



The Life and Times of Two Ironmongers!



Many years ago, there was an adage in the introduction to a television programme – “People and places may change, but the facts remain the same”. Away from the world of entertainment, the words also ring true of real life. Our story this month examines people and places who did indeed change, but their story remains an important part of Kirkcaldy’s retail history.

When embarking on the *50 Objects Project* the spark which provided the inspiration for this story was completely unknown to the team. By sheer good fortune an unusual, interesting and quirky article was stumbled upon by chance.

Although certainly not a mainstream item, the fact that it was so different prompted the team to bring it to a wider readership. The tale concerned an ironmonger with an extremely inventive mind whom we are quite confident is, as with our team, unknown to the bulk of the town’s population. Our research conjured up a light-hearted notion of earnest and uncompromising citizens gliding around the town’s thoroughfares as if figures in a ballet. Not every object has to be deadly serious – everyone is entitled to Andy Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame!

In the planning stages, the idea grew of enhancing the story by comparing the subject with another much better known

similar business. The idea seemed both fitting and appropriate as both were ironmongers, both were established almost simultaneously in the 1850s (or so we thought) – one lasting for half a century – the other more than 100 years, with both trading on Kirkcaldy's High Street.

The narrative will both look at the founders and the family members who followed them. One is a name synonymous with Kirkcaldy, both in personal and business terms, while the other simply seems to have slipped 'under the radar'. 'Under the radar' or not, before their demise, they made a splash which carried their name throughout the UK and even almost as far away from these shores as it is possible to get – New Zealand!



The names Barnet and Wilson are the foundations of the article. To many, the former will be immediately and irrevocably linked with *Barnet and Morton's* emporium and the fine building on the High Street which housed the firm for a substantial part of its existence.

The name Wilson will be both more problematic and difficult to place, but his quirky story equally deserves to be told.

What is especially pleasing is that, at the time of writing, the former premises of both firms are still standing. It is

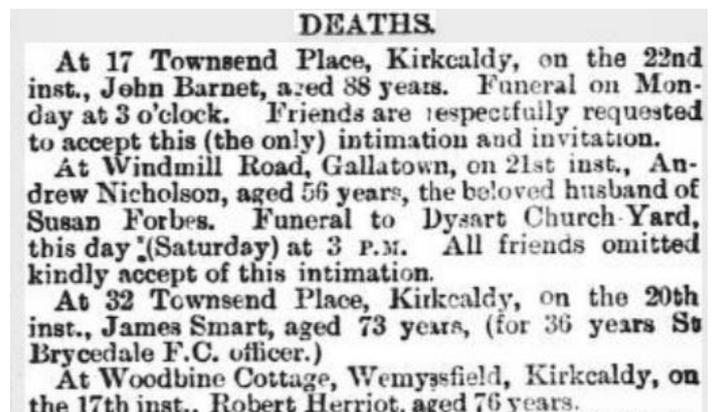
heartening to note that that which housed both the Wilson's business and family home has recently undergone an extensive renovation, resulting in a much enhanced appearance.



For no better reason than that Barnet and Morton were the first to be established they will be the starting point, thereby relegating the lesser known and certainly quirky Wilson tale to come second.

Both stories commence at the time of their inception through to the early decades of the 20th century. The thinking behind this approach is that not only it gives an insight into their formative years, but equally, describes a way of life (using the writing style of the day) which has long gone – but would be very familiar to many readers' grandparents and great grandparents. Today's labour saving devices and the convenience of electricity to power them still lay well in the future. Housework, like most manual work of the time, was not an easy proposition and required the application of substantial 'elbow grease'.

The year 1894 is a good place to begin the narrative, especially the month of February. In the issue of the 24th February the *Fife Free Press* mourned the deaths of four significant



figures in the town. Not all were major players although each was highly respected and they were; Robert Herriot, James Smart and, as was the customary address of the time, 'Mrs Elder'. The fourth, John Barnet, plays a significant part in the narrative.

Robert Herriot died on the 17th February aged 76 at his home *Woodbine Cottage* in Wemyssfield. A retired merchant, who along with his brother, had run the substantial grocery firm of *R & J Herriot*, operating from premises on the corner of the High Street and Rose Street. A native of Haddington, he had attached himself to the Baptist movement in Rose Street and became one of its leading lights, arguing and supporting its move to Whyte's Causeway in 1852. His connection with the church extended to over 40 years, much of it as treasurer.



The *Fife Free Press* on the 3rd January 1894 had reported that he had been presented with a marble bust of himself by the Church congregation to mark his sterling service to the organisation. The sculptor was a Mr Taylor of Edinburgh and a sketch of the finished article is shown. Sadly, the weather and ill-health had prevented him attending in person and the bust was collected on his behalf by his son, John L. Herriot.

Just over a month later, the *Fife Free Press* of the 24th February, as well as carrying the notice of his demise, paid him

a handsome obituary. During his fifty year plus residence in Kirkcaldy he had served as a Town Councillor and for a spell was the Burgh Treasurer. An active member of the Scottish Liberal Association Robert had been heavily involved in the planning of the celebrations which marked the 50th Anniversary of the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832.

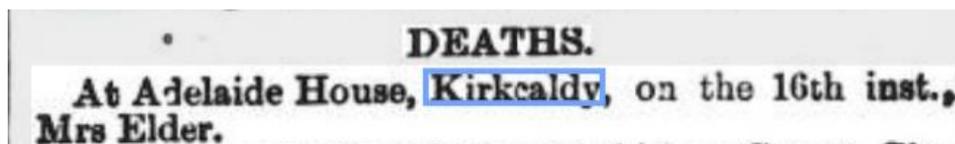
If this was not enough, in addition to running his business, he was a founder member and chairman of the Kirkcaldy Building Society, whose office was also in Rose Street. He had also served as a manager and trustee of Kirkcaldy & District Trustee Savings Bank. He was heavily involved in a number of movements which promoted abstinence from alcohol, most notably the *Band of Hope*.

The Fifeshire Advertiser of the 3rd March reported that his home had been broken into on the Saturday following his death and some valuables stolen. Mrs Herriot's niece had been staying with his widow when they were awoken during the night. Each thought that the other was the moving figure they saw in the darkness, until the burglars bolted! It transpired that same evening a man had been assaulted and robbed on the Sands Road. His watch and chain, money and a tobacco pouch, had been stolen. The police believed that the same two individuals were involved and that one was possibly a woman!

The day before Robert's death, just a few hundred yards from Woodbine Cottage, in Adelaide House, Mrs Ellen Elder had

passed away aged 89. In fact, the intimations of death were consecutive items in the Fife Free Press of the 24th February.

Mrs Elder was mentioned in *Object 15* which centred on the Elder family. Ellen Turner or Kennedy had become the second wife of the patriarch George Elder. He had built Adelaide House on what is now part of the Town House



and square. After his death, Ellen had continued to live in the property until her own death aged 89. Part of her story incorporated the tragic events surrounding George's daughter, Elizabeth, who in 1853, had married the Rev. John Alexander. The marriage was destined to be short lived with Elizabeth dying only five years later. Elizabeth left a young daughter, Joanna, only aged two when her mother died. Worse was to follow when, in 1863, her father also passed away.

Young Joanna went to live with Ellen until her own marriage to the Reverend Stalker in 1878. It was only two years later that Joanna also died at age 22. There was added poignancy in that her parents had died in the Free Church Manse on the corner of East Fergus Place and Wemyssfield – a property which could easily be seen from the windows of Adelaide House. Perversely, it was in this self same property that Joanna herself drew her last breaths.

The 20th of the month saw the death at 32 Townsend Place of



James Smart. Born in a property in Kirk Wynd in 1821 he had lived his whole life in Kirkcaldy. He was a shoemaker to trade, but he was also the Beadle of the Free Church. He had been appointed by the Reverend John Alexander (see above) when the church was

located in Tolbooth Street and had continued in the post when the congregation had moved to St. Brycedale. He only retired shortly before his death – having held the post for 36 years. His obituary claimed that he had never missed one Sunday during his long tenure. He had been struck down by an illness some three weeks prior to his death, had rallied, but a relapse had proved too much.

The obituary made mention that, as a tribute, during the funeral service/burial the church bells rang out a measured peal.

The fourth death occurred on the 22nd at 17 Townsend Place. This was John Barnet, aged 88, who is normally the individual credited as being the founder of Barnet and Morton. He had been born in the town in 1806 and, bar a few years obtaining business experience in Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester, had lived in Kirkcaldy all his life.

His parents, James Barnet and Jean Kinnear had been married in Perth in 1798. He had been educated at Forrester's School and then served his apprenticeship with Alexander Russell & Sons at Kirkcaldy Foundry. It was after the completion of his apprenticeship that he undertook the travelling mentioned above.

In 1840 he was back in Kirkcaldy and set up in business on his own account as a manufacturing ironmonger. It would appear that weighing beams and mangles were the staple products. He was operating from premises at 182 High Street.

It was in 1847 that his first attempt at expansion almost brought disaster to the fledgling business. In fact, it could be argued that it did bring financial disaster. Barnet had agreed to purchase the extensive business of his former employer on the basis of paying partly in cash and the remainder in instalments. The transaction had hardly been completed when Alexander Russell & Sons failed and Mr Barnet was obliged to pay in full for the extensive and costly stock. It can be seen that Alexander Russell & Sons were no modest enterprise. The London Gazette of the 25th May 1850 advertises a sale by public roup in *Robertson's National Inn* on the 6th June to sell

For Sale by Public Roup,
Within ROBERTSON'S NATIONAL INN, KIRKCALDY,
On THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 1850, at One o'Clock Afternoon,
The following Vessels belonging to the sequestrated estate of Messrs.
Alexander Russell and Son, Engineers, Kirkcaldy:—



1. The Clipper Schooner GAZELLE, of the burthen of 91 tons per register. This vessel was built at Berwick-upon-Tweed, in the year 1845, and has ever since been employed in the trade between Kirkcaldy and London; is well known as one of the best and fastest vessels of her class; and is in excellent repair, and well found.

2. The Clipper Schooner OSPREY, built at Leith in 1842, of the burthen of 66 954-3500 tons per register, as she presently lies in the harbour of Kirkcaldy. This vessel has also been for some time in the trade between Kirkcaldy and London, and is well found and in good repair.

3. The Sloop SHAMROCK, built in 1836, of the burthen of 60 1959-3500 tons per register, as she presently lies in the harbour of Kirkcaldy, and as lately employed in the Newcastle trade.

For further particulars apply to Mr. James Russell, Writer, Kirkcaldy, the Trustee; to Messrs. Tosh and Gibson, Writers, there; or in Glasgow, to Messrs. D. and J. WILKIE, Writers, there.
Kirkcaldy, May 16, 1850.

three ships belonging to the firm. These were the schooners *Gazelle* and *Osprey* and the sloop *Shamrock*. It was in the September that the public roup took place in the premises of the firm. The advertisement is shown which reflects the extent and variety of the company's assets. It would appear that one of the properties is the building which now contains *The Wynd* in Kirk Wynd.

The assumption has to be that Barnet would not become the owner until the full purchase price was paid. The reason being that in the roup, which followed the sequestration, it is only Alexander Russell and Sons who are mentioned – with the only mention of Barnet being as a tenant of a High Street shop owned by the Russells. Some decades later Thomas Russell returned to Kirkcaldy, started a new business,

and shortly thereafter was sequestrated again. In the enquiry into the latest failure he admitted that both he and his brother had been sequestrated in 1850 and discharged in 1855. It would seem therefore that the financial problem which Barnet faced was confined to having to pay for the stock immediately and in full, although his deposit and any instalments would have been lost.

FOUNDERY AND ENGINEERING WORKS, AND HOUSE PROPERTY IN KIRKCALDY, FOR SALE.
There will be exposed to Sale by Public Roup,
On THURSDAY, the 5th September next, at twelve o'clock at noon, within the Works of Kirkcaldy, sometime belonging to and occupied by Messrs. Alexander Russell and Son,
THE following PROPERTIES belonging to their Sequestrated Estate: namely,
1. These valuable and extensive WORKS, long occupied by Messrs. Russell and Son, with the whole MACHINERY and WORKING TOOLS connected therewith. The Works contain FOUNDERY, ENGINE, MILLWRIGHT, and MACHINE SHOPS, with a STEAM-ENGINE, of about Sixteen Horse-power, and are capable of employing from 230 to 250 Men.
Detached from the Works, but situated conveniently for them, is an excellent DWELLING-HOUSE, fit to accommodate a Genteel Family; and there is also another House and a Half-house, possessed by various Tenants.
The whole Machinery and Tools are of the best kind, and in good working order, and there is an extensive Stock of Patterns, of every description.
The situation of the Property is very eligible, being in the centre of Kirkcaldy, and well adapted for Local Employment, and for making Marine Engines, and Railway Work in general. The Premises cover an Area of fully an Acre, Imperial Measure. Upset price, £6 000.
2. That SHOP, with COUNTING-ROOMS, WAREHOUSE, CELLARS, &c., and DWELLING-HOUSE above, lying on the south side of the High street of Kirkcaldy, as sometime possessed by Messrs. Russell and Son for their retail trade, and now occupied by Messrs. Barnet and Heron, at a rent of £62 per annum. Besides the above possession, there is on the south part of this Property, with a front to the sea shore, Premises occupied by Messrs. Russell and Son for boiler-making. Upset price, £1,200.
3. That DWELLING-HOUSE, lying on the west side of the Kirk-Wynd of Kirkcaldy, below Hill-street, as possessed by various tenants. Upset price, £200.
The Title-deeds will be shown by Messrs. TOSH and GIBSON, Writers, in Kirkcaldy; by whom, or by Mr. JAMES RUSSELL, Writer, in Kirkcaldy, the Trustee, or Messrs. J. and D. WILKIE, Writers, in Glasgow, further information will be given, and Plans of the Property and Inventories of the Machinery and Tools exhibited.
John Taylor, Foreman at the Works, will show them to intending Purchasers.

