

# Forgotten citizens beyond the margin

The HERALD, 14th June 1989

The politicians are buzzing round Glasgow at present. But most of the time they ignore the real city.

JACK McLEAN affectionately anatomises an ignored part of the true, people's city: Toryglen.

TORYGLEN is at the margin beyond the margin. It always was. Its origins in the 1950s new Glasgow -- a stirring vision of sub East-European/Atleean Social Democracy with inside lavyies and a good life for the wife and kiddies -- saw to it that Toryglen was like every other scheme: a touch soulless at best.

Back in the fifties and early sixties, though, Toryglen was one of the prime schemes to find yourself allotted to. Not quite Knightswood or Mosspark or even its contemporary estate, Merrylee, but definitely desirable. It was on the edge of the old Govanhill where there were yet notions of gentility or at least the respectable working class syndrome which was to lead to the upwardly mobile stuff of later years.

There was grass about and fresh air and neighbouring Castlemilk was still half-built and had not yet developed its status of undesirability. It was a good place to be and the local children got to go to, a mile away admittedly, one of the best schools in Glasgow, Queen's Park Secondary School. A legendary school, packed with old traditions. Toryglen had all the ear-markings of the "good" scheme.

But it was also at the edge of Rutherglen and at the edge of social changes which were to occur in many of the housing estates which were being built throughout Scotland in those post-war years. These were to be crucial factors in the development of Toryglen.

First of all Rutherglen. This was an ancient burgh, right on the doorstep of the new scheme, a burgh resentful of Glasgow and its ways: still semi-rural and conscious of its long history, with its fairs and its burgh councils and its own royal charter. It took not at all to its new neighbours: not then; not now. It allowed

nothing of Toryglen past its borders and to this day is still fighting any kind of incursion.

A recent proposal by Strathclyde Regional Council to amalgamate Toryglen and Rutherglen children into the same school has met with enormous resistance from both groups of residents, and this despite the fact that the majority of Toryglen people shop in Rutherglen rather than in Glasgow or even nearby Govanhill.

But Toryglen had nothing of nearby Govanhill, or of Glasgow come to that, either. It was a new estate and it kept on getting newer. From the early beginnings of a peripheral estate with lots of decent and respectable tenants it went on, as many of the schemes were to do, to extend itself. Thus the notorious, for Toryglen, Prospecthill Circus and surrounding canton was erected.

Here I have to declare a personal interest. I worked in Toryglen for over a decade: taught in the new Queen's Park School now risibly set in Toryglen, and I knew the Circus. Toryglen called that area simply that, as it had clowns and wild animals and ringmasters and demoralising sawdust about it, like any other circus, which indeed it did. There were lots of good people about the Circus. But there were lots of undesirables too. There still are.

First the decent people. Round the Prospecthill Circus of Toryglen are rows of neat enough houses and high rise flats. A quiet area it is, despite the usual high unemployment. Sure, some of the quietness of a morning is due to the unemployed in their beds or the dope smokers mulling over their videos watched into the small hours: it would be surprising in depressed areas like this if it were not so. But there are clear indications of people trying their best.

A row of bilious pink curtains, neighbour after neighbour emulating each other in outward finery, and with the almost Levantine aesthetic which the working classes invariably display throughout the country. The net curtain industry, too, would go broke if it were not for the sensibilities of such ordinary people. Beside a graffiti-smearred gable end is a small red sports car, a pride and joy, no doubt, to some employed youth.

The houses look out on an industrial landscape worthy of Orwell. In the high rise flats there are those who try hard to keep the decencies up. Wee Mrs Conroy puts up pictures torn out of a calendar to cheer up the landing while she complains of the neighbours above and below and of the youths who assemble at nights to drink

bottles of Buckfast and leave the empties, with their ominous promise of social breakdown, tucked into the steps. There are, says Mrs Conroy, "all those alkie in the flats across the way. And the wee lassies wi' weans -- single parents y'know -- they attract some right bad hats."

As there always is in schemes there is a shopping precinct – shops that do not grow organically out of local needs, but rather out of planners' perceptions of them. Not a few of them are now irrevocably boarded up: all of them have steel shutters to protect them from the ever-present vandals: an off-licence would be impossible.

Michael's Chip Shop has grilles at its counter. You poke your hand through a meagre space in the grille to take your fish supper and you have to put your money through first: nobody thinks there is anything odd about this. Like getting fed through a handsworth of openness: just the way the dole money comes and the pension and everything else. The local pub -- the Beacon -- is filled with old men, most of them under pension age but made geriatric by unemployment, who sit lethargically on seats upholstered in slashed plastic. The barmaid is cheerful enough: the working classes are ever cheerful in adversity. You are not going to get *conversazioni* about Sartre and Joyce here, though.

This is what the sociologists call an ethnocentric area: nobody goes out of it much and few want to either. Down the road in Polmadie, not five minutes away from the Beacon, is the Spur Bar and Lounge. Quiet, clean, respectable, good food and well-appointed surroundings, a clientele considerably more confident and up-market in working class terms, the Spur has a community easily visible where the Beacon has not.

Another five minutes away from the Beacon and the shopping precinct and the Prospecthill Circus there is South Toryglen with well-kept gardens and even a new yuppie estate of Georgian pretensions. The children here are cleaner and better-dressed. The girls have the pristine white socks and the boys the creased grey flannels denoting parental motivation and parental finance. Most of those children go to Kings' Park School rather than the nearer Queen's Park.

Their parents -- many of whom have bought their humble enough homes- have taken to describing themselves as coming from Kings Park anyway. They will rather pathetically deny Toryglen. District councillor (Labour) and local Church of Scotland minister, the Rev. Stuart MacQuarrie, is strongly supportive of his flock but admits there is a lack of confidence among the people of Toryglen.

“There is a lack of identity,” he says, about the area he represents in more ways than one, but claims this is changing.” The people try so hard and things are going to happen here.” One cannot help but muse on his optimism.

But 10 minutes walk away is the other margin of Toryglen: Govanhill. This is the edge of the Central constituency. A big, blowsy, tenemental, archetypal Glasgow district, full of people and ethnic divergence: it has seen the Jewish community and the Highlanders and now contains a vivid and vivacious amalgam of Irish and Asian and aboriginal communities.

Paddy Neason’s pub is packed on a Friday night: with Sikhs and Donegalies and Glasgow folk, easy in each other's company and united in their recreative pints of Guinness, just as they are united in their shopping sprees of a Saturday. Many will patronise the Halal butchers along with a one-time Pakistani neighbour.

Here you will find Mrs Di Paolo watering her vast array of potted plants which she has displayed along the first floor parapet. The nameplates at her close-mouth door read like the United Nations: Medina, Ahmed, Di Paulo, Wong, Paxton, Malik, Sawadzki. Govanhill is the old Glasgow with many a gap site there, true, but with a new sense of the sort of optimism which Toryglen's Reverend MacQuarrie is striving to invoke.

Things are getting better in Govanhill: indeed life is getting better in Govanhill, but then life has never really gone away. The pubs, the Chinese and Indian take-aways, banks, fruiterers, fishmongers, drapers, schools, nearby health centres (which Toryglen lacks incidentally), the railway stations, the buses and the bustle, the people in the streets: this is the city which has been denied the people of Toryglen.

Govanhill is just on the margin of the politicians’ concern this week, as Toryglen is not. Toryglen is the margin beyond the margin this time. The Water Margin. Like a water margin, too, you cannot see it: but it’s there and the politicians will not be able to ignore it either.