

HISTORY UNLOCKED



STORIES AND MEMORIES OF
627 DUMBARTON ROAD





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INTRODUCTION

Here at Improving Lives, we have often wondered about our building.

At the back of the building - behind reception, the meeting rooms and kitchen - lie a couple of curious doorways. We had heard rumours they may have been jail cells!

With the building being more than 100 years old, we knew there must be some notable history, so we set out to find it.

We worked with Clydesider as part of their 'In Peace and Revolution' heritage project, which was all about finding and sharing stories of local community activism. We knew that as our building had been home to the Independent Resource Centre before us, it had been a place where local people and volunteers had supported each other in times of need. But could we unearth more links to activism, and more stories from the history of the building?

We were delighted at what we found!

Throughout this book we will look at our building through various different time periods, from when the building was built, and all key moments up until now.

We hope you enjoy the tour!



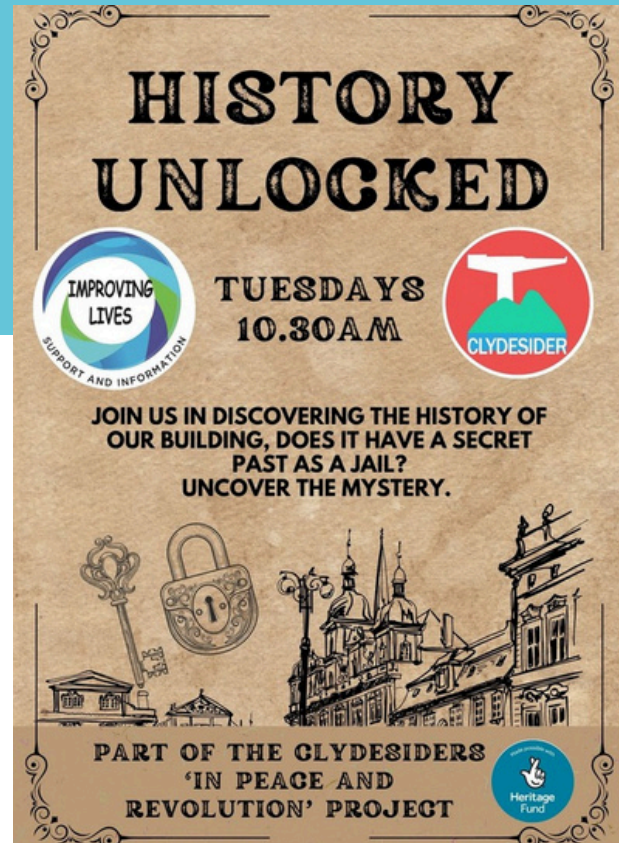
HISTORY UNLOCKED

The History Unlocked group was brought about to find out more about our building, so we collected some volunteers and group members to find out this information.

The group met regularly on Tuesday mornings with each member sharing their ideas, theories, stories and research.

To learn about our building, we looked at many different sources of information - the archives, Ancestry, census, maps and arguably the most valuable sources of information, people's memories. From this we collected, noted and shared information and now we are sharing it with you through this book.

The History Unlocked group took trips to Dumbarton Library and met with archive staff, learning information about our building and surrounding areas. A few weeks later the group took a trip to Clydebank Library to take a look at the new Clydebank museum.



POLICE STATION

The building was built in 1893. Although we are unsure how long the construction took, we do know that by 1906, it became a police station.

We found a report from 1907 from the Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland saying that "New stations have been completed at Dalmuir (that's us!), Radnor Park, Kilpatrick and Helensburgh... There are 18 stations with from 2 to 13 cells at each."

So it seems our building was one of the smaller police stations with 2 cells.

The report also says: "Officers in charge of stations with cells live rent free, others pay from 1s to 3s per week for houses provided."

This gave us a clue that the flats above may have been where the police officers lived (for free!) As you will read later, we found a great story about what sharing a building with your colleague was like.



Images of the cell doors today



Burgh of Clydebank Coat of Arms

On the outside of the building you can see the Clydebank coat of arms.

The Burgh of Clydebank and their coat of arms was created in 1886 due to the rapid rise of workers in Clydebank.

The coat of arms consists of a red Saltire cross, which is the St Patrick's cross, a Singer Sewing Machine, H.M.S. Ramillies which was built by J&G Thomson (which would later become John Brown's). The Lion and the Stag are additions from the private arms of James Thomson, shipbuilder and First Provost Alexander Pattison.

The Coat of Arms also contains a symbolic crown and helmet and a bundle of corn which is to represent the agricultural work known in the area.