TO IRONMONGERS AND OTHERS.
IMPORTANT SALE.

There will be Sold by Public Auction, without reserve, early in July (on a day to be afterwards named) —

THE ENTIRE STOCK belonging to **BARNET & HERON**, Successors to ALEXANDER RUSSELL & SON, consisting of BAR IRON; WRIGHTS', JOINERS', and CABINETMAKERS' FURNISHINGS; IRONMONGERY GOODS; TIN PLATE, and TINSMITHS' WORKING TOOLS, &c.; together with the whole SHOP FITTINGS, COUNTERS, GLASS CASES, SHELVES, &c., as will be fully detailed in Descriptive Catalogues, which will be ready on or about Saturday the 21st instant.

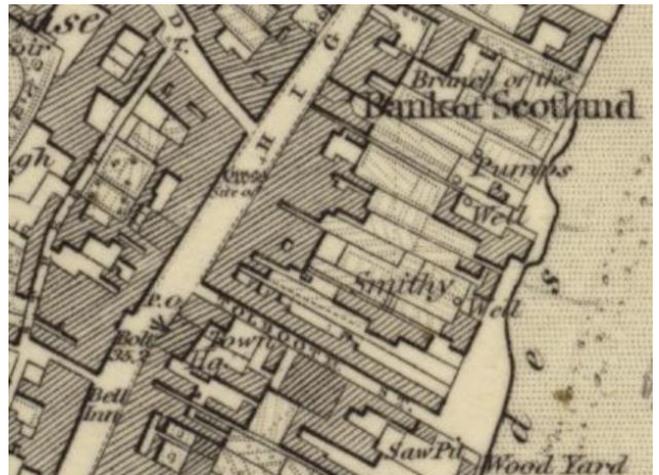
The Sale will take place on the Premises. Apply to **BARNET & HERON**, Ironmongers, Kirkcaldy.
Kirkcaldy, 9th June 1851.

Barnet's reaction to his financial situation was to assume local businessman Gilbert Heron as a partner. The new firm continued for two years before being dissolved. The notice of dissolution was dated 23rd July 1851.

In reality John Barnet was now starting afresh with greatly diminished finances. To help offset costs he sublet the front shop to a draper, Henry Horn. Horn himself ultimately went on to great things – eventually operating his business from the magnificent edifice which is now the Cupcake Coffee Box. The initials of Henry Horn and his son Ebenezer can still be seen carved onto the building along with the year they took over the premises – 1859. It is one of these buildings that people pass every day but never notice the embellishments as their eyes are trained at ground level.

Barnet meantime, at 182 High Street, had made an office and showroom on the floor above, with the works, cellars and iron stores, behind. Again, he assumed a partner, his brother-in-law, James Morton. This is said to have taken place in 1856. Therefore, in the space of 8 years, he had been involved in John Barnet, Barnet & Heron, John Barnet (again), and finally, Barnet and Morton.

From this point onwards the business flourished and, despite the death of James Morton in 1864, the company were able to repossess the whole of the premises which had been originally owned by Alexander Russell and Sons. Here they remained until the 1895 move into 192/196 High Street – a property

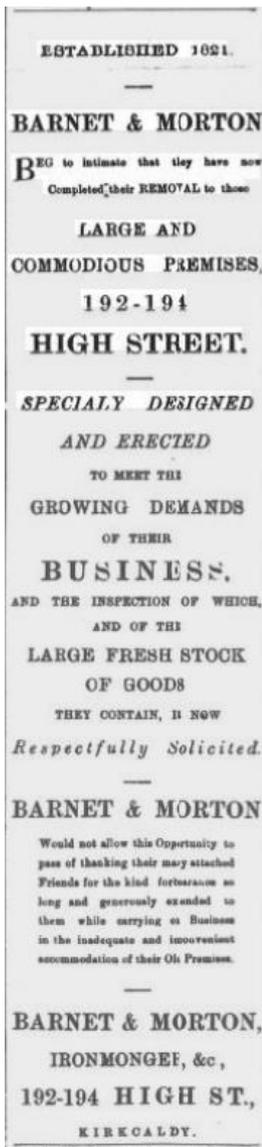


which remains one of the most iconic and architecturally impressive structures on the thoroughfare. The current building which has stood for over 120 years, replaced far older properties, and the engraving shows those which formerly occupied the site. Although a replacement itself, the former Sang's building was designed to be similar to the original, almost in the form of a gable facing the street.



The building to the left of Sangs was John Barnet's original shop. Those on the extreme left were demolished and the new Barnet and Morton building constructed in their place. Sadly, John Barnet, only lived to see the magnificent new structure in the course of its

construction as he died the year before completion. (The 1820 sketch sits in this portion).



A puzzle is presented by the advertisement which announces the opening of the new premises. The date of 1821 is shown as being the date the firm commenced trading. It has proved impossible to confirm this or otherwise. We have already outlined John Barnet's early years and it seems highly unlikely that it would be he who was able to start on his own account in 1821. His father James may have been the one – he was a joiner and perhaps he had diversified into ironmongery? Attempts are still being made to investigate this apparent anomaly, but what can be said is that there were no signs of centenary celebrations in 1921. Either way what has to be said, and was said, by the *Fife Free Press* in his obituary was that “Such success as Mr Barnet was able to achieve was the result of hard work and persistent effort, and was not won without many a heartfelt struggle”.

John Barnet took a keen interest in municipal affairs and for many years was a town councillor. He was pressed more than once to take the higher offices, but always declined citing business responsibilities. It would have enhanced the story if we could have made mention of some of his municipal activities. However, simultaneously, another John Barnet was involved in local affairs and was described by Provost Swan as his ‘lieutenant’. This John Barnet was a cabinet maker along with his father, Samuel Barnet. Although this Barnet rose to

become a Baillie, many references do not make it clear which Barnet was being referred to. Discretion being the better part of valour – we have left his civic career untouched. We are convinced there is a relationship between the Barnet families and research is ongoing.



John had a long

association with the church and for more than fifty years was an elder in the Union U.P. Church and, for the greater part of that time, was the Sunday school superintendent until growing frailty led to him giving up the post. He was a leading figure in

the formation of the Sunday School Union which began in the Cowan Street Chapel in 1842. He had been active in wider politics when a younger man and was a Liberal all his life. His obituary was heartfelt and included:- “Mr Barnet was a splendid exemplification in his life and character of a type of manhood which is, unhappily for our country, dying out. With puritan uprightness of conduct and sternness of principle, he combined a broad judgement and a warm heart, so that those who knew him best loved and revered him most”.



John had married Grace Morton who predeceased him. Her father's name was Henry Morton which gives us a clue to the source of the name of one of their children. There were five boys and no daughters could be traced. The children were:-

James	29.10.1842	
Henry Morton	12.01.1845	
John	12.04.1847	
Alexander	14.01.1849	
William Fleming	26.04.1854	Died 1857

Although five children are listed above it was only Alexander and Henry who followed their father into the business. William had died in 1857 at age 3, but no trace has as yet been found of John and James. As always, dealing with old Parish Registers can be fraught with difficulties. In the 1851 Census the parents are listed along with Henry aged 6. Alexander is also listed as a 2 year old. Of John and James there is no sign.

1851 BARNET, HENRY M (Census 442 / 7 / 13) Page 13 of 20
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Parish of Barnet		Household of Henry M. Barnett		Within the limits of the Royal Burgh of Barnet		Town or Village of Barnet	
Name and Surname of each Person	Sex	Age	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Where Born	Married	Single	Widow
Henry M. Barnett	M	47	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Grace M. Barnett	F	46	Wife of Henry M. Barnett	Barnet			
George M. Barnett	M	28	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Richard M. Barnett	M	26	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
James M. Barnett	M	25	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
John M. Barnett	M	24	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Alexander M. Barnett	M	23	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Henry M. Barnett	M	6	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
John M. Barnett	M	2	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
James M. Barnett	M	1	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Richard M. Barnett	M	1	Wine Merchant	Barnet			
Magdalen Barnett	F	1	Wine Merchant	Barnet			

Henry M. Barnett was born in 1845 and when he reached the age of 12 he joined his father in business. This would mean that he commenced employment just as James Morton

became a partner and the name *Barnet & Morton* was born. His brother, Alexander, joined the firm some five years later around 1862.

Henry died in June 1914 a few months before the outbreak of the First World War. He was a lifelong bachelor and had lived in what had been the family home at 17 Townsend Place until



17 Townsend Place

moving to *Marchmont* on Bennoch Road where he died. Henry was aged 69 and had been in poor health for some time and his obituary mentions that for the last 3 months of his life he had been confined to the house.

The *Fife Free Press* paid a fulsome tribute to Mr Barnet

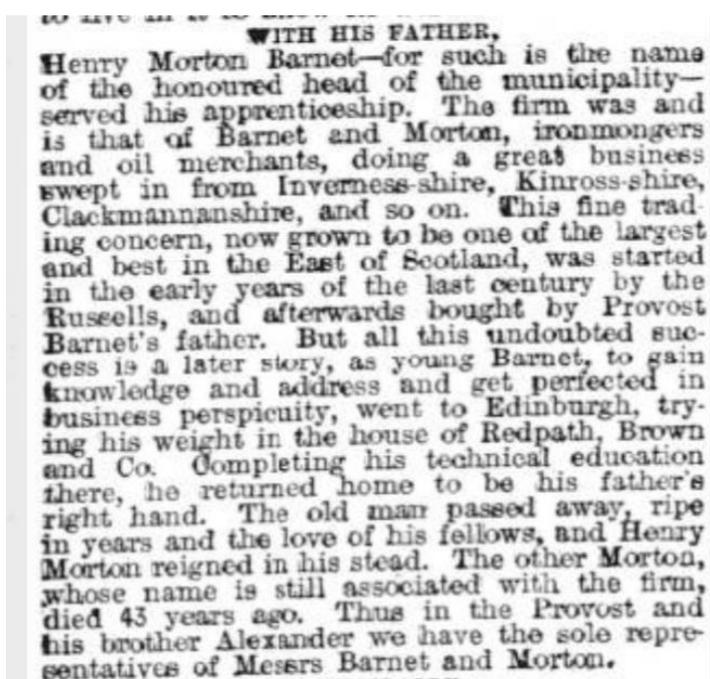
– “It says much for the energy and enthusiasm of the late Mr Barnet that in the midst of a busy business life he was able to devote so much of his valuable time and ability to the public affairs of his native town. For a long number of years he rendered valuable service to the community, both as a town councillor and magistrate. On the death of Provost Tait in 1903, which was some years after Mr Barnet had retired from the Council, he was invited by the members to return for the purpose of being elected to the Provost’s chair. This he willingly agreed to do, a position

he filled with dignity and tact until the end of the term in 1906”.

In total, he was a town councillor for 15 years and for six of these he was a Bailie. The pressure of business around the time of the opening of the new premises led to his standing down as a councillor but, as mentioned earlier, he made a comeback in 1903.

Reports from the time indicate that it was always the Provost’s intention to retire in November 1906. An urban myth grew up that he had had to resign during the term as he had been accidentally omitted from the voter’s roll when he moved from Townsend Place to Marchmont. It may well have been the case, but it certainly did not force him out of office.

In the *Fife Free Press* of the 18th August there is an interview with Mr Barnet. The item had appeared the previous week in the *Weekly News* and had been an article in their series “The Civic Chiefs of Scotland”. In a wide ranging discussion Barnet reminisced over his life, his family and the changes to the town. At this stage he was close to the end of his term as Provost and covered subjects such as electricity coming to the town, the advent of the



WITH HIS FATHER,
Henry Morton Barnet—for such is the name of the honoured head of the municipality—served his apprenticeship. The firm was and is that of Barnet and Morton, ironmongers and oil merchants, doing a great business swept in from Inverness-shire, Kinross-shire, Clackmannanshire, and so on. This fine trading concern, now grown to be one of the largest and best in the East of Scotland, was started in the early years of the last century by the Ruseells, and afterwards bought by Provost Barnet's father. But all this undoubted success is a later story, as young Barnet, to gain knowledge and address and get perfected in business perspicuity, went to Edinburgh, trying his weight in the house of Redpath, Brown and Co. Completing his technical education there, he returned home to be his father's right hand. The old man passed away, ripe in years and the love of his fellows, and Henry Morton reigned in his stead. The other Morton, whose name is still associated with the firm, died 43 years ago. Thus in the Provost and his brother Alexander we have the sole representatives of Messrs Barnet and Morton.

tramcars and the major harbour extension. His love of golf and Kinghorn Golf Club shone through. It is a thoughtful and well written piece by someone who was there and played their part. As a glimpse of the period it is well worth reading. A portion is included here.

