



Out In The Scots' Fresh Air

The outdoor life was much espoused by the Victorians and Edwardians – camping, walking and cycling were all actively promoted as being highly beneficial to health. Summer camps for poor children from the inner cities were also advocated. From as early as the 1860s, organisations like the Glasgow Foundry Boys' Religious Society recognised the value in getting children out into the fresh air, and the Boys Brigade was one of the first to set up summer camps – all the boys had to bring was their Bible and Hymnal, everything else was provided. For many, these summer camps offered their first glimpse of green fields, cattle and sheep, and perhaps even the seaside.

[opposite top] *The Scottish YMCA Holiday Camp at Colintraine on the Kyles of Bute, 1908.*

[opposite bottom] *Campers with an ill-pitched tent in Ardkinglas, c.1906.*

[left] *The author's grandfather being photographed during a walk c.1900.*



[below left] *A family picnic in 1901 or 1902, from a Kodak snapshot. The Edwardian picnic was a more formal event than today – with china cups and saucers, and a robust teapot!*

[below right] *Posing with new bicycles c.1906, before setting off for a ride.*



[main picture] *The Highland Games at Tomintoul c.1903, photographed and published by William Meldrum of Tomintoul. The Tomintoul Games are amongst the oldest in Scotland, tracing their origins back to the early 1840s.*

[inset] *The Sword Dance being demonstrated at an unspecified Highland gathering c.1905. The majority of 'Highland Games' cards from the period seem to show the sword dance rather than the many other activities which took place. The large and unwieldy nature of contemporary cameras may have had something to do with this!*



Then, of course, there were the Highland Gatherings. Driven by the popularity of the writings of Sir Walter Scott, the first formally organised Highland Games of the modern era took place in the early 1820s. The tradition of sporting competitions in rural communities can, of course, be traced back many centuries, but the traditional games as we know them today are less than 200 years old.

'Splendid scenery, novel trials of skill and strength, the picturesque garb of the combatants, and the strange tongue in which the onlookers give vent to their mirth or satisfaction at defeat or failure, combine to render a Celtic gathering unique' was the description of a Highland Gathering by W. Gibson in *Frank Leslie's Monthly Magazine*, in 1882. For the benefit of his readers, Gibson illustrated such 'unique' sports as tossing the caber, putting the stone, wrestling, and throwing the hammer.

Of the prizes awarded, Gibson told his American readership that: 'There are not, as in most scientific contests, silver flagons, cups, belts or medals. Rarely are jewels or merely ornamental articles given; a plaid for the ghillie's wife, a piece of tartan to make a kilt for the boys or a petticoat for the girls; a new crook for the shepherd, a bag of flour, a piece of meat, some crockery, or a useful tea-service in common metal, or a few shillings in a piece of paper toward paying the rent at Candlemas, being some of the favorite honors to be striven for.' There is nothing like a bit of poetic licence to enliven a bit of reporting, and further embed the

[below] *Writing from Edinburgh to his friend Dr. Richards in London, in 1905, 'Edgar' wrote: 'I have got the originals of these photos. They were taken about 2½ years ago – imagine our surprise when they were offered for sale in town here!'*



romantic idyll of life back in the old country – which was what ex-pat Scots seemed to want to read!

For those not fortunate enough to live in the countryside, town and city councils created fine parks for their citizens to walk and picnic in, and provided bandstands where regular open-air concerts were held.

Victorian cities, as we know, were not particularly healthy places. Amongst other things, there was a lack of sanitation, there was the pollution from hundreds of thousands of factory chimneys and domestic chimneys, and then there were the little gifts that the country's millions of horses deposited wherever they went!

In many Victorian cities, you could walk a long way and never see green leaves, and the massive industrialisation and expansion of the 19th century did nothing to ameliorate that situation. In the polluted atmosphere and squalid living conditions, those at the bottom of the social order worked very hard, were paid very little, and died very young. As Andrew Aird wrote in his 1894 book, *Glimpses of Old Glasgow*: 'Public Parks for the community were not required early in the century. The limited area of the city made it easy for the inhabitants to

enjoy fresh air amid Nature's beauties without loss of time. The rapid growth and widening area of the city, however, made additional "lungs" beyond what Glasgow Green provided quite a necessity. Our civic rulers were not slow in providing additional parks, an account of which, as well as of the Green, I give.'

The practice of describing public parks and greens as the 'lungs of a city' – for that was what they were – developed out of a description of Hyde Park as 'the lungs of London' in the late 18th century, probably by William Pitt. The term was first used in Parliament

[below] Titled 'Highland Dancing', this 1903 postcard was published at a time when the romance of Scotland and the Highlands was at its peak, and improved travel made visiting 'North Britain' relatively straightforward.



[right] 'Highland Games - Wrestling', c.1905. A large crowd watches the wrestling bout, while the caber lies on the grass waiting to be tossed.





Three of Glasgow's many public parks, as seen on Edwardian postcards: the ornate greenhouses of Glasgow Botanic Gardens, which was moved to its present location in 1843 (left); Tolcross Park, which was opened to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 (below); and Camphill Park, opened in 1894 (bottom).

as early as 1808, reputedly by William Windham, Secretary of State for War in Lord Grenville's Whig Government. It subsequently passed into common usage to describe the beneficial atmospheric and environmental effect of open parkland amidst much industrial and domestic pollution.

Two important pieces of legislation pushed forward the creation of public parks – the Glasgow Public Parks Act of 1859 and the Public Parks (Scotland) Act of 1878. As a result of the passing of these pieces of legislation, a broad-brush template was established for the development of parks, and for their maintenance and access. One of the first to be constructed, 'upheld and maintained under the provisions of the Public Parks (Scotland) Act 1878', was Aberdeen's Duthie Park, which was opened in 1883 by Princess Beatrice, deputising for the Queen who was recovering from an accident at the time.

'If we had a few more squares and open spaces', wrote Aird, 'they would greatly conduce to the healthfulness of the lieges ... No doubt our Health Committee will in due time try to increase the number of these.'