Lastly Latin is inscribed at the bottom of the coat of arms. "Labore et Scientia" - this translates to "By work and Knowledge".

A NOTABLE POLICE SERGEANT

During our research we found out some stories about a Sergeant who spent time working at the police station.

The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald reported that in January 1915, Mr. William McDonald had been promoted to Sergeant and placed at Dalmuir Police Station at 627 Dumbarton Road.

McDonald first joined the Ayrshire Constabulary in 1900, later he transferred to the Dumbartonshire force and was stationed at Kirkintilloch and Waterside, where on two separate occasions he was successful in saving lives from drowning.

Sgt. McDonald has been described by others as a tall man at 6ft 3 inch and presenting with a "Fine Physique".

McDonald was also an avid fan of playing bowls and was a member of Dalmuir Bowling Club for many years, even reaching a season final one year.



**Dumbartonshire Constabulary
Cap Badge**

In June of 1921, Sergeant William McDonald gained another promotion to inspector and moved to Clydebank Police Station, where he carried out the remaining years of his Police service.

In April 1927 the Kirkintilloch Gazette reported that Inspector William McDonald of the Dumbartonshire Constabulary had retired on a pension after an impressive 27 years of service.

Within his years of service, it was noted that Inspector McDonald had only taken sick leave twice for short periods of time.



A DISPUTE BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

During our research, we were contacted by a woman whose great grandfather, William Barbour, had served as a police constable when 627 Dumbarton Road was a police station.

She kindly shared some documents with us that shed light on an interesting dispute between her great grandfather and his commanding officer, Sergeant William Ewen, when they both lived in the flats above the station.

Noisy neighbour

On a quiet Tuesday morning in 1926 Sergeant Ewen calls police to his flat to complain about his upstairs neighbour, Constable Barbour.

He alleges that Constable Barbour "began to saw up firewood in his kitchen. The sawing went on continually until 11.15am. Being my weekly rest day I was in my kitchen with Mrs Ewen, and the noise got quite unbearable."

On going upstairs to challenge Constable Barbour, Sergeant Ewen alleges that "he gave me quite a stare, and slammed the door in my face."

In another report, Ewen complains that Barbour had been "making himself objectionable for some time past" and when he speaks to him he gets "nothing but impertinence"!

When faced with a misconduct hearing, Constable Barbour denies the allegation - saying that he merely carried on sawing wood after Sergeant Ewen complained, as the job was only half finished.

Sadly, we do not find out whether Constable Barbour is ever punished for his noisy sawing. But the incident gives us a glimpse into what life is like when you live above your boss, and you dare to disturb his rest day!



← Constable Barbour's flat

← Sergeant Ewen's flat

← Police Station

[illegible]

RENT STRIKES



Within the history of our building, we have uncovered a link to the infamous Rent Strikes.

This was during the 1920s, when the area around Clydebank and Dalmuir saw thousands of people moving here for work. Housing was very scarce and often in a poor condition. When restrictions on rent increases that had been in place during the First World War were lifted, many landlords took the chance to put rents up - leaving many people unable to afford the payments.

In response, local residents grouped together to fight back against the rent increases, refusing to pay any rent at all.

This led to a series of evictions as landlords and police worked together to try to force people to pay. It was an issue that affected hundreds of people in nearby streets.

The Scotsman reported that on Christmas Eve 1924, "a huge force of policemen had been drafted in from all parts of the country by motor and concealed in Dalmuir Police Station in the early morning hours."

They were lying in wait ready to go out on dawn raids to evict tenants who had been refusing to pay rent. A group of "scouts" from the Tenants' Vigilante Committee had been on patrol throughout the night, looking out for the possibility of evictions so they could warn people ahead of time.

When the Scouts came off duty at 8am, the police officers were ready to strike.