Mr Barnet had a natural desire for knowledge and read books in German, French and Norwegian. In his later years he travelled extensively. It was he who pushed the connections of the firm to even the remotest parts of Scotland.



The *Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 6th June also carried an obituary which featured a photograph. The article contained the following:- “Mr Barnet gave useful service to the *School Board of Kirkcaldy*, The *Education Committee of Fife* and the *Kirkcaldy and Dysart Water Commission*. His knowledge of

commercial life and commerce was extensive and he was a valued member of the Kirkcaldy Chamber of Commerce. He was also a trustee of Kirkcaldy Savings Bank and a Justice of the Peace for the County.

“He took a deep interest in religious life and work and was for many years a member of some of the main committees of the United Free Church. He was one of the founder members of

Victoria Road U.F. Church and was the session clerk until the moment of his death. In February last he was presented with his portrait in celebration of his jubilee as a Sabbath School teacher.

“He was for many years (1895-1907) president of the Kirkcaldy Y.M.C.A. and at the time of his death a member of its Council.



Altogether, he was one of our most useful citizens and he exercised a wide influence for noblest ends. He will long be remembered with affection and respect. Today the townspeople deeply sympathise with his brother and lifelong companion, Mr Alexander Barnet, and his family in the great loss they have sustained”

A number of anecdotes exist of Mr Barnet and a number of these are contained in the *Kirkcaldy Y.M.C.A. Centenary History*.

Reference is made to his “being a highly respected figure that was often seen on the High Street dressed in checked trousers, black jacket and a velvet tile hat talking to people of the town”.

Public speaking was another of his great pleasures. “On one occasion, at Dunnikier, he started his speech with “It is good to see everyone here under this green sky and standing on blue grass”. His audience loved the slip and cheered, and, not

knowing that he had made a mistake, he continued with renewed effort thinking the crowd were fully behind him”.

He also had moments of discomfort, one being when he entertained the Town Council to a cake and wine afternoon on a Sunday. This prompted a letter to the *Fife Free Press* following the announcement of a Temperance Revival meeting in the Y.M.C.A. – “The Provost said he was not a teetotaller, but was a temperance worker. If Provost Barnet considers entertaining the Town Council to cake and wine on a Sabbath afternoon as temperance work, God save us from coming in contact with such workers; and yet the Provost holds the highest office in the Y.M.C.A. One can only say, by their fruits shall they be known”.

The death of Henry left Alexander as the head of the firm. Alexander seems to have been a man who neither courted publicity nor it would seem was he the subject of a lengthy obituary. He was married in the family home at Townsend Place on the 29th November 1877. The ceremony was carried

At Townsend Place, Kirkcaldy, on the 29th ult., by the Rev. Mathew Howieson, uncle of the bride, Alexander Barnet, of the firm of Barnet & Morton, ironmongers, to Eliza Jane, only daughter of Captain Howieson.

out by the Reverend Mathew Howieson, the uncle of the bride, Eliza

Jane Howieson. Her father was a Captain Howieson.

Alexander and Eliza had 6 children born between 1879 and 1890. All were found on the 1891 Census living at *Meadowbank*, 16 West Albert Road, Kirkcaldy. They were:-

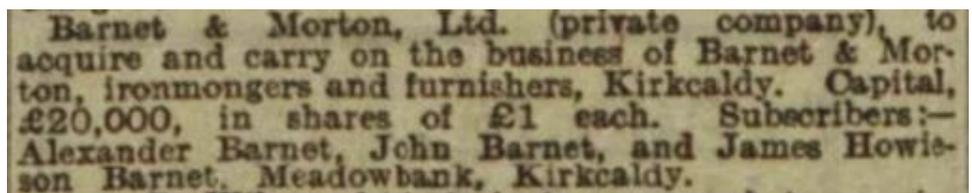
Eliza M.H.	1879
Grace	1881
Jeanie	1883
John	1885
James H.	1887
Henry M.	1890



Meadowbank

Following the death of Henry M. Barnet – a private limited company was set up. *The Courier* of the 12th February 1916 intimates that “Barnet and Morton Ltd (Private Company) to acquire and carry

on the business of
Barnet and
Morton,



ironmongers and furnishers, Kirkcaldy. Capital £20,000 in shares of £1 each. Subscribers:- Alexander Barnet, John Barnet and James Howieson Barnet”.

The *Fife Free Press* of the 7th July 1917 reports on the marriage of James Howieson Barnet and Margaret Sinclair on the 28th

June in Cathcart, Glasgow. The Reverend George Johnston, who was the brother-in-law of the groom, officiated.

The Reverend George Johnston had in July 1902 married Eliza the eldest child of Alexander. Grace and Jean Barnet were bridesmaids. It is quite clear where they met as, prior to being called to Cathcart, Johnston had spent ten years as the minister of Victoria Road Church. The reception had been held in the garden of Meadowbank and the report mentioned that the employees of Barnet and Morton had given a silver cake basket as a wedding gift. The festivities concluded with the company treating their workforce to supper in Morrison's Central Rooms. Interestingly enough, it was noted that a Mr and Mrs Sinclair from Cathcart were among the guests – possibly where a young James Barnet first met his future bride?

Tragic news was not far away when Margaret, as with so many young wives had become a widow, as *The Fife Free Press*



Local Casualties.

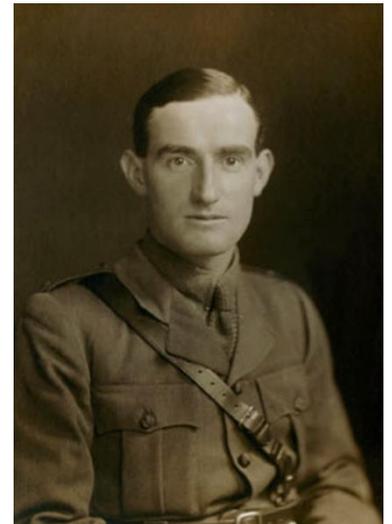
LIEUT. J. H. BARNET KILLED.

General regret will be felt throughout the community at the sad news which has been received by Mr Alex. Barnet, Meadowbank, West Albert Road, Kirkcaldy. It has been intimated by the War Office that his son, 2nd Lieut. James H. Barnet, Black Watch, was killed in action in France on 1st August. No further particulars are yet to hand. Lieut. J. H. Barnet has been in France since December last. Prior to enlisting he was associated with his father and brothers in the business of Barnet & Morton, iron-mongers, Kirkealdy. It is only two months since Mr Barnet received official intimation that his other soldier son, Lieut. Henry M. Barnet, Black Watch, had been killed in action in April last. Lieut. J. H. Barnet leaves a young widow to mourn his loss.

intimated that, on the 1st August 1918, James Howieson Barnet had been killed in action. His rank at the time of death was Second-Lieutenant, Black Watch (Royal Highlanders), 4th Battalion – he was 31. James, on leaving school, had joined the family firm. He sang in the Victoria Road Church Choir and was a

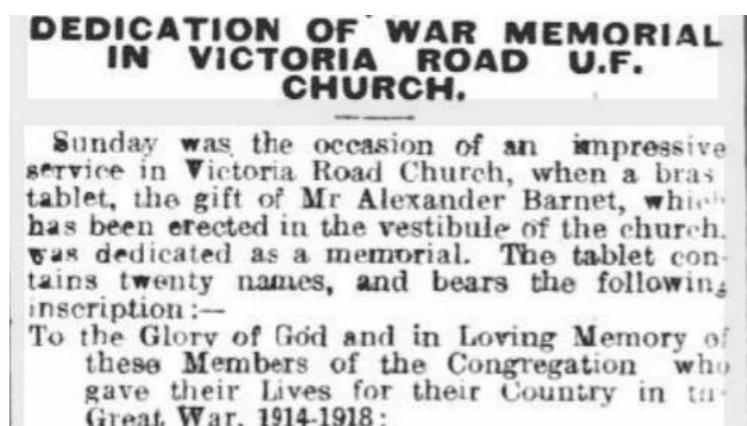
Sunday school teacher. He was also secretary of Kirkcaldy Tennis Club. The present owner of the property advises that for many years Meadowbank had a tennis court in the garden.

The grief of Mr & Mrs Barnet must have been intense as, only two months previously, they had received the news that their youngest son Henry had died of wounds on the 27th April 1918. Henry had, as with his brother, been educated at Kirkcaldy High School. He went on to study at George Watson's College in Edinburgh. He did not join the family firm but



took up employment with Messrs Brown, McFarlane & Co. Glasgow. They were producers of sheet metal plate and are still in existence today. Henry was commissioned into the King's Royal Rifles as a 2nd Lieutenant. Brown & McFarlane's website, even today, carries the *Roll of Honour* of the men who fought. Of the 28 men who took up arms – two did not return. Photographs of the two fallen employees are included on the

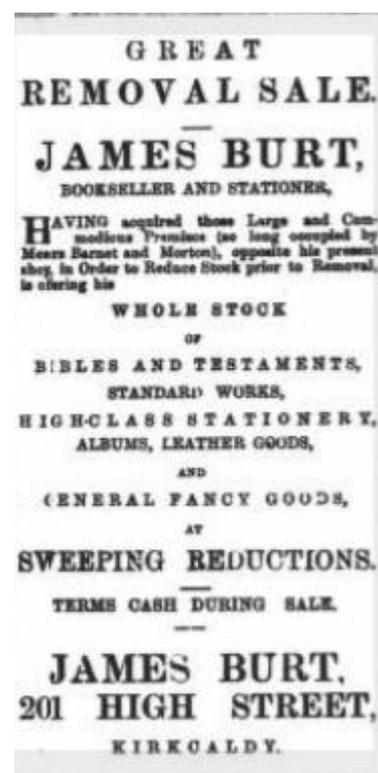
site and Henry M Barnet is one of them. It appears he was known as Harry to his employers.



The Fife Free Press of the 5th July 1919 carried a report of the dedication of a war memorial in Victoria Road U.F. Church. The memorial, in the form of a brass tablet, was the gift of Alexander

Barnet. Below the inscription were the names of the 20 members of the congregation who died in the conflict. The memorial was moved when St Andrews amalgamated with St John's and remains on display in Bennoch Church.

The Fife Free Press reported that on the 8th October 1921 that the Kirkcaldy High School War Memorial had been unveiled. The ceremony was presided over by Provost Lockhart and the unveiling itself had been carried out by Miss Jean Barnet. Another name on the memorial was that of 2nd Lieutenant James Burt of the Black Watch. He was only 20 when he died on the 19th July 1918. The reason this is mentioned is that they all were of the same rank and all three died within months of each other and, in the closing months of the war. Also, in 1895, it was James Burt Snr., who had purchased the



premises vacated by *Barnet and Morton*. £2400 was the purchase price and Burt moved from 201 High Street which is now occupied by Specsavers. In 1918 the families were not just commercial neighbours, but united in grief.

At one stage there would not have been a house in Kirkcaldy which did not have a book bought from *James Burt* with its distinctive black sticker, bearing the firm's name, affixed to the inside of the front cover.



Alexander Barnet died on the 15th December 1923 aged 75. His wife had predeceased him. Despite a vigorous search very

Mr **Alexander** Barnet, Meadowbank, **Kirkcaldy**, iron merchant, managing director of Barnet & Morton, Ltd., who died on December 15, left personal estate in Great Britain valued for probate at £20,398 10s 2d, of which his interest in Messrs Barnet & Morton amounts to £7339. Probate of his trust disposition and settlement, dated December 4, 1917, with a codicil of September 27, 1918, has been confirmed in London in favour of his daughter, Miss Joan Barnet, of the same address; his son, Mr John Barnet, iron merchant, of **Kirkcaldy**; and his son-in-law, Rev. George Johnston, of Merylea Road, Newlands, Glasgow.

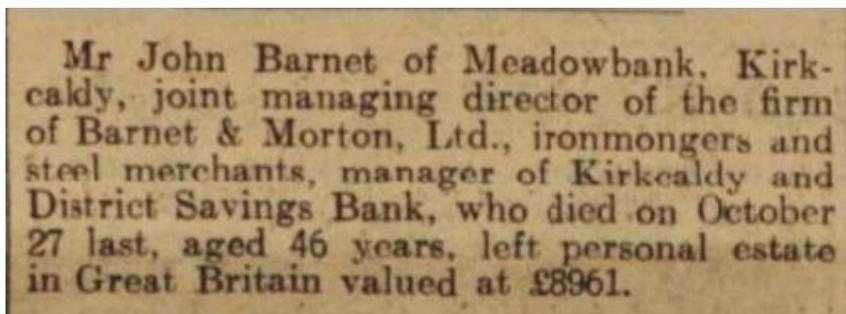
little has been discovered about the man. No obituary in the press was found, other than the death intimation itself. Death was from a combination of age and paralysis. He was certainly the

chairman of the company when he died and the death was registered by his son John. What was gleaned from the newspapers was that his total estate amounted to £20,398 with his interest in the firm estimated at £7,339. His executors were his daughter Jean, his son John, and his son-in-law the Reverend George Johnston.

As previously mentioned, the surviving son John had become a director of the new limited company in 1916. He was an engineer to trade, having served his time with the Kirkcaldy firm of Douglas and Grant. He then joined the family business some years before the outbreak of war. His responsibilities were as workshop supervisor and also controller of the technical side of the firm.

