 was the first time they had the Gala queen and ladies in waiting in the procession. There was a champion that came behind the queen's car. The queen was from the qualifying class and we all voted for her.

They had a fancy dress parade and they had collecting tins to collect the money for the next

Gala Day. They'd have wee fairies in one float and flower girls in another.

We marched in the parade as part of the school. In my day all the pubs were shut til the Gala Day was over.

It was in the swing park in Whitburn. The boys would do the marathon, four times round the park. Our Gala Day was the first Saturday in July"

*Jim McHarry, Whitburn*

*"In my day all the pubs were shut til the Gala Day was over."*





## Practising to perfection

"We rehearsed for weeks before it and on the day I'd be up bright and breezy because it would start early, 10'clock perhaps. It was a huge procession. The Friday night before it was pouring buckets but the Saturday was fine. Big, big turnout. Open top fancy carriages. I loved it. I loved every minute of it. I wasn't in the least bit nervous but my mum and dad were. My dad was stick thin because of the nerves. During the year you maybe opened fetes or something but it was mostly all about the big day. The following year you went back as the ex-Gala Day queen and handed over the crown to the new Gala Day queen.

The house was decorated, the public band came on the Friday night to serenade the Gala Day queen and your mother and father had to provide vittels and bottles of beer or whatever for the band.

There wasn't as many industrial estates, and there wasn't as many private estates that have sprung up, and you virtually went all through Broxburn in this very posh car. They were all dressed like they were going to a wedding. A lot of the buildings put up ferns, arches, it was beautiful. Everything was focused on the Gala Day."

*Marjory Stewart nee Fields, Broxburn*





“I loved the Gala Day when I was younger cause you specifically went out and bought clothes. New clothes and new shoes. I went to Livingston or Glasgow. It was always white I picked. I cannae stay clean in blue, let alone white! When I came home, it was straight in the bin with the clothes. Sometimes you were that bogging you weren’t even allowed inside.

My dad was in the wheelie bin race when I was young. The roads weren’t shut off or anything. They had made the bin look like an old plane. It was a race from Westrigg to the other end of the village but you had to stop in every pub. When we did the race again a couple of years ago it had to be a pram or a wheelbarrow and they had to wear knee pads and a helmet and nae alcohol.”

*Cheryl Miechowian, Blackridge*

“I was a page boy in the parade and after that I used to go in for the fancy dress competition. I won it as Old Mother Riley. And a guy I was at school with, he and I used to vie with each other



for the first prize. I won it one year as Oor Wullie with his bucket, he won it the next year as Tarzan, I think. Not that you got much, if you were lucky half a crown or something, but it was good fun.”

*Tom Richardson, Broxburn*



*“For the 40th all the flower girls had a banner with the year on. All 40 years of the Gala.”*

*Maureen Buchanan*



“I remember being a fairy when I was seven. My grandmother, who had been a dressmaker, made my outfit. It was a short white dress and there were sequins sewn onto it.

It was a very hot summer and people had been fainting, but we were okay, we had been on a lorry. The flower girls who were walking were fainting with the heat, and the knight challenger fainted off the platform altogether.”

*Lynn Sloan, Whitburn*



“You got a wee cardboard box with a teacake, a caramel wafer, and a caramel log and a snowball and there was a cake, like a sponge cake and it was covered in chocolate with coconut on top.”

*Linda Clarke, Broxburn*

“It’s the week after the kids go back to school after the summer holidays. Last year the theme was ‘circus’ and I made the costumes for it. We had ballet dancers and tightrope walkers and strong men and you name it we had it and it was fabulous. I made 27 costumes. And we won the

first prize, St Nicholas won first prize. We also made the trays that the usherettes have with popcorn and sweets on to throw out. We had a banner saying ‘St Nicholas Circus Comes to Town’.

It was good moving the Gala from June. We have our Gala in August and we have floats coming from Bathgate and Bo’ness and all the bands. Last year the parade took nearly two hours to go down.”

*Kay Denholm, Broxburn*





# Sports and activities





## Aiming to be the best

"It was in the swing park in Whitburn. The boys would do the marathon, four times round the park. The champion of the sports got a cup. You got money as well, 3 shillings, 6 shillings and 9 shillings." *Jim McHarry, Whitburn*

"The junior marathon was two laps and the senior marathon was four laps and I used to go out training for months before so I could compete. At the end of the Gala Day all the people who won trophies were taken through the village on people's shoulders. The money that I won at the Gala Day – and at that time it was quite a lot, between three pounds and five pounds – I took on holiday to Blackpool and that was your pocket money for the two weeks. When I was nine or 10 years old, I bought a Slazenger Eclipse racket. I've still got it after all these years.