RENT STRIKES

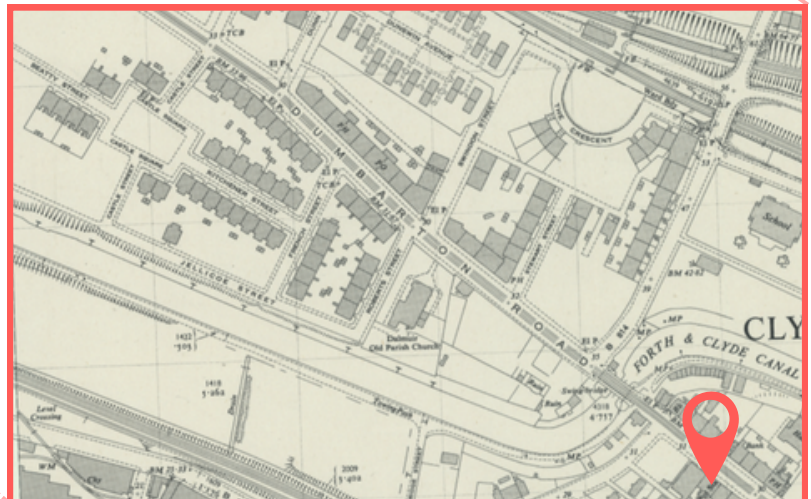
Several homes in Dalmuir were targeted on this eventful morning, with the first home being on Kitchener Street. This home had been occupied by a tenant who was removed from their home six weeks prior but like others in the area, did not give up that easy and returned to his home. The arrival of the police officers and the eviction officers, and the help of the "scouts" had created a crowd which slowed down the officers reaching their destinations.



There was also an arrest that was not a tenant that occurred during these events. A Press photographer was at the scene of the evictions and while present at the barrier the police had set up to hold back the crowds, they decided that they wanted to capture the moment. Although they had been warned both by the public and the police not to do so, they went ahead. This caused an outrage by some members of the public who rushed the photographer and started kicking him and his equipment. One man was arrested after this incident and placed in Dalmuir Police Station.

After three hours of standoffs between tenants and police, five tenants had been removed from their homes, another two houses on Kitchener Street had been evicted, one from Castle Square and lastly a house from Jellicoe Street.

After learning that our building was at the centre of this important piece of local history, it made us think about what life was like for people who lived here at the time, and who fought bravely to stand up for better conditions.



We are here!

THE LOST YEARS

Pat O'Neill and various council members.

PROVOST O'Neill, wife May, council members and exchange youngsters welcome the South African visitors to West Dunbartonshire.

Words of warning on buying goods by post

TRADING Standards officers at West Dunbartonshire Council have warned local people to take extra care when buying goods by post.

The warning came after complaints were received about a local business which traded in refurbished engine parts for cars.

Principal Trading Standards Officer Joe McMurdo said: "The company placed adverts in magazines nationwide inviting orders and payment in advance. "In some cases, orders were unfulfilled and in others substandard parts were supplied. "The business went into liquidation before it could recompense customers. The only way people can get their money back now is to take civil action against the owners of the business."

The business in question has ceased trading in West Dunbartonshire, but a similar string of events has been reported in various parts of the West Coast of Scotland.

By AMANDA McKENDRICK

To help consumers avoid being caught out, Consumer and Trading Standards advise a few simple precautions:

- Check that the newspaper, magazine or catalogue is up to date.
- If buying through a newspaper or magazine, check whether you are covered by a Mail Order Protection Scheme. If you are not, and you pay in advance, you could lose your money if the trader goes out of business.
- Try to avoid sending cash by post. If you have to, use registered post, otherwise, use credit cards, cheques, or postal orders, and make sure you keep a record of payment.
- Buying on credit gives you extra rights if the goods cost more than £100 — even if you only pay a deposit. The credit company is equally liable for any claim you have against the trader.
- When you write, always include your name and address, even when returning goods.
- Keep copies of orders and dates when sent.
- Keep a copy of the advert. Make sure there is full postal address for the trader. Be wary of dealing with any company which has only a post office box number.
- If you are joining a club, make sure you know what commitment you are making and the cancellation terms.

If things go wrong, you should complain to the trader. If the problem cannot be resolved, approach your local Consumer and Trading Standards Office for advice.

The addresses and contact numbers are: 147 High Street, Dumbarton — 01389 742544; 627 Dumbarton Road, Clydebank — 0141 952 2204/6403.

Police recover body

THE body of a 29-year-old man has been recovered from the bottom of a rock face on the banks of Loch Long, south of Arrochar.

The man has been named as Paul Brown, of Sandyflats, Johnstone; he had been camping in the area with friends.

There are no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death and a report will be sent to the Procurator Fiscal.

We think the building stopped being a Police Station around the 1950s, although Billy's story (page 16) puts the date later than that.

We haven't been able to find out what the building was used for next, but we know that it became the Trading Standards office at some point before the 1990s.

This local office was set up as a place people could seek help if they had become the victim of a rogue trader, or been sold something that wasn't as advertised.

We wonder how many Dalmuir locals fought back against dodgy traders and counterfeit goods by reporting them to Trading Standards?

Trading Standards

We know that our building was Trading Standards after the Police Station and before the Independent Resource Centre, however, we do not know what this building was in between these years.

In all of our research on our building and from all the stories we have heard, this gap had not been filled.