It was through his obituary that we were able to glean some of his father's interests. John died aged only 46 on the 27th

October 1931. He was a bachelor and had been ill for the five weeks prior to his death. *The Fife Free Press* of the 31st

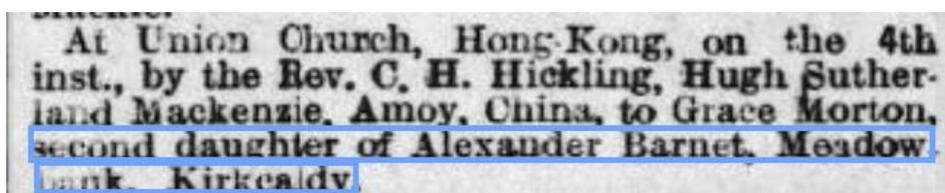
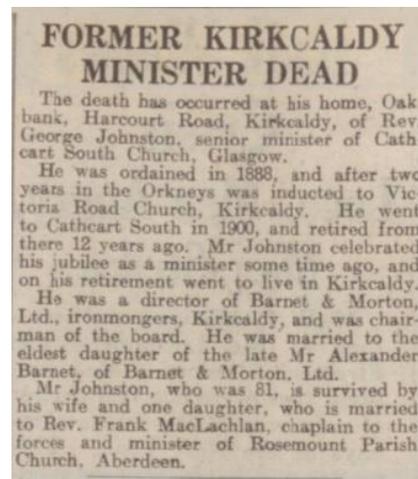


October portrayed a quiet and unassuming man who took no interest in public affairs. His energies were largely devoted to the Victoria Road Church, where he had taken over as session clerk from his father in 1923. He was also the chairman of the Scottish Coast Mission – another position where he followed his father. He was an energetic businessman and was a member of Kirkcaldy Rotary Club and also a trustee of Kirkcaldy & District Trustee Savings Bank.

John Barnet was certainly well liked and respected. The article disclosed that his funeral was the largest seen in the town for many years and also mentioned the significant number of

floral tributes. George Johnston was a pall bearer at the funeral, being one of the last male members of the immediate family.

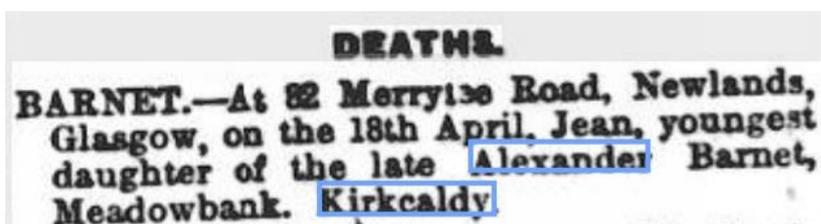
The *Fife Free Press* of the 28th December 1942 reports that the Rev. George Johnston had passed away at age 81. He died at his home, *Oakbank*, in Harcourt Road. He was survived by his wife and one daughter who had married the Rev. Frank MacLauchlan. At the time of his death the Reverend Johnston was both a director and the chairman of Barnet and Morton Ltd.



Research disclosed that on the 4th December 1911, Grace Morton

Barnet married Hugh Sutherland MacKenzie in Hong-Kong. Mackenzie's address was given as Amoy, China. They certainly had at least one son who is believed to have been christened Ronald.

Jean Barnet passed away on the 18th April 1927. Jean was a spinster and died in Glasgow. The suspicion is that she died at the home of her sister and brother-in-law, the Reverend



Johnston. Jean died at age 43 from cancer. Her usual address was given

as *Meadowbank, Kirkcaldy*, and it was her brother, John Barnet, who registered the death. The presumption is that brother and sister continued living in the family home after the death of their parents.

That should have concluded the family history aspect but there is one last addition. The name of Lieutenant-Colonel John A. M. Collyer cropped up in connection with Barnet and Morton. The unusual spelling did indeed reveal that he and Bailie Collyer were one and the same. Collyer was a man who was involved in almost every aspect of life in the town for a period of over 35 years. He had been an army captain in World War 1 and, in 1939 had been placed in command of the local Home Guard, being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. It would be nigh on impossible to list all the associations he was involved with, especially in the field of music. What caught the eye was that in 1947 he was presented with a gold cigarette case with the inscription – “Presented by the directors of Barnet and Morton Ltd to Lieutenant-Colonel John A. M. Collyer, chairman and managing director of the Company, to mark the completion of 25 years’ valuable service”. The presentation was made by a Dr R.S. MacKenzie – the grandson of Alexander Barnet. The Dr. was traced to Dundee where he died in 1972.

COL. COLLYER HONOURED

Lieut.-Colonel J. A. M. Collyer, J.P., chairman and managing director of Messrs Barnet & Morton, Ltd., ironmongers, Kirkcaldy, has been honoured by his co-directors in recognition of his silver jubilee with the firm.

At the annual meeting of the shareholders of the company, held last week, Dr R. S. McKenzie, Dundee, one of the directors, who is a grandson of the late Mr Alexander Barnet, presented Colonel Collyer with a gold cigarette case. The case is inscribed: —“Presented by the directors of Barnet & Morton, Ltd., to Lt.-Col. John A. M. Collyer, chairman and managing director of the company, to mark the completion in May, 1947, of 25 years’ valuable services.”

It is worthy of note that the day Col. Collyer completed his 25 years’ services with the firm, he was appointed President of the National Federation of Ironmongers, and it is understood that he has been invited to continue in office for another year. He will be nominated for the presidency at the annual conference at Eastbourne next month.

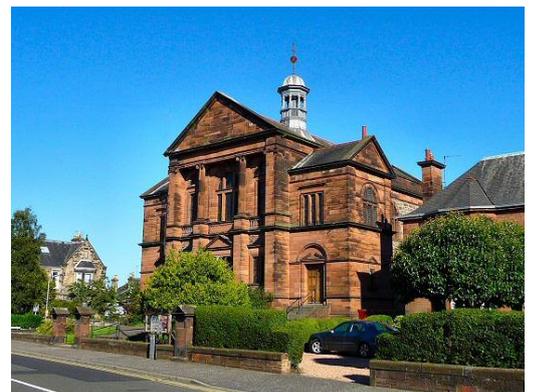
It was John Barnet who brought Collyer to the firm as, firstly, General Manager – then he became a director - finally being appointed chairman – probably in succession to George Johnston? He was given credit in his obituary for significant expansion of the firm. The Dr R.S. Mackenzie mentioned above was the son of Grace Barnet and Hugh Mackenzie. Hugh, as we suspected, was also a minister. He was an Australian by birth and ministered in several American States - Georgia, Arizona, Texas, Illinois and Colorado. Grace also had

MACKENZIE.—At Springlake, Texas, on the 30th June, Grace Morton Barnet, wife of the Rev. Hugh S. Mackenzie, and second daughter of Alexander Barnet, Meadowbank, Kirkcaldy.

a short life dying in Texas in 1922 at the age of 41. The intimation of her

death is shown. No trace has as yet been found of the death of Hugh Mackenzie, although he did occasionally preach in Scotland, presumably when visiting his son or attending the General Assembly.

How did Barnet and Collyer come to meet – Victoria Road Church again provides the answer – John Collyer was the organist! If ever a church played a major role in a family's life it was the Barnet family. St. Andrews Church would have been known to all members of the Barnet family since it's opening in 1903.



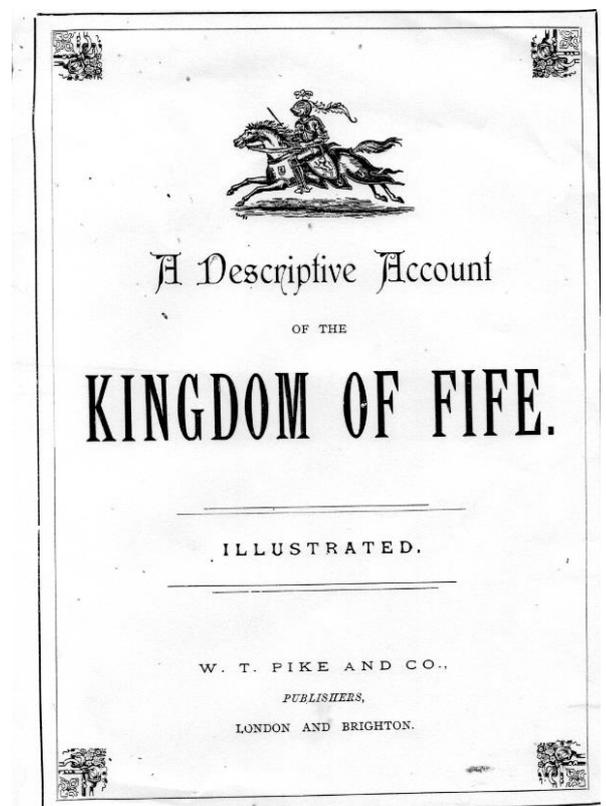
Grace's Guide of 1914 gives us a glimpse of the company in 1914 and solved a question which had been posed earlier.

They were listed as Ironmongers, Iron Merchants, Iron Workers and Oil Merchants etc. The principals were Henry Morton Barnet and Alexander Barnet. The address was given as 192-196 High Street Kirkcaldy with the premises covering three-quarters of an acre. The staff numbered 46 and the telephone number was Kirkcaldy 21. The telegraphic address was 'Barnet Kirkcaldy.' The bankers were listed as both the Commercial Bank and the North of Scotland Bank.

The mystery of when the firm was founded was solved by this article. Robert Russell had opened the ironmonger's business in 1821 which was subsequently taken over in 1847 by John Barnet. Therefore it is slight misnomer to claim 1821 as the starting date.

The conclusion to this part of the narrative follows below and was found in *Kingdom of Fife - Illustrated*. The article was written in late 1893 or early 1894:-

"The business of Messrs. Barnet and Morton will be of special interest to householders and hotel-keepers, etc, at the present time and notably in that department devoted to improved kitchen ranges, stoves and grates. Economy of fuel has become a matter of great importance in the household and when it can



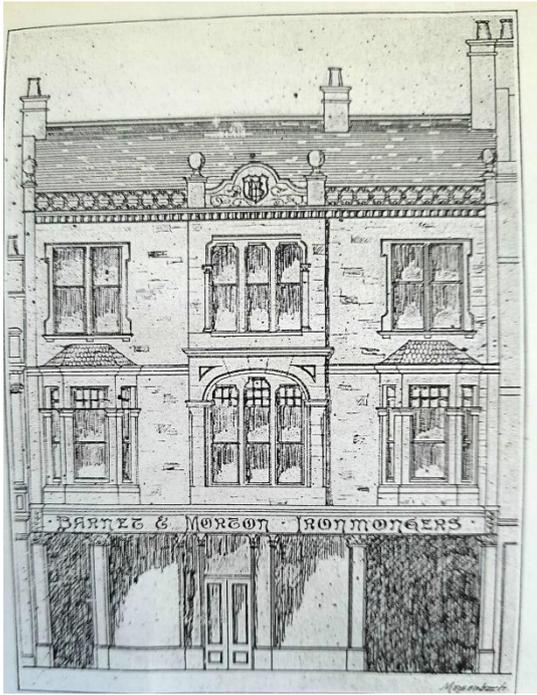
be effected with due regard to cleanliness and efficiency, a very important feature in the domestic equipment has been secured.

The ranges shown by Barnet and Morton embrace all the most recent improvements in design and construction and are marvels of finished workmanship. With regards to the tiled hearths and registers, they are of a highly ornamental and artistic character, as well as being extremely efficient for heating purposes.

These goods are designed so as to give out the maximum heat with the minimum consumption of fuels and to do away entirely with the inconvenience arising from soot or dust.

The firm have an enormous stock of goods, however, in each of their numerous departments and it would be difficult in Fife or elsewhere to find a stock that shows more care and experienced judgement in the selection.

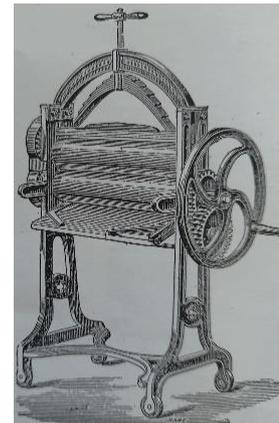
The business of the firm has now been established some sixty years and has become one of great magnitude, their connections extending throughout the County northwards as far as Ross-shire and embraces; householders, farmers, gardeners, artisans and builders etc.



The sole partners, Messrs. Henry Morton Barnet and Alexander Barnet are well known in the trade and are men of great enterprise, giving a personal supervision in every department. The premises are situated in the middle of the Town's High Street and constitute one of the finest commercial establishments in Kirkcaldy.

The large lofty plate glass windows make a special feature in this busy thoroughfare. The showrooms are spacious and well lit and the stock is very conveniently arranged in departments. It would be futile to attempt a detailed description of a stock

which seems to include everything in the way of furnishing and general ironmongery, brass foundry, garden and agricultural appliances, galvanised goods, hollow-dash ware, lamps, bedsteads, electro plate – goods, cutlery, edge tools – in fact,



IRONMONGERY FURNISHINGS.
 IN VIEW OF THE APPROACHING TERM.
BARNET & MORTON
 WOULD most respectfully beg attention to their Stock of HOUSEHOLD IRONMONGERY, which is Extensive and Select.

