

Scotland 1840-1910

- Brother James L. Coogan

The search for a text that does not overly romanticize Scotland's ancient history at the expense of a more integrated survey has not been easy. Most of what has been drawn for the purposes of this thumbnail sketch has been taken from Christopher Harvie's *Scotland: A Short History*¹⁶. For those interested in a more comprehensive overview of the country, a beginning with that text holds promise.

Although it is not possible at this time to document with any exactitude the arrival of the Coogan's (variously spelled: Cogan, Coogans, Coggin, Cougan, and MacCoggan or MAC Coggan, even O'Cuagain [Gaelic]¹⁷) into Scotland, there can be little doubt that its mid-nineteenth century industrial development was a deciding factor. Here there was an insatiable appetite for abundant (albeit unskilled) labor that constituted a clear alternative to the bitter living conditions afflicting the Irish people at the same time. The political history of the Scots during this era is in itself a fascination and not without an impact on the new immigrants, this essay will focus on immediate conditions that influenced its working-class population of Glasgow.

While the family name can be traced to Welsh origins and identified with the Anglo-Norman invasion (A.D. 1171) it can be found in its many forms in Co. Leitrim, Cork, and Clare. It was recorded in Scotland when John Coogan (born 1849) married Margaret Coogans in 1870. His parents were listed as Patrick Coogan and Mary Murphy but whether these had come from Ireland is not presently known.

Port Glasgow (www.portglasgow.com) had been long identified with trade. For a time most of the nineteenth century the commodity of tobacco was controlled from here even extending as far as Europe itself. Black belt iron ore at Monklands together an abundant coal supply gave rise to rail and machinery production but also fueled the production of linen, cotton and sugar refinement. Already with a population of 345,000 in 1850, Glasgow rose to over a million by 1912 "a far bigger proportion of its country's population than London ever attained up to this time."¹⁸

Such rapid expansion brought on near disaster from typhus epidemics, unsafe housing (in 1871, 75 percent of Glasgow families lived in one or two rooms), poor sanitation and chaotic social organization. Nevertheless, the skilled worker was looked upon as "second citizen" of the empire. Harvie goes on to note:

He is a very good workman, who could turn his hand to many things and 'make a job o' them a'. He is intelligent, and has clear perceptions of injustice. But according to his lights he is a reasonable man. He stands up for himself not only against a common enemy, the employer, but also against his comrades in allied trades if they invade his frontiers. He is gruff, intractable and independent, and his latent irritability takes fire if his rights are infringed. Of servility, he has not a trace.¹⁹

¹⁶ Christopher Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History*, Oxford University Press Inc. New York. 2002.

¹⁷ Cf. Coat of Arms in "Coogan -Quinn Family Scrapbook" (CQFS) "John Coogan p.

¹⁸ Harvie, p. 155.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 156

The city gained prominence by its expositions of 1888, 1901, and 1911 that were on a grand scale and said to rival those of Paris. Its entrepreneurial class exploited the rapidly changing industrial scenes of Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. The latter had moved toward a single class industry, notably transportation in the form of railroads and shipbuilding.

This kind of development depended almost entirely on a stable working-class that could find relief in football, cheap theatre, and “the Kirk” where hell-fire sermons attempted to control the exhibition of frustration and even anger. “To this was added the attempt of the Catholic community, confined to low-status jobs, to win parity of esteem.”²⁰

Much of the leadership in the area of social concerns that had been formerly handled by the Kirk now fell to local boards and councils. All of this in an attempt to “keep the lid on a low-paid hard-drinking labor force, penned in tiny flats and increasingly prone to mutiny as the economy became affected by cyclic depression, even poorer migrants poured in from famine-stricken Ireland on steamers offering sixpence fares.”²¹

Kelvin’s introduction of high-pressure marine engines and incorporation of the screw propeller greatly advanced the marine industry. Within a short time, these adaptations of steam power helped to strengthen the economy with the production of other goods such as furniture, crockery, beer and spirits, linoleum and an array of foodstuffs. Among these producers were Sir Thomas Lipton and a rapidly expanded network of Co-op societies.