Do you know? Let us know

If you happen to know what was in this gap, please reach out and let us know. If you know any other information on our building please reach out and tell us. We would love to know.
contact@improvinglives.co.uk

INDEPENDENT RESOURCE CENTRE



In 2008 the building became home to the Independent Resource Centre.

This organisation had evolved out of the Unemployed Action Group, originally set up in the 1970s to help the thousands of people who found themselves out of work as industries like shipbuilding and Singer's pulled out of Clydebank.

It was started by local people including John Nicholson, who were out of work themselves, and who wanted to help others in the same situation.

The Group gave people advice, helped them fill out the forms they needed to claim benefits and also provided an important social network for people facing really challenging times.

The Unemployed Action Group carried on providing these important services over the next few decades, changing its name to the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre in 1992 before changing again to the Independent Resource Centre shortly before moving to this building in 2008.



One of the key people who ran the Centre at this time was Mary Collins.

Mary summed up what the Centre was all about:

"It goes without saying that unemployed people need to come together in order to overcome obstacles such as access to education and training, welfare advice, etc. The Centre has been a lifeline for many individuals. It is fair to say that a centre such as ours, with local community volunteers... is perceived rightly as nonthreatening."

The Independent Resource Centre occupied the building for 14 years. By the time it closed in 2022, it had helped local people claim around £7 million in benefits.

There are probably thousands of local people who benefited from the help of the Centre. Everything from computer classes to borrowing clothes for job interviews - Mary and her team would try to help however they could.

Their work lives on through Improving Lives, the building's current residents, who also help local folk who need support.

And the inspirational Mary Collins is honoured in a plaque on a meeting room in the building.



Later in 2022, Improving Lives moved into the building at 627 Dumbarton Road.

Improving Lives are a small charity covering the whole of West Dunbartonshire and beyond. We offer a safe and informative space for people living with disabilities, their family or carers.

Improving Lives' founder, Kevin Crawford, had woken up one morning to find his life changed forever. His ongoing health conditions and bone deterioration culminated in a trapped nerve that left him in agony and unable to move. Recovery has been a very slow process for Kevin, involving surgery on his spine, during which time he had to come to terms with a drastic change in his mobility.

Finding himself new to the world of living with disability was an eye opener for Kevin and his wife Dhyani who suddenly found herself as a carer - as they struggled to find out what services, support and activities were available in their hometown.

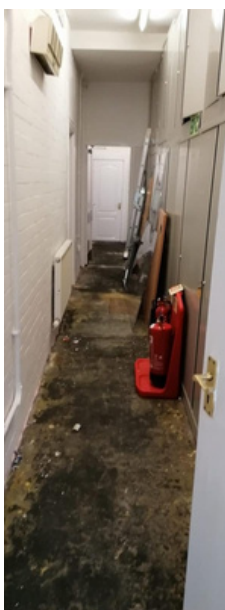
It was then that they decided to set up Clydebank Disability Group which later changed its name to The Big Disability Group following demand from other areas outside of Clydebank. We recently changed our name again in 2023, to Improving Lives, to expand the reach of our services.



Improving Lives provide one to one advice and personalised support plans to allow and assist people to make improvements to their lives in whatever way they identify as important to them.

This can be getting out of the house for the first time in years, attending support or activity groups, getting into education or employment, help filling in a form or assistance in applying for a blue badge or bus pass.

From our hub at 627 Dumbarton Road we also run several support groups such as autism peer support, Art for Anxiety and men's fishing group. All of our groups focus on building confidence, growing relationships and building on strengths.



PEOPLE'S STORIES



BILLY MCGEECHAN

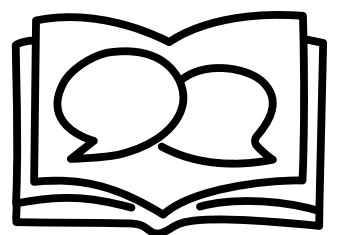
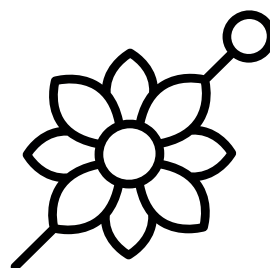
Volunteer at Improving Lives

My memory of the Police Office was back in the early 1960's, I lived in Kitchener Street at this time (now known as Castle Street). Me and a few friends were out playing out the back, only one block of tenements stood there in Jellicoe street. One of my friends came up with the idea that if any of us had a necklace or a brooch in our house, we could take it to the police office and you would be rewarded with a cash reward when the item is reclaimed.

