

***PLACES OF ENTERTAINMENT***  
***IN EDINBURGH***

***Part 4***

***PORTOBELLO***

***Compiled from***  
***Edinburgh Theatres, Cinemas and Circuses***  
***1820 - 1963***  
***by George Baird***



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## ***Foreword***

After Frances Watt of Nicolson Square Methodist Church had read my father's book *Edinburgh Theatres, Cinemas and Circuses 1820-1963*, she approached me to give a talk about places of entertainment in the South Side to the Epworth Group of her church. While preparing the material for the talk I was seized with the idea of producing compact books for some of the localities in Edinburgh. Naturally, my first effort was about The South Side. Other Parts already published are: Part 2, Tollcross and its environs and Part 3, Leith. This book, Part 4, is about Portobello, or as my father put it, *Dear Old Porty*. Parts still to be published are: Part 5, Stockbridge and Canonmills; and Part 6, Princes Street and Top of the Walk.

In 1959 my father, **George Baird, 1893-1967**, conceived the idea of writing the History. His primary aim was to report the emergence of 'houses of entertainment', by quoting the first advertisement relating to the **opening** of the theatre or cinema; its address; the price of admission; and what was being presented for the entertainment of *Edinburry* folk. The main sources for doing this were: *The Scotsman*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, *Edinburgh Courant*, *Leith Burghs Pilot*, *Leith Port Annual*; Window Bills, handbills, held by the Edinburgh Room and the National Library; and the 1915 and 1954 *Kinematograph Year books*. Background information was included where he thought it would be of interest to the reader. His sources for this were J.C.Dibdin's *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*; James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*; Councillor Wilson McLaren's Reminiscences, as given in the *Edinburgh Evening News*; William Hutchison's *Tales and Traditions of Leith*; *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*; and William Baird's *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello, 1898*.

He started work on the History in October 1959 and from the outset received practical support from the City Librarian, Mr. C. M. Minto, and the staff of the Edinburgh Room. He acknowledged the help of Librarians thus, "Facts and Diamonds have this in common – one must dig for them in their respective habitats. In this case facts are to be found in Libraries. That, however, is not the whole story, for, without the skilled Librarian to help, one would be like a traveller trying to cross a desert with no knowledge of map-reading, nor of navigation. My grateful thanks to the many Librarians

who have assisted me over the years in my search for facts of a historical character.”

In 1964 he completed his research into the opening of 70 theatres, 120 cinemas, 40 circuses and 22 skating rinks, ice and roller. It was a tragedy that as he was nearing the completion of the History he fell ill in the Spring of 1964; as a consequence he was unable to compose a foreword to the History. Two copies of the History were produced by typewriter: the top copy is held by the Edinburgh Room, I have the carbon copy.

With a view to making the History available to a wider readership, I decided to re-set the History in *Word 97*, in A4 format. Keying the 180,000 words made me realise the enormous task undertaken by my father in transcribing most of the text from source material. I completed the A4 version of the History in July 2000.

The material in this book is drawn from Chapters: 26, 32 and 33 of the History. References to sources of information have been abbreviated by using the following conventions- **S:** *The Scotsman*; **WS:** *The Weekly Scotsman*; **EN:** *Edinburgh Evening News*; **ED:** *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*; **EC:** *Edinburgh Courant*; **LPA:** *Leith Burghs Annual*; **LBP:** *Leith Burghs Pilot*; **LO:** *Leith Observer*.

My personal comments are shown in square brackets [ ].

George F. Baird  
October 2001

## **PORTOBELLO KNOWN TO ME AND COUNTLESS THOUSANDS AS 'PORTY'**

That it was, within my remembrance, a prosperous seaside resort can also be shown in the records. Alas, it has fallen from its once exalted position.

I begin by giving some historical information about Portobello, which became a Parliamentary Burgh in **1833**; most of this is drawn from *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello* by **William Baird** to whom I am indebted.

**Portobello had a Theatre before it had a Church** During the summer of **1808**, Portobello, if it could not boast of having a Church, strangely enough had a Theatre established within its bounds. This, it appears, was a wooden building erected by a company of *Strolling Actors in Tower Street*, for the entertainment of the villagers and summer visitors.

**Portobello chapel** A suitable place for a chapel was acquired in a newly prospected street proposed to be opened on the Marquis of Abercorn's ground, and which he had named Melville Street after Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, the M.P. for Edinburgh. The feu for the site was obtained at £2 per annum, and vested by a conveyance dated 25<sup>th</sup> March **1809**. The foundation stone was laid on 27<sup>th</sup> October **1808**. Its first preacher was Mr Thomas Wright, who was succeeded after five years by the Rev John Glen in 1814 until **1843**, when he and his flock joined the Free Kirk.