French Bedsteads, Full Size, From 15s.
 Chair Bedsteads, With Cushion Complete, 50s.

IRON BEDSTEADS IN GREAT VARIETY OF DESIGN AND PRICE. STRAW, FLOCK, and HAIR MATTRESSES to Suit.

SPECIAL ATTENTION is also requested to their Stock of the following—
 GRATES, FENDERS, FIRE-IRONS, STOVES, KITCHEN RANGES, ASH PANS, &c.
 TILE GRATES in Large Variety. TILE HEARTHES Laid to Suit.
 JAPAN GOODS in TEA TRAYS, COAL VASES, BATES, TOILET SETS, &c.
 CUTLERY—DINNER, DESSERT, and TEA—in BLACK, STAG, and IVORY HANDLES.

ELECTRO-PLATE of Finest Quality in Endless Variety of Useful and Ornamental Articles.
MANGLES, WASHING and WRINGING MACHINES by Various well-known Makers.
HAT and UMBRELLA STANDS DOOR MATS, FLOORCLOTH, MATTING, BROOMS, BRUSHES and other Household Requisites of the Best Quality.

On the merit of the foregoing classes of Goods there have been recent **MEASURES, RECOMMENDATIONS** in Price, so that now they are perhaps lower than at any previous time, and **BARNET & MORTON** give full effect to these in favour of their Customers.

BARNET & MORTON,
 IRONMONGERS, HIGH STREET, KIRKCALDY.

everything from kitchen ranges to mouse-traps and from corkscrews to the latest pattern of breech loading guns.

There is a very choice selection of presentation goods of a highly useful and artistic character, silver plated goods, etc. All accessories for bell-hanging, gas-fitting etc., are also kept in stock.

To the rear are large warehouses and stores devoted to bar, hoop and sheetiron, roofing iron, nails, etc., and here also are well equipped workshops, where a staff of experienced men are employed at the making and repairing of tin and hollow-dash ware and blacksmith's work. The firm are agents for Milner's and Whitfield's safes and also for the productions of Messrs. Hay, Merricks and Co's Roslin Gunpowder Mills. They do a large trade in gunpowder, dynamite, and other explosives for which they have special storage and altogether the business is one of great importance.



Extensive as the present premises of the firm are, they have, we understand, become too limited for this growing business, so that they have been under the necessity of providing themselves with more extended accommodation. With this view the premises to the rear of 192 – 196 High Street which extend all the way back to

Sands Road have been acquired as a site for the erection of new warehouses, cellars and workshops,



which when completed will form one of the largest, handsomest and best arranged suites of premises in the trade”.

In Kirkcaldy’s time honoured tradition, unless you were Adam Smith, then the greatest accolade a notable citizen will receive is a street being named after the individual. Barnet Crescent is such a street and is named after Henry Morton Barnet. Some years ago the close which now runs from the High Street to the Swimming pool was



reopened and named Barnet’s Vennel. Again this is in recognition of Henry M. Barnet. Could the apostrophe not have been moved to incorporate the whole family?

Having examined the early years and the individuals involved in the creation of *Barnet and Morton*, the narrative moves on to look at the Wilson family, their ironmongery business and the moment that brought their name to prominence.

Designed in Kirkcaldy – A Rival to the Bicycle?

To younger generations it may be hard to believe that Kirkcaldy was once an industrial powerhouse. It was a town which had an industrial landscape, a town famed for manufacturing, a place which could boast a wide variety of skills and trades, all confirmed by the inordinate number of chimneys which dominated the Kirkcaldy skyline.

There were the great linoleum producers, linen manufacturers, shipbuilders, carpet manufacturers, forges, engineers, and any number of potteries. All were testimony to the inventive minds and hard work of local people. Some were well known, some little known, and some hardly known at all.

Many have simply slipped under the radar and are lost in the mists of time. Such a firm was George Wilson & Co., who, in the dying embers of the 19th century, created a stir in both this country and abroad. For a short space of time their name and by association that of the town made headlines. So who were these people and just what did they do?

The *Kirkcaldy Trades Directory* of the time tells us they were; *Inventors and Patentees, General, Furnishing and Builders' Ironmongers*. They operated from 9-13 High Street, Kirkcaldy. The building still stands and, although now under renovation, for many years it housed the Raith Fruit Shop. The ground floor housed the business with family living accommodation above.

The firm can be traced back to 1854 when an Ironmonger's shop was opened by David Wilson at 13 High Street. David had been born in Abbotshall



around 1810. In the 1861 census he was known to have employed one man and two boys. David retired in 1881, transferring the business to his two grandsons, David Jnr. and John. *The Fifeshire Advertiser* of the 31st December 1881 tells us that they started trading under the title of D & J Wilson.

NOTICE.

MR DAVID WILSON, IRONMONGER, &c., West End, Kirkcaldy, having transferred the business carried on by him to his grandsons, Messrs DAVID WILSON, junior, and JOHN WILSON, all debts due by Mr Wilson will be paid by his successors, and debts due to the said David Wilson are requested to be paid to the said David Wilson, junior, and John Wilson.

In June 1888 the *Fife Free Press* of the 16th of that month reveals that the partnership had been dissolved. John became the sole owner and commenced trading as George Wilson and Co., this name being retained until the business ceased trading in 1903. The original founder, David, died on the 14th January 1890 aged 80. As always, family history research has the habit of throwing up little puzzles – here the question is, why did John

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT.

G. WILSON & Co.,

HAVING obtained the Premises lately occupied by D. & J. WILSON, Ironmongers, intend Opening the above on *Friday, 2nd June* (under the Management of J. H. WILSON, Partner of the late Firm), and carrying on Business as usual in all its different Branches. G. W. & Co., having Purchased part of the Late Firm's Stock, intend offering the same at a Reduced Rate, along with a Fresh Supply of Goods from the *Leading Manufacturers*, and hope, by giving strict attention to all Orders intrusted to their care, to merit a share of Public Patronage.

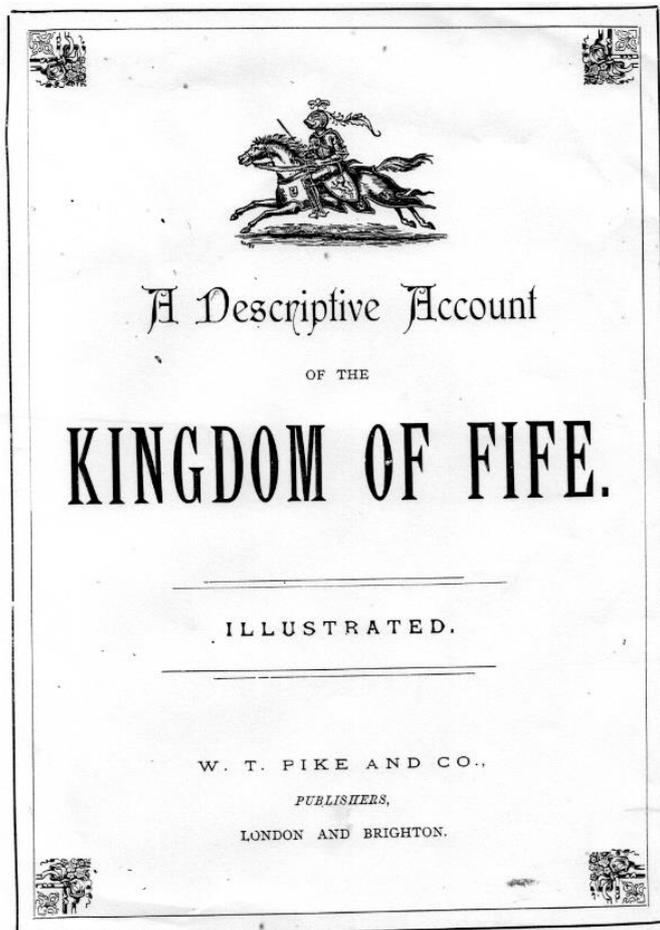
Special Attention will be directed to Cycle Repairs of all descriptions.

SMITH, JOBBING, AND TIN REPAIRS PROMPTLY EXECUTED.

Terms—Strictly Cash.

G. WILSON & Co.,
IRONMONGERS, SMITHS, AND PLUMBERS,
TIN, COPPER, AND ZINC WORKERS,
GAS FITTERS,
HIGH STREET (WEST END).

use the name *George Wilson*, with another being, why David left the firm to his grandchildren and not to his children?



Moving on to 1894, we gain an insight into the business when we again read in *The Kingdom of Fife - Illustrated* the following:-

“The name of Wilson has for more than forty years occupied a very prominent place among those of the leading commercial men in the busy town of Kirkcaldy but Mr. J. H. Wilson, the present representative of the family, has made for himself a name,

famous far beyond the limits of the “Lang Toun” and which bids fair to rival that of many of the leading inventors of the age”.

The article goes on to give some details of the founding of the firm and tells us that “under Mr John Wilson’s able and enterprising management it has been remarkably developed, especially in the direction of those inventions to which we shall have to call the reader’s attention.

The premises are conveniently situated and consist of two commodious shops adjoining and inter-communicating.

Attached are spacious workshops equipped with appliances for general cycle repairing. There are also large warehouses and every convenience exists for holding and manipulating a large stock of goods. The various departments are all extensively stocked comprising general and furnishing

ironmongery, stoves, grates, ranges, etc, tools of the best Sheffield manufacture, sporting guns, revolvers and ammunition, opera glasses and other optical goods, cutlery of the best makes, bassinettes, perambulators and cycles. In the latter department the firm



are the agents for several of the leading manufacturing houses and supply machines of the first quality upon exceptionally advantageous terms”.

We further learn – “That special attention is devoted to the repairing of cycles, all orders in this department being executed with promptitude in a style displaying expert and finished workmanship in every detail. There is also a large stock of cycle accessories, many of them being of a special type – the invention of Mr Wilson! Not the least important feature of the ironmongery business lies in the very moderate prices charged in all departments which will be found to compare most favourably with those of similar establishments.

The long experience of the firm and their intimate relations with leading wholesale and manufacturing houses, combined with the vast extent of their operations, will readily account for these facts.

While much respected as the head of this flourishing business,

KIRKCALDY.

Mr J. H. Wilson has applied for a patent for ferrule points for connecting and adjusting wires in wired-on tyres for all kinds of wheels.

it is as an inventor and patentee that Mr. J. H.

Wilson is most widely

known. He first came into prominent notice as the patentee of various important improvements in the manufacture of cycles and cycle accessories. Many of these inventions have, as the Yankees say, “caught on” to a remarkable extent.

The *chef d’ocuvre*, however, is a delightful and health-giving pneumatic skate. This wonderful mechanical invention is worthy of more than a passing word and we append a few particulars of the contrivance. The invention consists of an ingenious adaptation of the pneumatic tyre to the roller skate – thus rendering the latter practicable to all classes of roads. The pneumatic skates are arranged to clamp or strap on the soles of the shoes like ordinary skates, the rollers being fitted with pneumatic tyres. They are fitted with ball bearings and therefore run noiselessly. The wheels are 6 inches in diameter, the tyres 2 inches greater, with the average weight of each skate being two and three quarter pounds.

It has been proved by demonstration that the skates meet all the requirements for road travelling, hills being surmounted and descended, while rough places are rendered smooth by the resiliency of the tyres. The skates are equally serviceable for rink, turnpike road, cinder path, wood pavement, garden walks, lawn, sands, etc., etc. They are noiseless in their working; renewals of any part can be made at an expense of a few shillings or even pence.



They are made on the most scientific principle of mechanics known and are equally adaptable for ladies or gentlemen, for what more graceful in movement is there than that of skating?

Some ideas of the possibilities of the pneumatic skate may be gathered from the fact that, during November of 1893, a professional skater in the Midlands covered a distance of sixteen miles in one hour and twenty seven minutes. This feat is more remarkable when we consider that the roads were made very soft and muddy as it rained most of the way.

That the invention of the pneumatic skate has already created a considerable sensation can be judged by the multitude of press notices and comments which have already appeared in abundance.

From many, we cull the following from the *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph* – “the pneumatic bicycle has found what may be proved as a formidable rival in the pneumatic road skates, the

patented invention of Messrs. J.H. Wilson and Co., of Kirkcaldy, who sent us a photograph of the skates and assure us that, with a pair of these on the foot, one can skate over the ordinary turnpike roads the same as if on ice and, at a greater speed, while at the same time they can ascend and descend hills easily. Six or seven miles per hour is the maximum speed attempted in the streets of Birmingham, and that only on smooth roads, but it is said that twelve miles an hour can be covered by experts. The cost is £3.10s a pair and they can be carried in a handbag when not in use. This new means of locomotion is being largely used in Glasgow.

We have often looked with envy upon the pneumatic bicyclist as they flew silently past us and have thought that, had we been ten years younger, we might have shared in their delight. Perhaps this pneumatic skate may enable old fogies to indulge in a little skim through the air without exhausting one's vital energies".

The Ironmonger writes - "A rather formidable competitor to the cycle, I hear, has made an appearance in the Midlands in the shape of a pneumatic skate. Judging from the admiration it excites it is not unlikely, I should think, to find its way into all parts of the country. The invention, which was patented a short time ago by a Scotch firm, is evidently derived from the old roller-skate of skating-rink celebrity but, whereas the ordinary roller skate has four wheels, the pneumatic skate has only two, placed in line at either extremity of the skate. The

patentees are sanguine that this method of locomotion will supersede cycling as a pastime, the exercise being very beneficial to health and the movement extremely rapid”.