On the Friday night at East Whitburn Gala Day they had the five-a-sides for the boys and the rounders competition for the girls. And pillow fights. A greasy pole stretched over a kind of trellis, and you had to get up on this pole with

pillows filled with whatever, and you had to knock the person off. Best of three. And, of course, you were slipping all over the place! It was funny."

*Robert Cook, Whitburn*

"On the Friday night they had a cleek and gird race, then the pram race. That started at Church Street and they went in all the pubs on this side and got a half pint of beer in each. Of course they couldn't drink it all. They flung it about themselves mostly. The police stopped it in the end. A couple of years later it was decorated prams – beautiful. And then it was lads with shopping trolleys. They even had a pole vaulting competition over the canal."

*Pat McCue, Broxburn*





"It was a good day. Plenty races. Get a couple of bob for winning. The winner got a medal. There was the three-legged race, longer races.

They had a pram race at West Calder. They had different prams done up and somebody getting pushed. They sat and stopped at every pub and had a pint. There was nine pubs in West Calder. Eight pubs and a hotel."

*Bill McKenzie, West Calder*

"We all went up to the park for the races. The dad's race, the mum's race, the egg & spoon, the sack race and the tug of war. We'd have a picnic

when the races were on. It was a good get together. It was an exciting time when we were wee. Round about the 1970s you had a pram that was decorated and you had a baby, an adult in it. It came from Miller's Bridge all the way down to Hall's factory. It was lots of fun. But then it got silly and too much drinking and it was stopped."

*Kay Denholm, Broxburn*

*"The champion of the sports got a cup. You got money as well, 3 shillings, 6 shillings and 9 shillings."*





# Music





## Striking the right note

"I joined the band in 1935 and moved onto solo cornet when I was about 14. I played my first Gala Day when I was five and a half. The band had to shorten their step, they were outpacing me! Bands were generally a family thing and my father's family were all musical. He encouraged me. In the early days there wasn't much money as you can imagine, and when we went to play at some of the local Gala Days we walked. We carried the instruments and we walked there and we walked back, and played back in again. One of the trombone players in Whitburn Band could mimic a cow mooing on his trombone and when we were out walking from Whitburn to wherever we were going, quite honestly they [the cows] all came out to the side of the road and that caused a bit of a laugh."

*Chris Blair, Whitburn*

"I played the trumpet or the cornet in the West Calder Brass Band. I was 13 or 14 when I joined. When I left school I went to train as a butcher with the Co-op. We practised to go on parade for the Gala Day. We'd play in the public park after the parade, too. We played in Polbeth Gala Day as well. The Gala Day was run through West Calder Co-operative. We did the bags in the bakery."

*Pat Woods, West Calder*

"Whitburn Borough Band played and everybody was presented to the queen and took their places on the platform, and it was all done in time to the music. It was all schooled and very structured. It was very good. The band did very well, I remember them winning championships when I was a teenager. They had a very distinctive sound."

*Lynn Sloan, Whitburn*

*"One of the trombone players in Whitburn Band could mimic a cow mooing on his trombone..."*





## Tunes from near and far

"I was about seven when I started in the band and was about 12 year old when I first played at the Gala Day. I was offered parts like page boy but I never took that 'cause I was playing in the band. We were trained by Mr Willie Ferrier to play in the band. I call him Mr Armadale – he was Provost of the town I think about three or four times, he was in the Co-operative, he was in the union, he was a band member. They even named a street after him in the town.

My father, a steel moulder at Atlas steel foundry, where Willie Ferrier worked too actually, was president of the Gala Day for many years here. My father had all the swords and all the costumes and things all out ready for the Gala Day.

At that time it was only Friday night and the Saturday. They did the *Oyez, Oyez, Oyez!* from the Cross right to where the queen was, the proclamation and then they went to the queen's house and, of course, the band got a wee

sandwich and a cup of tea and then went on to where we were gawn to. On the Saturday, once the walk was over they crowned the



queen in the park, after all the crowning and all that was over, the dignitaries went away for a spot of lunch. In the afternoon they had a' the races and entertainment going on in the park.

At night when you left the park, a' the brass bands would join together and you would have the mass bands. The bands would play down the street, the pipe bands, the flute bands or whatever. You had one tune that everybody played then Armadale band would play at the Goth because the Goth sponsored Armadale Borough Band. When it started they gave us the instruments. Other bands would be sponsored by, I dunno, The Star, the Regal Bar or whatever and they would play outside there.

Then the men would go into the pub and a' the wives had to go home. Of course we didn't get to





go in... but later on in life we did!

My brothers played in the band too, George and William, and I still play in the band though there's not many of us left. They started organising right after the Gala Day. It's just the same today.

Everybody thinks that's it finished until next year, but it's no. All these people have got to go and start raising funds for the next one. They do a really good job, the Gala Day committee and it takes them all year. A lot of people don't understand that but I saw it in the early years with my dad and all the work he put into it."