So as things would turn out my mum just happened to be in possession of a fancy brooch, and so it was decided I would take the brooch along with them to the police office and say that we found it in the street at Kitchener Street. So we went along the road and entered the police office together and gave the officer the brooch, he then proceeded in taking our details, names, addresses, dates of birth.

The next part was to convince my mum that when she couldn't find her brooch, that she should try the police office just in case it had been handed in there. Me and my friends spent many days wondering how we could encourage her to try at the police office to check the lost property place. Eventually one of my friends said to her that his mum had lost a bracelet and it turned up there in the lost property of the police office.

At last she relented and popped in to the police office lost property. We waited excitedly for her to say that they had it, and we could head along to retrieve our much awaited reward. Alas I was greeted with an angry mum who clipped me hard across the ear and said that we were all to go along to the police office and apologise to the officer for wasting police time! We did and all walked out of that office after being reprimanded and warned that next time we would end up in prison, and sadly unrewarded for our escapades, but having learning a valued lesson.



DANNY MCCAFFERTY

Volunteer and former Chair of the Independent Resource Centre



If one word was to sum up the continuous historical threads leading to the establishment of the Independent Resource Centre, I would choose "ethos".

That ethos recognised the need for a truly independent organisation which wasn't just an "add on" to the statutory welfare system but which challenged negative, unfair, discriminatory and ineffective practices seeking policy and attitudinal change.

I was member number 8 of the Clydebank and Drumchapel Unemployed Action Group in the early 1970's, little recognising that it was the beginning of a relationship that would span nearly 50 years.

My own journey involved participation as a community activist, trade unionist and elected Councillor. Following retirement in 2010 I was contacted by Mary Collins, co-ordinator of the IRC who asked "what are you doing these days?"

That signalled the beginning of a voluntary role as Chair, involving policy development, community engagement, liaison with local and national agencies as well as political lobbying on behalf of the IRC.

The groundbreaking role of the IRC was acknowledged by motions passed at Westminster and Holyrood on its 25th Anniversary; by Social Security Scotland as a "pilot project" to inform best practice; representation as part of the Poverty Alliance at a European Poverty Conference in Brussels and by visits from Government Ministers, STUC leaders and other influential bodies.

When the IRC wound up, much of what it sought to achieve had been incorporated into social policy and welfare by government.

The IRC was never absorbed "into the system". Rather, it uniquely influenced "the system".



KEVIN CRAWFORD

Founder of Improving Lives

When I first started volunteering in the Independent Resource Centre at 627 Dumbarton Road, I never thought the building would end up meaning so much to me years later.

At the time, I was simply trying to help out and gain some experience in a different career but being there opened my eyes to how much the right support can change someone's life. The building was a place where people could come in and feel supported, respected and understood. My time volunteering there played a big part in giving me the passion for helping people in the community and wanting to make a difference.

Years later, when we started Improving Lives, the aim was simple. We wanted to create the kind of support that helps people feel less alone, more connected and better able to cope with whatever life throws at them.

A lot of that came from what I learned through my own experiences living with disabilities but also from my time in the building and seeing the difference support and community can make.

I honestly never imagined we would one day end up based in the very same building where all of that first started for me. Taking over 627 Dumbarton Road felt a bit surreal and like things had come full circle. The building has a long history of helping local people and supporting the community, and I think it is special that this is still happening today. Different people and organisations have used the building over the years, but the heart of the place has stayed the same. It has always been about people helping people.

I think our History Unlocked group have done an amazing job coming together to research the building. There is still so much to learn and I know we are all hoping that the public can help them fill in the gaps.

THANK YOU.

We would like to thank

- the Participants of the History Unlocked Group at Improving Lives,
- Peter Taylor for his artwork of our building,
- Carol Barbour for sharing her great-grandfather's story,
- William Henderson from West Dunbartonshire Council's Arts and Heritage Service for showing us how to research in local archives and granting permission for us to use the photos in this book,
- Kayleigh Hirst at Clydesider,
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund who funded Clydesider's 'In Peace and Revolution' project
- and The National Library Of Scotland for allowing us to reproduce the maps.

To find out more about Clydesider's 'In Peace and Revolution' project exploring West Dunbartonshire's local community activists, visit www.clydesider.org



At Improving Lives, we have often wondered about our building. At the back, behind reception, the meeting rooms and kitchen, lie a couple of curious doorways. We had heard rumours they may have been jail cells!

We wanted to find out more, so as part of Clydesider's 'In Peace and Revolution' heritage project, we set about researching the building's history.

This booklet shares the stories and information we found, the building's links to examples of local activism, and the people who have been part of its story.



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