There can be no doubt that the pneumatic skate has a great future before it and this is demonstrated by it having already found favour in high places. This is evidenced by the fact that it has been patronised by the King of Greece”.

The above article couched in the language of the time portrays a potentially bright future for Mr Wilson’s invention. There can be no certainty as to when the skates were first designed and

ROAD SKATING.

The pneumatic road skate, which is now being exhibited to the public, virtually provides a skating floor on every road or foot-path by which we desire to travel, whether for recreation and healthful exercise or for business purposes. It is no longer necessary to find one’s way to the nearest skating floor, when, for £3 or £4, you can procure a pair of these skates and make a skating floor of every inch of the road. The pneumatic skate can be fixed on in a few moments, be stored at but a very small cost, or easily carried in a small bag or in the hand. There seems to be a very promising future for the pneumatic road skates, as, even where a bicycle can hardly be ridden, these handy little appliances can be employed; and they afford an excellent means of getting healthy exercise with a minimum amount of trouble. As the result of tests already made, the Governments of France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Sweden, Japan, Spain, and other countries have already inquired for these new road skates for military purposes, and Colonel Fox and other eminent military authorities who have seen them practically tested strongly recommend them as likely to prove of great value in the Army.



built, but it can be demonstrated with some certainty that they were first launched on an unsuspecting public around September of 1893.

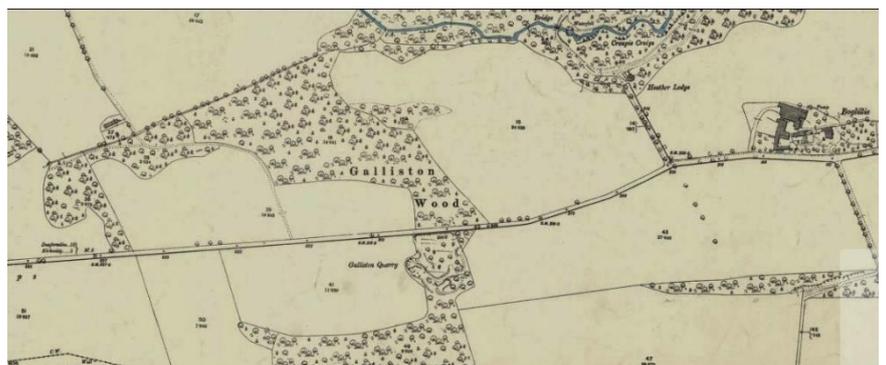
Clearly, someone had been busy on what seems to have been a significant advertising campaign. The *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph* article mentioned above seems to have come about through a photograph and probably/possibly a promotional message being sent to them by Wilson or his representatives.

As a starting point, the *Fife Free Press* of the 12th August carried a headline *New Mode of Road Travelling* :-

"Kirkcaldy claims the distinguished honour of producing the first pneumatic road skater in the world. Mr Robert Wilson of Messrs J H Wilson & Co., ironmongers, Kirkcaldy, is the inventor of the skate and this week the Messrs Wilson have been experimenting on the public road, with the result that there is every prospect of this new mode of road transport becoming a decided success. The inventors claim that their patent will meet all the requirements of road travelling and will speedily take the place of cycling.

Hills can be ascended and descended with comparative ease on them, while the roughest roads can be traversed with a degree of comfort hitherto unknown in cycling circles. The first exhibition took place on Wednesday evening at the Heather Lodge.

A number of interested spectators were present and a clever exhibition of the working and management of the



skates was given by Mr Wilson. At the outset a steep hill leading from the Heather Lodge to the Galliston Quarry was tried and managed with the greatest of ease. The level part of the road, a little past the Quarry, was next tried and the speed obtained was good.

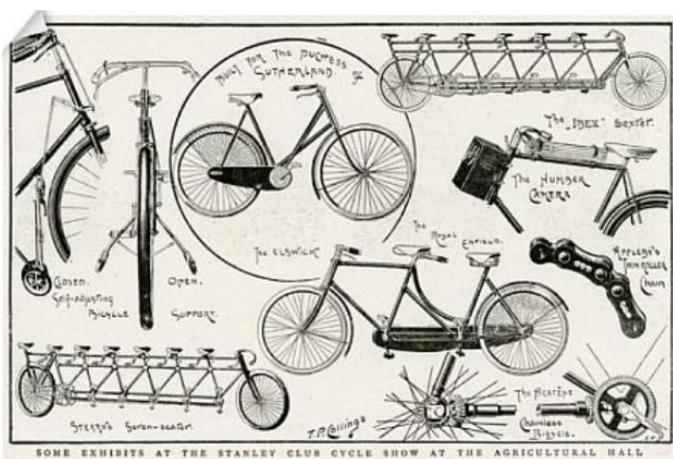
During the return journey a report like that of a pistol was heard which showed that something had gone wrong. This proceeded from a defect in the canvas of one of the tyres which, we are told, was defective. These defects are all being remedied, a specially prepared canvas for the outer covering of the jacket being made. The firm however, are masters of these defects which has clearly been proved by the long and practical knowledge gained in the construction of their patent pneumatic tyres for bicycles and carriage wheels.

The principal, however, of pneumatic skating for the roads has quite well been proved to be correct and the Messrs Wilson have the honour for Kirkcaldy to be the first pneumatic skaters in the world.

The following is a letter Mr Wilson has received from the editor of the *Monthly Gazette* (Mr G.B. Skipton) a cycling periodical;- " Gentlemen - "Although your skates appear to be a trifle foreign to the objects of the Cycle Touring Club, it is

sufficiently relevant to merit attention at our hands. If, therefore, you care to send me a specimen pair of skates with which to experiment, I will make trial of them at the first opportunity and report the results through our columns. As

regards making the skates known to the public, I am inclined



to think that you will find the forthcoming *Stanley Cycle Show*, or the *National Show* which is to follow, desirable means of giving it publicity".



LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. — We beg to tender our apology at being unable to have Pneumatic Skate Practices in the Public Park on Wednesday Evening last, as generally understood. We were compelled to postpone same at the very last moment, as we were Exhibiting in England. The next Practising will take place in Park, at 7 P.M., on Wednesday, the 23rd inst., certain.

I am, yours,
J. H. WILSON.

Messrs J. H. Wilson & Co will be pleased to show, to any friends in their back shop, the skates in use.

The next exhibition will be held in the Beveridge Park on Wednesday evening, when the general public will have the opportunity of seeing Mr Wilson perform on the new pneumatic skates".

During the month of September possibly every newspaper in the land, both large and small, had been notified of the product. Not everyone would publish, but many titles as diverse as; *The South Bucks Standard*, the *East Anglian Daily Times and Advertiser* and the *Cumberland Pacquet & Wake's Whitehaven Advertiser* all carried an article on the invention. In fact, *The South Bucks Standard* was able to enhance their story by adding that 'a gentleman unmindful of the surprise he was creating had been skating through High Wycombe in excess of 5 miles per hour".

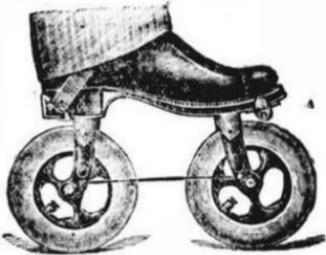
In Kirkcaldy, we see the first adverts appearing in the *Fife Free Press* of the 7th October 1893.

Here we find two adverts for

CYCLISTS and Others who wish their Machines Enamelled and Striped in the most Fashionable Tints, at the most Reasonable Charges, should forward them to W. M'Gregor, at Wilson's Depot, 9 to 13 High Street, Kirkcaldy.

Wilson – one offering embellishments and stripes for cycles with the other announcing that space is being created to accommodate the expected stock of pneumatic skates.

Subsequent issues carried a mixture of full and more modest adverts for the skates and these are reproduced here. The firm did not simply sit back and wait for custom to come to them, taking the initiative by advertising their invention by the best means possible – demonstrating it in action.



NOW ON VIEW
THE FAMOUS
PNEUMATIC SKATES
SEE OUR WINDOWS!
GREAT SPORT AND AMUSEMENT
LEARNING.
NO ENTERTAINMENT COMPLETE WITHOUT
THEM.
JUST THE IDEA FOR FUN AND MERRY-
MENT AT A GARDEN OR A
CHRISTMAS PARTY. AMUSES OLD AND
YOUNG.
PARTICULARS AND PRICES
OF THE
Pneumatic Skate Company,
10 LIVERY STREET, BIRMINGHAM.
Sole Manufacturers for the Patentees,
J. H. WILSON & CO.,
9 TO 13 HIGH STREET,
KIRKCALDY.

The *Fife Free Press* of the 2nd December covered the initial ‘advertising in action’ venture when reporting that the previous week – Mr Robert Wilson had given a demonstration at the *Kirkcaldy Bicycle Club’s Annual Social*, held in the Town House. The article reported that, despite the lack of available space, there had been an excellent and entertaining performance with much artistic flair shown.

The same newspaper on the 16th December had reprinted an article from the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. It transpires that the bold Mr Wilson and a Mr McGregor had journeyed to Dundee to give another public demonstration. After two

circuits of Albert Square they adjourned to the Esplanade “where once again some intricate works were fully demonstrated”. The article suggests that “An opportunity was afforded of testing the speed qualities of the skate against the bicycle, to the apparent disadvantage of the latter”. The article concluded with Wilson’s stated intention to promote open races for skaters at cycling meets during the following summer.

KIRKCALDY
SHOPKEEPERS' EXCURSION
 TO
CRIEFF,
WEDNESDAY, 20th June, 1894.

RETURN FARE,	2s 9d.
DINNER AND TEA COUPONS,	2s.

SPORTS:—5-a-Side Football Competition, Tag-of-War (5 men a-side), 120 Yards Foot Race, 300 Yards Foot Race, Quarter Mile Foot Race, Hop, Step, and Leap. Entry money for each event, 6d per man, or 2s gives right to compete in all Entries close on 16th June with Mr JAMES DOWDS, 171 High Street. Exhibition on WILSON'S Pneumatic Skates.

Train leaves Kirkcaldy Station at 7.30 a.m.;
 Sinclairtown at 7.35 a.m.; leaves Crieff at
 7.30 p.m.

Tickets to be had from Members of Committee;
 also from Messrs Davidson, Young, and Burt,
 Booksellers; and from Mr Wilson, Watchmaker,
 Mid Street.

Early Application for Tickets is necessary.
 T. SAUNDERS, Secy.

That summer of 1894 saw on the 20th June another performance given by Mr Wilson. This occasion was *The Kirkcaldy Shopkeeper's Excursion to Crieff*. Sports had been arranged along with 5-a-side football and a demonstration, by Mr Wilson, of the pneumatic skate. The return fare was 2/9d with the train leaving Kirkcaldy at 7.30 am and Sinclairtown at 7.35 am, with the return journey scheduled to leave Crieff at 7.30 pm.

The St Andrew's Citizen on the 14th July reported that pneumatic skating was becoming popular in Kirkcaldy. The result was that Mr Wilson appeared in the Cart Haugh in Cupar later in the month. *The Fife Free Press* of the 4th August

reported that citizens of Cupar were used to the sight of people gliding on skates over the ice when the River Eden overflowed in winter – but, were taken aback by a man gliding over the area in midsummer.

THE PNEUMATIC SKATE AT OBAN.
Mr Wilson, Kirkcaldy, the inventor of the pneumatic skate, gave a demonstration of this novel means of locomotion on the Corran Esplanade at the band-stand, Oban, on Wednesday evening. The performer went through all the turns and movements practised by the fancy skater, which were witnessed by a large crowd of spectators. The skate supports the foot about three or four inches from the ground. It possesses two wheels directly in a line with each other, which are covered with the pneumatic tyres as with the safety bicycle.

Moving further afield, Mr Wilson was seen performing on the bandstand at the Corran Esplanade in Oban on the 18th August. Once again, all the tricks and turns were

on display.

Even Markinch was not immune from the new mode of transport. The *Fife Free Press* reported in the issue of the 22nd

MARKINCH.
'PNEUMATIC SKATES. – On Wednesday several young men passed through the burgh on the newly-invented pneumatic skates, and naturally caused much comment.

that the previous Wednesday several young men had passed through the burgh on the newly invented pneumatic skate and naturally caused much comment.

The Year 1895 had a completely different feel to it in relation to both his skate and his firm. Throughout the year the *Fife Free Press* consistently carried the same advert – which in truth was more of a statement than an attempt to secure fresh business. The content was simply advising potential customers of the names of the cycle manufacturers they represented. There was no mention of the pneumatic skate other

WILSON'S,
WHERE YOU GET THE BEST CYCLE,
AT LOWEST CASH PRICE.
**THE BRITISH PNEUMATIC SKATE AND
CYCLE COY.,**
9 TO 13 HIGH STREET, KIRKCALDY,
Representing —
BAYLIS THOMAS & Co., (Ltd.), Coventry;
ROBERT BIRD & Co. (Ltd.), Wolverhampton;
BRADBURY CYCLE COY. (Ltd.), Oldham;
ROYAL GEORGE CYCLE COY. (Ltd.), London;
WARD and WHITHAM & Co. (Ltd.), Oldham;
STARLEY BROTHERS (Ltd.), Coventry; THOMAS
CLARK & Co., Manchester; and several other
Makers. Prices lower than ever.
DUNLOP PNEUMATICS, £9 15s.
Choice Selection of High Grade Present Day
Machines on view. We invite all to see a Rare
Novelty in CYCLE WHISTLES--*Something Good.*

than the business name of *The British Pneumatic Skate and Cycle Company*. This name had sat alongside that of *George Wilson & Co.* presumably formed to differentiate it from the ironmongery business. The advert also made mention of the wide selection of novelty cycle whistles which were in stock (precursor of the bell?).