Motherwell

Located approximately 20km. southeast of Glasgow, Motherwell lies across the main Glasgow-Carlisle railway occupying a plateau above the Clyde and Calder rivers. The Caledonian Railway (called the “Caley”) running between Glasgow and England plus lines to the north of Scotland thus constituted a crossroads to make Motherwell an important junction.

It was natural then that Motherwell would become the site of a locomotive and carriage, wrought-iron manufacture, works. In time, this district extended for some six kms. to the twin town of Wishaw.

A local family, the Coleville’s, set up a steel works here that used the Siemens method of open-hearth steel production. This encouraged the development of other works that produced alloys, railway wagons, cranes, bridges, colliery machinery, and tramcars.

The town grew from 400 persons in 1850 to some 50,000 (combined towns) by 1911 with a workforce elite which was prosperous. Liberal voting, it sustained Scotland’s biggest co-operative (union) society. Murchison comments that the new community was a

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

“frontier-town”, a very American-like phenomenon. “Less favored were minorities – gastardbieters who moved in from Ireland and Lithuania, to do the hard, ill-paid manual work”²². Motherwell became Scotland’s largest Catholic diocese.

It also produced notable Calvinists and Catholic clergy, from Professor William Barcaly to Cardinal Thomas Winning, historians and writers such as Professor Tome Divine and Liz Lockhead,” Olympic swimmers and footballers.²³

Murchison further comments that the net loss migration from Scotland 1901-1910 was 53,000, and in the years 1910-1917 it lost another 254, 000²⁴ If the Coogan Clan was “on the move” they were not alone during these crucial years.

It was, then, from this cauldron of industry that the first Coogans began their emigration westward to The United States and the State of Pennsylvania. It appears that it was begun by John Coogan who with his oldest son James (age 27) came to Fayette City in 1903. John is listed as having made several crossings each time accompanying other family members so that eventually all of his family came to reside here taking up the work they were familiar with such as coal mining and other industrial jobs. Young Tom Coogan moved on to Canonsburg and later to Detroit where a vastly extended family thrives to this day.

James’s wife feared for the family’s welfare under the harsh conditions imposed by mine owners. There was no health care, idling was common such as when river levels dropped to low for barges to take their loads down the Monongahela to the steel works. In case of death, there was no provision for surviving families. It was probably with her insistence that James took the family to 1022 Oak Ave., Turtle Creek where there was employment in the Westinghouse Company and railroads. Eventually they moved closer to Pittsburgh when they bought a house at 2412(3)? Woodstock Ave., Swissvale, PA 15218.

²² Harvie, p. 188ff.

²³ Rosalind Murchison **British Population Change since 1860**. Macmillan: London 1977. p.60

²⁴ Ibid. p.63.

Scottish Place Names Explained²⁵

A reading of the family record identifies several places that can confuse the reader who is unfamiliar with Scotland. These explanations may be helpful:

- Wishaw:** a small industrial town outside of Glasgow, Midlands, that grew to a considerable size in the late 1870s.
- Strathclyde:** the river bank along the Clyde; also includes Greenok, Gourock and Port Glasgow.
- Motherwell:** A city adjacent to Wishaw; the two became almost as one city.
- Cambusnathan:** also spelled Cam Bus Lang, pronounced Cam-Lang a town near Glasgow.
- Dalziel:** Parish of; pronounced Diel; named for the Clan of Dalziel or Diel.
- Lanarkshire:** The equivalent of our county land divisions; comprises Glasgow area. Glasgow is in Lanarkshire.

²⁵ Explanations provided by Mr. and Mrs. John Brown, originally residents of Glasgow but now of Neville Island, Pittsburgh, Pa.