*Thomas Smart, Armadale*

"It's the last Saturday in June. Crowning at the park. At the end, after the parade. You used to get a Gala box for a pound. You got a ticket and got it from the caravan. They still do it. Still get a turn out. The streets are absolutely mobbed. Starts at 11 in the morning. We've usually got dozens of bands, marching. All the bands, Orange flute bands, brass bands, foreign bands. We always have a band from Scandinavia. It's a tradition."

*Peter McKinley, Whitburn*

*"They do a really good job, the Gala Day committee, and it takes them all year. A lot of people don't understand that but I saw it in the early years with my dad and all the work he put into it."*





# Images

Front cover	Flower fairies at Broxburn Gala Day 1952, courtesy of Elaine Douglas.
Back cover	Whitburn Band at Gala Day 1950s, courtesy of Robert Cook.
Inside covers	Advertisements from assorted Armadale Gala Day programmes.

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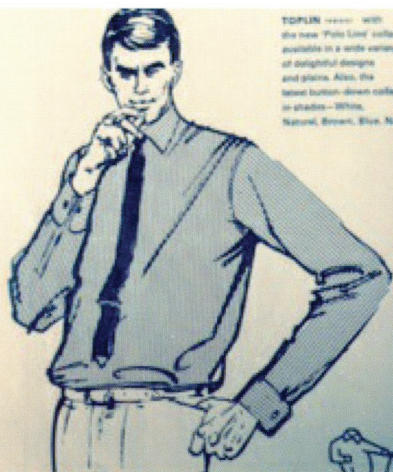
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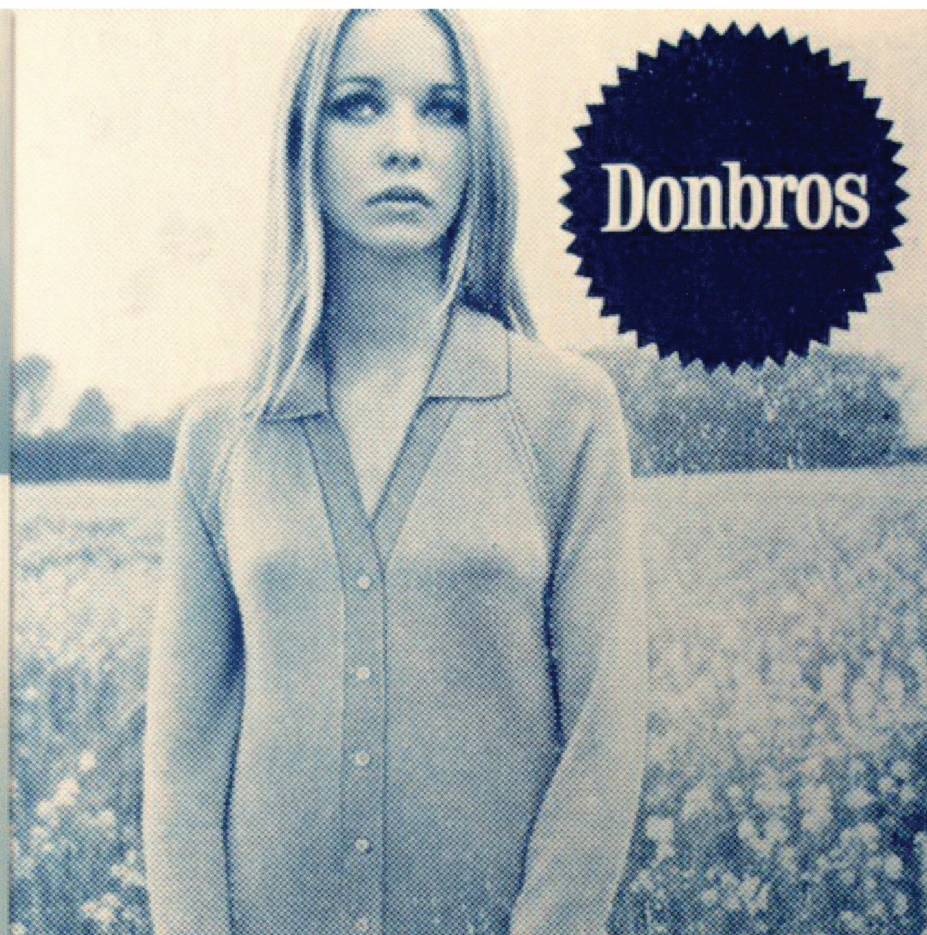
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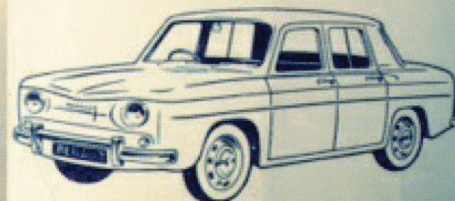
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