The last advert to appear in this fashion was on the 6th July 1895. Something appears to have gone wrong – adverts and displays appeared to be a thing of the past. A little more research seemed to provide an answer – at least in part.

In December of 1895 we find a prospectus issued to form a new limited company named *The Pneumatic Road Skate*

Company Ltd. They will have a capital of £75,000 in £1 shares. The intention is to take over the *Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company* - housed at 10 Livery Street, Birmingham – the manufacturers of Wilson’s skates!

The two principal directors are to be a George M. Gibbs of the *Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company* and Mr E. Christian – the Director of the *National Skating Palace*. The prospectus argues that the existing company, formed 18 months ago to develop and manufacture the pneumatic skate, simply does not have sufficient capital to meet the growing demand for the product or allow further expansion. It paints a glowing picture of the anticipated first year’s profits and believes that the cash injection from the share issue, along with the patents held, will put the firm at the forefront of this industry. From the £75,000 raised £25,000 will go to Gibbs as the vendor. On application, 2/6d per share is to be paid. This is followed by 7/6d on allotment. Two final instalments each of 5/- are to be paid one month and finally two months after allotment.

THE PNEUMATIC ROAD-SKATE COMPANY
(Limited).

• PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT.

The attention of intending investors is directed to the advertisement of Press Opinions which appeared in yesterday's "Times," "Telegraph," "Standard," "Daily News," "Financial News," "Financial Times," and "Financial Post."

Copthall House, 13, Copthall Avenue, E.C.
7th December, 1895

Notice is Hereby Given, that the PROSPECTUS of the COMPANY is ISSUED TO-DAY (Saturday), and will be ADVERTISED on MONDAY NEXT, the 9th inst.

Prospectuses and Application Forms can be obtained on application at the Offices of the Company, Copthall House, 13, Copthall Avenue, London, E.C.

Applications by wire should be addressed Pneumatic Skate, Copthall House, London.

The Prospectus will be obtainable on Monday at the Bankers, Solicitors, and Auditors of the Company.

Allotment will be made strictly according to priority of application.
(By Order),
T. W. HOLLIER, Secretary.

“ A REVOLUTION IN LOCOMOTION.”

“ PNEUMATIC SKATES ” (For the Road).

The obvious advantages of the Pneumatic Skate are that:—

1. It is generally applicable to the purposes for which bicycles have hitherto been used, at about one-fifth of the cost.
2. It offers the best means of locomotion for carriers and messengers of every description.
3. It is always portable, and does not necessitate special transport by carriage or rail.
4. Apart from its practical use, it forms a cheap, delightful, and healthy means of recreation.
5. It offers special advantages for military purposes.

Applications have been received from Firms in many of the principal towns and villages in the Kingdom, to act as Agents for the sale of the Pneumatic Skate.

The SUBSCRIPTION LIST will OPEN on MONDAY, 9th

Sizeable lists of places that will have an agency are shown – but no Kirkcaldy! Wilson therefore appears to have lost both his manufacturer and his agency at one fell swoop. The Prospectus terms appear to be very generous to Gibbs – who will receive on top of the £25,000 in shares, £15,000 in cash and then another £15,000 in cash, shares or a combination thereof. This meant Gibbs stood to receive £55,000, meaning only £20,000 was available for working capital. Does this seem a reasonable balance and would £20,000 be sufficient to fund the proposed expansion?

The only conclusion that could be drawn is that somehow John H. Wilson was sidelined either by his own making or by others – but it was a wrong conclusion!

THE PNEUMATIC ROAD - SKATE COMPANY, LIMITED.

POINTS FROM THE PROSPECTUS.

The Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company, Limited, was formed eight months ago for the purpose of testing and developing the invention of the Pneumatic Skate. The result of this development has been the sale of a considerable number of Skates and the receipt of a large number of further orders, which the Vendor Company had not the capital to execute, and the present Company has been formed to provide the capital to adequately meet the demands of this business.

The Skate is in the form of a miniature bicycle for each foot; attached to it is a support for the ankle, and below the sole are two pneumatic wheels of about 3½ in. in diameter.

The design of the Skate has been much improved since its inception, both in its height and weight, and the pattern now adopted by the Company is believed to be capable of little or no improvement.

The simplicity of the invention will strike any observer, and from tests which have been applied a speed of from 10 to 15 miles an hour is easily within the reach of ordinary skaters—a much greater speed can be attained by experts—while the Skate can be used on a rough road, up and down hill, and on all ordinary and smooth surfaces.

This particular form of locomotion has, since its recent introduction, attracted a great deal of attention, and within the last few months inquiries and orders have been received for the Skates from many parts of the world, and applications have been received from first class houses to take up foreign and colonial agencies.

From present indications the Directors entertain little doubt that the first year's business will result in an extraordinarily large profit, and that the business of the Pneumatic Skate manufacture will in time attain to the magnitude of the cycle industry as an ally rather than a rival.

Arrangements have recently been made for manufacturing the Skates in very much larger quantities than hitherto, to enable the Company to cope with the extensive business open to it.

The combination of patent rights by the Company will, it is believed, give this Company the master position to the whole of the future trade in their Pneumatic Skates, similar to that claimed by the famous Pneumatic Tyre Company (Dunlop's Patent) in regard to the pneumatic tyre.

The PROSPECTUS will be ADVERTISED on MONDAY.

PNEUMATIC SKATE MANUFACTURING COMPANY.—This company has just been registered with a capital of £12,000., divided into 6,000 ordinary and 6,000 deferred shares of £1. each. The objects are:—To acquire all the benefits and interest granted and conferred by an indenture of license, dated 31st January, 1894, between John H. Wilson, of High Street, Kirkcaldy, N.B., of one part, and George M. Gibbs and William Marrian, of 10, Livery Street, Birmingham (trading as the Pneumatic Skate Company), for the manufacture, production, and sale of pneumatic skates by the said George M. Gibbs and William Marrian, in accordance with patent No. 1,339 of 21st January, 1893, granted to John H. Wilson, and to carry out business of skate manufacturers and dealers, tyre makers, leather merchants, boot and shoe manufacturers, brass and iron founders, metal-workers, ironmongers, rubber and vulcanite merchants, &c. The number of directors is not to be less than three nor more than five. The first are George M. Gibbs, William Marrian, Moritz Stern, and Frank J. Gibbs. Qualification, 100 shares. Remuneration, £100. per annum divided between them. George M. Gibbs and William Marrian are the managing

A slice of luck coupled with a more determined search took the team to the correct answer. The *Birmingham Daily Post* tells us in its 20th March 1894 edition that the Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company Ltd had just been registered with a capital of £12,000 in £1

shares. A tranche of £6,000 was being issued meantime. The object of the company was to “Acquire all the benefits and interests granted and conferred by an indenture of licence dated the 31st January 1894 between John H. Wilson of High Street, Kirkcaldy, on one part, and George M Gibbs and William Marrian, of 10 Livery Street, Birmingham, {trading as the Pneumatic Skate Company} for the manufacture, production and sale, of pneumatic skates by the said George M Gibbs and William Marrian, in accordance with Patent number 1,359 of 21st January 1893, granted to John H Wilson”.

A little more information on the new company was given but the above shows that Wilson had secured his patent in January 1893 and had come to an agreement a year later to sell his patent to Gibbs and Marrian. To raise cash for this purpose the pair had formed a limited company. In simple terms, Wilson had sold his rights and the inventor had merely become a customer of the new limited company.

Business must have been brisk for the new venture. Having been founded with capital of £6,000, little more than 12 months later, £55,000 was the price commanded/sought by Gibbs as the vendor.

Someone somewhere was up to mischief. The January 15th



edition of the
*Lancashire
General
Advertiser*

carried an advertisement offering a reward. The reward of £50 was for information leading to the identification on an individual(s) who had placed paragraphs in certain newspapers implying that *The Pneumatic Road Skate Co. Ltd* had gone into liquidation.

All we can/will say on the subject is that after the closing date to apply for shares passed – we can find no mention of its success or otherwise. Not a sentence can be found on either the company or Mr Gibbs. At the time of writing we are still in

the dark, although the *Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company* was certainly wound up. *The Pneumatic Road Skate Co. Ltd* seems to have suffered a mortal puncture, and is nowhere to be found. The last trace of the Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company Ltd, besides the notice of winding up, is a

ROLLER SKATING.

THE PNEUMATIC SKATE MANUFACTURING COMPANY (LIMITED).

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPORTING LIFE."

SIR.—We are instructed by our clients, the Pneumatic Road Skate Company, Limited, to ask you to be good enough to correct a statement made in your issue of the 6th inst. under the heading of "Cycling News and Gossip."

In that paragraph you have referred to the winding up voluntarily of the Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company, Limited, and though you state it has been done voluntarily, you draw the inference that the road skate is a matter for ridicule rather than practical utility, and that that Company has consequently failed.

As a matter of fact the Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company (Limited) has been wound up only because its business has been disposed of to our clients who have purchased it, and it were needless to state that such liquidation should surprise. The number of applications for agencies which our clients have received not only in England, but even in France and Germany, leaves room for doubt that the business which is likely to come will be quite up to if it does not exceed the expectations to which you also refer in the paragraph, and which you suggest are not likely to be realized.

The whole paragraph is written so obviously under a misapprehension of the facts that we are sure in fairness to our clients you will insert this letter.—Yours, &c.,

STREANAN, VAN PRAAGH, CAMPION, and SIMONS,
25, Old Broadstreet, E.C., January 7, 1906.

letter from the solicitors of the buying company to the *Sporting Life*. They are taking issue with comments made by the newspaper, although the outcome is simply nowhere to be seen.

WINDING-UP NOTICES.
(From *Last Night's London Gazette*.)

W. Rothwell and Company Limited.
Hollins Liberal Club Company Limited.
The Forestry Company Limited.
Lamb and Company Limited.
Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Company Limited.
Baines and Company Limited.
Caeiphilly Coal Company Limited.
Halcomb and Company Limited.
Savin and Company Limited.
"Stella" Steamship Company Limited.
Clayton Constitutional Building Company Limited.
Gold Mining Association Limited; to be reconstructed.
Pooley Pocket Time Table and Guide Company Limited.
Continental and Colonial Corporation Limited.
St. Paul's Linguistic Institution Limited.

Did Wilson sell his patent too quickly or was he in a financial position where he was forced to sell? It is doubtful if that

question will ever be answered, but we believe that there is a need to champion John H. Wilson. We quote from *The Online Bicycle Museum*:-

“Every year, throughout the late 19th century and early years of the 20th century, more amazing ‘novelties’ on wheels made their debut. Engineering companies throughout the industrial world were cashing in on a remarkable consumer boom in pioneer forms of transport, and both professional and amateur inventors were cobbling together primitive ‘vehicles’ of all sorts to satisfy public demand. The skates shown are sold by *The Road Skate Company* of Oxford Street, and the company also issues a booklet – free of charge - on ‘Road Skating’ which purports to give ‘every information on the subject’.



Road skates were the ancestors of today’s roller skates. They were invented by a Mr Ritter, a Swiss, who was foreman at the original Napier Works in Vine Street, where later the first Napier Cars were made. The Ritter Skates were popular around 1897/98 and several well known cyclists, notably M.S.Napier, Walter Munn and A. Hoffman formed a club and skated on the road every weekend”.

We would draw the reader’s attention to the sketch shown of the skate and contrast that with John Wilson’s invention. By

1897/1898 John Wilson had come, done, seen and gone –but has he had the credit he deserves? Impossible to say for sure but there is certainly irrefutable evidence he was involved with the pneumatic skate and its patent in January 1893, four full years before Mr Ritter arrived on the scene.

Earlier, we mentioned ‘abroad’ and, in the *New York Times* of the 28th October 1894, their Paris correspondent reports that – “The latest invention is intended to do away with walking by

making every man his own vehicle. A pneumatic skate is on exhibition at the Royal Aquarium, London, on which the ‘skatestrian’ can speed along much more rapidly than on the old-fashioned

Admission free.
Those interested in pneumatic skates should visit the Westminster Aquarium, where, in the St. Stephen's Great Hall, the Pneumatic Skate Manufacturing Co., Ltd., of Birmingham, are giving an exhibition of them, and allow their skates to be tried. The exhibition will be open from Sept. 3rd to 9th, between the hours of noon and 10 p.m., and admission is free on presentation of card.

wooden wheeled roller. The craze has infected Glasgow where pneumatic skaters go at the rate of twelve miles an hour, mowing down everything and everyone in their path. It is suggested that the pneumatic skates will be used for military purposes. A retreating army that knows how to skate can get away from trouble three times as fast as by the ordinary heel and toe method.

