

# MEMORIES OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND GROUP OF THE SRGC

**The trials and tribulations of the Group  
described by one of the early members**

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*by* A C SMALL

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**F**OLLOWING the foundation of the Club in 1933, a meeting of representatives of Glasgow, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire was held in the Central Halls, Bath Street, Glasgow, including Edward Darling, Philip Crow, George Laurie and Professor G. Pontecorvo. They proceeded to organise Groups, each with a Group Convenor. Other early members included Mrs C. Jamieson, Messrs D. Wintersgill, W. C. Buchanan, W. Carvel, R. J. C. Biggart and David Livingstone, who organised joint meetings to be held in Glasgow.

## PRE-WAR MEETINGS

They quickly got down to business and held their first show in 1934, the Show Secretary being Edward Darling. A Committee was formed and a Secretary and Treasurer appointed but it appears that no minutes were kept, so what follows is largely personal memories, supplemented by gleanings from Syllabuses of Group Meetings, which were first held in Miss Buick's Tearoom. Edward Darling also became Chairman of the Group Meetings and emphasised that this was a Club, by which he meant a group of friends with a common interest in rock, or alpine plants, not, as he said, a mere association. By his inspiring leadership the Group got off to a splendid start and in return he was regarded with great respect and affection, not only for his first class advice and encouragement but also for his example as shown in multi-pan classes in the Shows. Eventually he was succeeded by Alex Todd and then Loudon Morton until it was agreed that Group Convenors and other office-bearers should occupy the Chair in rotation.

## POSTWAR ACCOMMODATION PROBLEMS

When war broke out in 1939 operations were suspended, but in

1946 when war ended, it was possible to get going quite quickly with Edward Darling once again chairing joint meetings. As an example of his enthusiasm he told me that, while serving the army in the trenches, during a lull in hostilities he created a small rock garden nearby.

The next Show was held in 1947 and then in each succeeding year. Suitable meeting places have always been a problem. When private cars were far from common, members used public transport and venues were near Glasgow Central railway station in tearooms where members could go from business and have a meal and sit until the meeting started. When I joined the Club in 1951, we met in Rosalind's Tearoom at 32A Gordon Street but when the lease of the tearoom expired, we had to move at short notice and were fortunate to get a room in the Grosvenor Restaurant. As it was not satisfactory, we moved the following year to Miss Cranston's at Waterloo Street until that building was demolished to make way

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*Venues were near Glasgow Central  
railway station in tearooms*

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for a modern office block, then we moved to the YMCA restaurant in Bothwell Street. Unfortunately it had pillars which obstructed the view of the slides, so we tried the Christian Institute next door, where the hall keeper kept us rigidly to our closing time by snapping off the lights. Our next venue was the new Renfield Church Centre in Bath Street, a pleasant hall near the Kings Theatre. By this time many members travelled by car and some found problems parking. When Renfield Church united with St Stephen's we moved back to our first home the Central Halls, by this time St George's Tron Church Hall, which for one year was good but the following year we had to use a different and unsuitable hall. Enquiries at Renfield St Stephen's showed that the Kirk Lounge would be available – here we are back in a very good room but again with a parking problem – 12 meeting places in 54 years.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership kept growing and changing with stalwarts like Margaret Thomson, Ron and Mary Wagstaff, Don and Joan Stead, Miss Simpson, Mrs Aird, Dr Lucy Dean, Daisy McFadyen, Margaret Nicholson, Chris Davidson, Dr Margaret Gibson and many others. Here it may be of interest to glance at the different backgrounds of our members: e.g. titled people 5, medical 10, university professors 2,

university and college lecturers 8, school teachers 12, lawyers 2, bankers 3, lady artist 1 and blacksmith 1.

## MEETINGS AND SHOWS

In 1966 the Beeching Act closed railway lines and badly affected Renfrewshire members in the Kilmacolm, Bridge of Weir area, although the growth of car ownership relieved the problem to a degree but added to the parking difficulties in Glasgow. To counter this difficulty, it was decided in 1972 to hold a meeting in Kilmacolm and the following year in Bridge of Weir and Gourrock – eventually these became annual joint meetings with the local Horticultural Societies, to our mutual benefit as these Societies provide a hall and we supply a speaker arranged by the Renfrewshire Group Convenor. A few desultory meetings were held by the Dunbartonshire and Glasgow Groups in Kessington Hall and in Knightwood Community Centre respectively but did not prove popular. In the early 1970s Bill and Bette Ivey, in an effort to revive the moribund Ayrshire Group, asked to join the West of Scotland Group. Fortunately they were successful and in 1975 they were able to stand on their own feet.

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*At the instigation of the Duchess of Montrose  
there was a joint venture with the  
Caledonian Horticultural Society*

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Shows were first held in the Central Halls in Bath Street, Glasgow but soon moved to the MacLellan Galleries in Sauchiehall Street, an ideal site with a choice of halls, the earlier shows being of two-day duration. On one occasion at the instigation of the then Duchess of Montrose, there was a joint venture with the Caledonian Horticultural Society, held to provide a show of cut flowers of large Rhododendrons. With the rise of inflation, the cost of renting the MacLellan Galleries became such that another venue had to be found. This was the Town Hall at Milngavie, which has proved successful.

## SPEAKERS

Speakers at the winter monthly meetings were originally from our own members, e.g.: Alf Evans, Jim Sutherland, H. H. Davidian, J. R. Aitken, J. T. Aitken, Henry and Margaret Taylor, Don and Joan Stead, David Livingstone, W. and B. Ivey, R. and L. Bezzant, J. D. Crosland, Jack Drake, J. Lawson, John Main and others. With

the introduction of the Travelling Speaker programme, names of lecturers from farther afield began to appear on our syllabuses and then the bequest by Dr Dean, known as the Dean Memorial Fund, provided money for the same purpose. To obtain a good balance of subject a policy of alternating talks on cultivation with visits to habitats has been adopted as far as possible.

To provide funds for the running expenses, Mr Darling provided plants to be raffled and other members did likewise until the raffles began to take up too much time and a sales table presided over by Martin Bremner and later by David and Avril Walkinshaw has now taken over at Group Meetings and, at our Annual Shows, providing a substantial addition to the receipts.

## TROPHIES

Trophies have been donated by members, to be competed for at the annual Glasgow Shows:

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| 1  | 1937 | Dr Buchanan Memorial Rose Bowl    |
| 2  | 1950 | Henry Archibald Challenge Rose    |
| 3  | 1951 | Crawford Silver Challenge Cup     |
| 4  | 1958 | Rhododendron Challenge Trophy     |
| 5  | 1959 | Urie Trophy                       |
| 6  | 1959 | James B. Wilson Cup               |
| 7  | 1964 | William C. Buchanan Challenge Cup |
| 8  | 1972 | Edward Darling Memorial Trophy    |
| 9  | 1972 | Ian Donald Memorial Trophy        |
| 10 | 1976 | Charles Simpson Memorial Trophy   |

Prizes were donated from Group Funds for competition at Shows accompanying decennial international Conferences:

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| 1951 | London and Edinburgh: Festival of Britain: Silver Quaich (a two-handled cup) |
| 1971 | Harrogate: Crystal Goblet, engraved with Club logo                           |
| 1981 | Nottingham: Crystal Goblet, engraved with Club logo                          |
| 1991 | Norwich: Caithness Glass, engraved with Club logo                            |

## GARDEN VISITS

An important feature of our programme has been the organising of garden visits, by the appointment of an Outings Convenor. Coaches were booked and lunches arranged at suitable hotels. On one occasion at least, the inhabitants of Bearsden were astonished to see a double-decker bus trundling past their gardens.