**Portobello Council Chambers or Town Hall** In **1833** Baillie Barclay, at his own expense, rented the house at No 1 Brighton Place till Whitsunday. Thereafter the Council met in various meeting-places, including Forsyth's Rooms, adjoining Mount Charles, High Street (I understand it is now known as the Royal Hotel). In **1852** the Council moved to Rosefield House, Adelphi Place, at that time used as a school. It was taken on lease for 5 years at a rent of £35 per annum, but having proved to be too small, a company was set up to build offices suitable for the Council's needs; the site fixed upon was

Portobello House, the property of the Baxter's, built in **1753**, at what is now 189 High Street, Portobello.

In May **1860**, plans were prepared for Council Chambers, Town Clerk's Office, Police Cells and dwellings, and several shops on the ground floor. In October **1860** the Town Council sent an offer to the Secretary of the Company to pay and rent for £80 per annum for a lease of 15 years. On this footing, building operations were begun. The foundation stone was laid on 4<sup>th</sup> August **1862** amid general rejoicing. The building was completed in May **1863** which allowed the Council to move from Adelphi Place.

The Council were, however, unhappy with the new premises and in August **1863** it was agreed to apply to the Court of Session for a reduction of their unfortunate lease; as a preliminary to that they resolved to rent a house in Grove Place (situated between Pipe Street and Tower Street, fronting the High Street) for £40.

On 29<sup>th</sup> April **1864**, the Outer House decided in favour of the Company's plea for payment of the first year's rent for the new Town Hall; and in May **1866** their Lordships again decided in favour of the Town Hall Company. The bitter struggle, lasting over four years, ended when the Town Council moved into the Town Hall premises in May **1867** after they had been thoroughly overhauled. We hear more about the Town Hall as a Place of Entertainment in the **1860's** and for several decades thereafter.

**Portobello new Town Hall 1878** In the knowledge that the 15 years' lease would end in **1878**, the Councillors bestirred themselves and a site for a New Town Hall to suit their needs was purchased at No. 118 High Street, adjoining Ramsay Lane, for £1,260, with a frontage of 57 feet and a depth of 106 feet.

Work on the fine block of buildings in the old Scottish baronial style was begun in December **1877** and it was opened during the autumn of **1878**, at a cost of £5,000. Ample room was provided for police and municipal purposes, Council and Court rooms. Police cells and offices, fire engine room etc. were at the rear. The tower at the Town Hall is fitted with a clock and a bell; the latter was the gift of Provost Wood.



It ceased to be used as Municipal Offices in November **1896**, in which year Portobello amalgamated with Edinburgh. Portobello Town Hall was opened in **1914**.

**Portobello Public Library** On 1<sup>st</sup> October **1897** a branch of Edinburgh Public Libraries was opened in part of the Town Hall which was formerly used to conduct Municipal business. It served with ever-increasing business for 66 years.

New premises in Rosefield Avenue, Portobello, were opened informally on Monday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1963**; the ‘flitting’ was done the previous day, Sunday, without a hitch. The Rt. Hon. Duncan M. Weatherstone, M.C., T.D., Lord Provost opened the new Portobello Library on Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup> **1963** at 3 o’clock. It was the first library to be opened since Dundee Street in 1940. (**ED** Saturday, 12 October **1963**). The estimated cost was £37,500 (**S** Thursday, 29 August **1963**)

**The Tower, Portobello** The Tower was erected in **1785** and was advertised for sale in the *Edinburgh Courant* on 11<sup>th</sup> April **1807**. It fell into disrepair till about **1864** when **Hugh Paton**, the publisher of *Kay’s Edinburgh Portraits*, purchased the Tower, which he restored to its original condition, and built the commodious mansion adjoining it. The Tower will be mentioned on several occasions in the Portobello story.

**Portobello Harbour** *Grant’s Old and New Edinburgh*, Volume III, page 149

“The harbour was built in **1787-88** at the mouth of Figgate Burn, at the foot of Pipe Street, by Mr Jameson. Mr Alex Robertson, lessee of Joppa Quarry, carted over 1,000 loads of boulder stones and squared stones for facing the pier and harbour walls.”

**Bathing Machines** **EEC** 11 June **1795**

“John Cairns at Portobello, begs to inform ladies and gentlemen anent Bathing Machines and Steady Horses and Careful Drivers (That is Good, Very Good, Steady Horses G.B.)

1 shilling for each time they bath, same price as at Leith.”