We had suggested that Wilson’s invention had even reached New Zealand and that is indeed the case. *The Timaru Herald* of the 17th November 1894 carried the article which had been published in *The Ironmonger* and was reproduced above did

indeed make it to the South Canterbury Region of the South Island.

Did it all end happily with Mr Wilson riding off into the sunset with tangible evidence of his invention? Sadly no – it all ended on Wednesday the 10th June 1903 when John H. Wilson was

examined in the Kirkcaldy Bankruptcy Court. There, in front of Sheriff Gillespie, he was questioned by a Mr Galbraith on behalf

NOTICE.
ALL those having **CLAIMS** against **G. WILSON & Co., Ironmongers, 13 High Street, Kirkcaldy, British Pneumatic Road Skate, Cycle Coy., Kirkcaldy, J. H. WILSON** as an individual, are requested to lodge all Claims within 14 Days to **E. J. M. THOMPSON, C.A., 12 Queen Street, Edinburgh.**
April 2nd, 1903.

of the trustees of his estate. Wilson indicated that he had found himself in difficulties after purchasing property in Ava Street some years previously. In April 1903 he had signed a trust deed in favour of Mr E.G.M. Thomson C.A. of Glasgow. He believed that the value of his stock was around £200, but the trustee had sold it at auction for £59. He also claimed to have used some of the stock to pay bills. He further indicated that his mother was the owner of the shop which carried a rental of £26.00 per year, but he had not paid any rent for four years. On top of that, he was due his mother £245 with his sister due a further £83.

He was also questioned in relation to a letter he had sent to a Glasgow Solicitor who had been pressing him for payment on behalf of a client of theirs. In the letter he had stated that he held forty valuable Towdend bicycles in stock and that “they

should not be afraid for their money”. He now claimed, in court, that this was in fact a clerical error and he only had held four such machines.

The examination made Mr Wilson look rather foolish – he had told Mr Thomson (his trustee) that he had tried to float a company with a share capital of £10,000, with himself receiving a salary of £350, plus being allocated 2,000 shares. The plan had fallen through and he was asked by Mr Galbraith if this was a bona fide company or a fraud to be attempted on the public? Over and above, he claimed that he had a bankbook with the Commercial Bank, but could not find it. All in all he was portrayed, at best, as an incompetent businessman, or at worst, someone more sinister.

A rather sad ending to his dream made worse by having also appeared three times in court at the turn of the twentieth century. One was on an explosives charge, the others possibly less serious, but nonetheless they were court appearances which do not help the promotion of the business.

The first saw John Wilson appear before Lord Kincairn in the

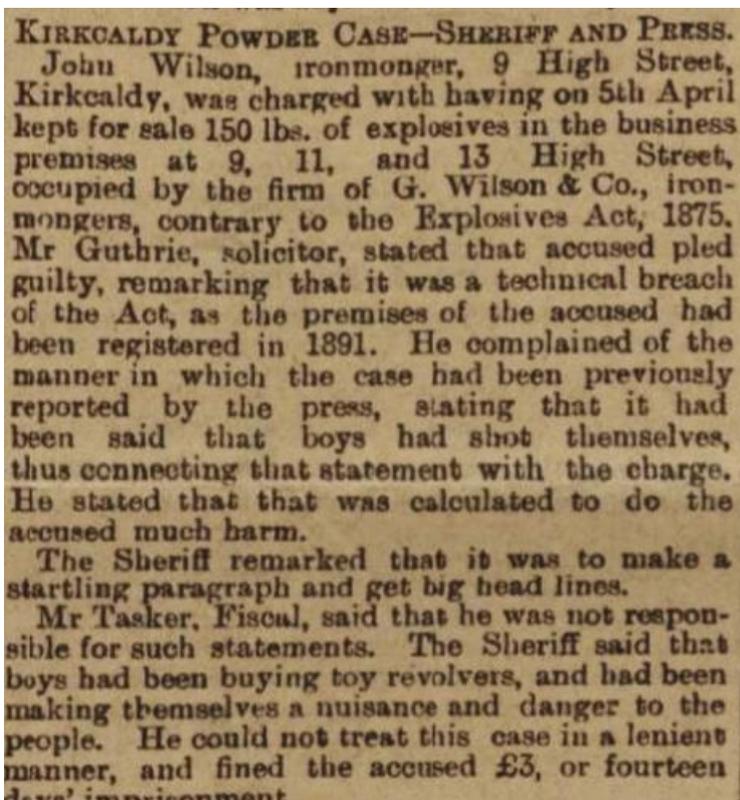


Court of Session on the 19th January 1889. The case was reported in *The Courier* of the next day. It might just be a precursor of the financial issues

which eventually overwhelmed the company. This particular

difficulty had first surfaced in October of the previous year. Hobart Bird & Co. of Coventry had brought an action over unpaid cycle parts which they had supplied between September 1897 and June of 1898. The original bill was for £60 13 1d and only £5 had been paid to date. Wilson had stated that the goods did not conform to the order and that they had been returned. Just as the case was about to be heard it was announced that the bill and court expenses had been settled. Was this the start of the downwards slide?

He had then been charged in April 1900 with storing 150 lbs of explosives held on his premises, contrary to the Explosives Act of 1875. Both he and his solicitor argued that the case was a technicality as he had been registered to hold explosives in 1891. It transpired that cartridges had been sold to what were termed 'boys' and they had in turn made a nuisance of themselves "by discharging a weapon at householder's doors"! One of the 'boys', it was suggested in evidence, had managed to shoot himself and was lying in the infirmary. Police enquiries led them to Wilson as having been the seller of the cartridges and they discovered thousands of cartridges held on the premises.



KIRKCALDY POWDER CASE—SHERIFF AND PRESS.
John Wilson, ironmonger, 9 High Street, Kirkcaldy, was charged with having on 5th April kept for sale 150 lbs. of explosives in the business premises at 9, 11, and 13 High Street, occupied by the firm of G. Wilson & Co., ironmongers, contrary to the Explosives Act, 1875. Mr Guthrie, solicitor, stated that accused pled guilty, remarking that it was a technical breach of the Act, as the premises of the accused had been registered in 1891. He complained of the manner in which the case had been previously reported by the press, stating that it had been said that boys had shot themselves, thus connecting that statement with the charge. He stated that that was calculated to do the accused much harm.
The Sheriff remarked that it was to make a startling paragraph and get big head lines.
Mr Tasker, Fiscal, said that he was not responsible for such statements. The Sheriff said that boys had been buying toy revolvers, and had been making themselves a nuisance and danger to the people. He could not treat this case in a lenient manner, and fined the accused £3, or fourteen days' imprisonment.

Wilson protested that he had done nothing illegal in selling the cartridges and it was the Press who were linking the shooting and explosive breaches together – thereby creating very bad publicity for himself and the firm. Sheriff Armour disagreed and Wilson was fined £3 with the alternative of 14 day's imprisonment.

Almost exactly a year later in June 1901 the *Fife Free Press* reported an incident which perhaps in some way reflects poor judgement. Donald Somers, a miner from Dunfermline, along with a friend William McKie, had pedalled to Kirkcaldy to attend the Links Market. Before setting out they had imbibed a considerable volume of beer at *Stewart's Inn*. On their arrival they were seeking stabling for their cycles. Wilson used his yard as a place to leave bicycles for a small fee and this is what the two worthies did. Labels were attached to the cycles with the cost being 3d if collected by 10.00pm and, if not, 1d being added to the price. The court was told that it was Wilson's 10 year old nephew who was in charge of the 'parking' – he worked from 2.00pm until 2.00am and had collected 15 shillings. Once again, Somers and McKie enjoyed more beer and did not return until the following morning. Somer's cycle had been moved to an outhouse and it appears that there was

no longer an acetylene lamp attached plus the label was on the ground. Wilson claimed that it had nothing to do with him – he claimed his nephew had sole responsibility as he was allowed to keep all the money. He refused compensation –

DISPUTE AS TO A BICYCLE LAMP.—In Kirkcaldy Small Debt Court on Thursday—Sheriff Liddal on the bench—proof was led in an action at the instance of Donald Somers, miner, Albany Street, Dunfermline, against George Wilson, cycle agents, High Street, Kirkcaldy, who take in for safe keeping cycles and other accessories, on payment of a rent, and that the pursuers did on 20th April, 1901, leave at defenders' a bicycle to which was attached an acetylene lamp, and on calling for which the following morning the lamp was amissing, and had not yet been delivered, and of which the defenders refused to give delivery or to compensate the pursuer to the amount of 12s. Pursuer stated that he came from Dunfermline on 20th April for the purpose of attending Links Market. He met William M'Kie at the Stewart Arms, and they rode into Kirkcaldy together, arriving at four o'clock. He had an acetylene lamp attached to his bicycle. They saw Mr Wilson in front of his shop, and asked stabling for their bicycles, and he told them to take them to the back yard. They went up the close, and a boy told them to put their machines against the wall. The boy said the charge was 3d for keeping the machine till ten o'clock, and 1d extra after that. The boy gave him a label, on which he wrote his name and address, and attached it to the lamp bracket of the machine. The lamp was then in the bracket. He went back for his machine between eight and nine o'clock on Sabbath morning, and found it had been put in an outhouse. The lamp was amissing and the label was found lying on the ground. His friend's lamp was all right. He told Wilson, who promised to make inquiries. The lamp cost 12s 6d. In his cross examination he stated that he left Dunfermline about one o'clock, but called at Lumphinnans. He intended to go home on Saturday night, but he had too much beer. William M'Kie corroborated as to the lamp being left on the bicycle. They were not told to write on the label whether they had a lamp. For the defence, George Wilson stated that it was his nephew who took charge of the storing of the bicycles, and he allowed him to keep whatever money he collected. When in the yard about five o'clock he saw an arvel bicycle without a lamp. He learned afterwards that it was pursuer's machine. Cross-examined, he stated that they would have about 150 bicycles in the yard that day. There was always some one in charge of the yard from one o'clock until three o'clock in the morning. John H. Wilson, 12 years of age, said he was in charge of the yard from two o'clock on the Saturday until two o'clock on the Sunday morning. He gave the parties labels, and told them to write their name and address, and if they had a lamp to mention that on the label. Pursuer's bicycle had no lamp. He drew sixteen shillings, and his uncle told him to keep the money. After hearing the evidence the Sheriff gave decree for 12s, with £1 18s 10d expenses. Agents—For pursuer, Mr J. Inglis, solicitor; for defender, Mr Jas. Thomson, solicitor.

was taken to court - damages of 12 shillings were awarded with costs of £1:18:10d.

Interestingly, he was defended by a James Thomson. Given the firm of James Thomson of 51A High Street are now in their fourth generation since opening in 1898 – could they be one and the same? A helpful lady at the firm advised that the records from the period no longer exist.

The 1903 notice of the Trust Deed was the last mention we could trace in relation to this

interesting and epic venture. Poor Wilson, as mentioned above, blamed it all on financial difficulties incurred since he purchased a house in Ava Street. It all finished with seemingly

no patent, no house, sequestrated, and due monies to both his mother and sister.



STOP PRESS - alongside researching and writing this narrative, the team made attempts to trace the Wilson family in more detail. Available time was insufficient to complete this task in full, but, we are delighted to announce, that some concentrated research has now allowed us to paint a picture of the family members and their relationships. The answer as to why the firm was named *George Wilson & Co* has also been unearthed.

All will be revealed shortly, via our blog section, and our facebook page will announce when it will be available.

So ends our visit to the 1850s and the tale of two ironmongery businesses – one traditional – the other augmented by an inventive mind which for a brief period brought John H Wilson close to the cusp of fame and fortune.

Somewhere there must/may be in a museum or dusty attic an example of the pneumatic skate. It lifted the humble roller skate out

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A BOON TO CYCLISTS.
All Cyclists should see the Neilson Patent
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WORKS—SANDS ROAD, KIRKCALDY.

of skating rinks and with the help of pneumatic tyres

KIRKCALDY CYCLE DEPOT.
Alexander A. Hay,
(Late) Manager of "The Neilson" Cycle Coy., Limited),
HAS OPENED that SHOP, 16 HIGH STREET, with a new Stock of Ladies', Gent.'s, and Juvenile Cycles of the following well-known makers, for which he has secured the sole agency for the district, viz:—Humbers, Quadrants, Swift, Sunbeams, Stars, New Comets, New Hudsons, Avonnes, and Holden Juvenile Cycles. Accessories at Moderate Prices. Ladies', Gent.'s, and Juvenile Cycles on Hire.
Intending Buyers should see the Value offered before Purchasing elsewhere.

Note Address—
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produced a simple means of transport that apparently could allow the wearer to travel at speed over many types of terrains. After selling out to Gibbs and Marrian, the Wilson enterprise probably saw the writing on the wall with the arrival across the street of Neilson Brothers who soon captured the Kirkcaldy market in bicycles before moving onto cars. It was made even worse when the manager of Neilsons, a Mr A. A. Hay, also commenced business at number 16 High Street – cycle outlets at 9, 16 and 22 – at least one too many.

There is nothing wrong with having a dream and even better if an attempt is made to bring it to reality. It is hard to believe that an invention by a Kirkcaldy man, for a brief spell, almost produced a revolution in personal transport.

After the high point of the possibilities for the pneumatic skate – it all seemed to go downhill! Perhaps the best and only way

to finish is to paraphrase Alfred Lord Tennyson – “It is better to have invented and lost – than never to have invented at all.”