It was ‘fashionable’ but too expensive for plain folk. Some of the ‘plain folk’, that is, for example, housepainters received 3d. per hour, as is shown in old records of Messrs Bonnar, for many years in George Street,

Edinburgh, now in 7 Young Street, Edinburgh 2. Their place of business in the 1770's was in the Lawnmarket. They are, as I write in 1963, in the eighth generation and as such, are the oldest firm, of any kind, in Edinburgh. See my history, "Wage Fluctuation in the Painting Trade from 1824 to 1956", in the Scottish Room, Central Library.

[From A. Foley's *Portobello in picture postcards*, P.C. 42, "...Beyond the boat stance are the bathing machines. Bathers would undress in the machine after being pulled out into the sea by a horse. When they finished bathing they signalled the attendant to be hauled back to shore." G.F.B.]

**Hot and Cold Baths** Based on a report which appeared in the EC 11 September 1804:

A company was formed; the cost estimated at £4,000. Shares were £25 each, and this allowed shareholders to have baths at half price; holders of two or more shares could have free baths. Ground was feued from Mr John Rae, at Bent's Park, extending 220 feet east and west, by 97 feet southwards.

**Stage Coach** The *Edinburgh Courant* announced on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1806, that a stage coach had been established between Portobello and Edinburgh: Price, 10d., setting off from Peter MacArthur's, Pipe Street, at 9 a.m, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. returning from John Swanston's, grocer Niddry Street (near the Tron), Edinburgh, at 11 a.m., 3.15 p.m. and 8 p.m.

**Pubs** As early as 1806-07 Portobello enjoyed the rather doubtful advantage of having a good many public-houses or 'Inns', mostly all in the High Street.

**Post Office** In 1807 Mr James Newlands opened the Post Office at the corner of Tower Street and High Street. He was also House Agent, Banker, Valuator Auctioneer, etc. It will be seen that Mr Newlands was not *hard cawed* in those far-off days. The Post-runner at that time was a little widow woman named Nanny Moffat. It was thought the little old lady 'ran' with an average of two letters per day.

**Portobello Races** EC Monday July ? 1811

"Portobello Races on Monday last offered most excellent sport. Portobello Races will be run next year on the first Monday after Leith Races, before which time the new tavern and hotel will be opened."

The first and second prizes were 10 and 5 guineas respectively. The winning post was at Bath Street,

**Population of Portobello** William Baird quoted a work called *Scotland Delineated*, published in **1799** in which Portobello is described as “a rising village of about 300 inhabitants, employed in the manufacture of bricks, tiles, jars, brown pottery and white stoneware.” The 1961 Census Report for Edinburgh discloses that by **1821** the population had risen to 1,912; that in **1841** the count was 3,588 persons; that in **1871** it had risen to 5,481; and that in **1891**, the last Census before its amalgamation with Edinburgh, Portobello had a population of 8,182 persons.

**The First Streets in Portobello** Apart from the main street, namely the High Street, the first ‘side’ opening was Rosefield Avenue in **1767**. Others were: Tobago Street, which was named after a tobacco planter, who had returned from Tobago to spend his retirement in Portobello; Pipe Street; Ramsay Lane; Wilson’s Park; Nicolson Street or Jameson Street now Windsor Place. In **1802** Tower Street was opened and staked off for feuing.

**Building on Rabbit Ha’** A notice announcing that ground to feu was available at Rabbit Ha’ (Hall), was made on May 5<sup>th</sup> **1804** by Thomas Scott W.S. at his Chambers in Lawnmarket. Thomas was the brother of Sir Walter Scott. The following streets were built soon thereafter: Bath Place, Regent Street, Wellington Street, Straiton Place.

**Duddingston Road leading from Brighton Place** It was not until **1846** that a start was made to make the Duddingston Road. The delay was due to the obstinacy of one named **Baxter** who owned land between Brighton Place and the old Duddingston Road from **1834**.

### **Shore Encroachment**

*To know that Evil has been done and yet stay silent and lethargic  
is to decry the name of Mankind itself*

Sir **William Rae**, Lord Advocate of Scotland in the year **1842**, knew that evil was being done, but he did not stand aside. But for Sir William it is questionable whether there would have been a promenade, or a pier, in Portobello. It came about thus.

A Mr **Alexander Smith**, W.S., proprietor of Melville House, fronting the beach, took it upon himself to extend the area of his grounds by enclosing,

with a high wall, a large slice of the sea beach within the high water mark. Numerous complaints had been made against the encroachment, but the only public authority which could take up the question was helpless, for want of funds, to take the matter to Court. Sir William Rae, a resident at the time in Portobello, on going along the beach one morning to take his usual bath found his way barred at Melville Street by Smith's high wall, against which the waves were being dashed. On learning the particulars of the case and, also, of the helplessness of the local authorities, he at once, on behalf of the Crown, raised an action in the Court of Session against Mr Smith, to have it declared that the wall was an encroachment upon the foreshore and should, therefore, be removed. The action was decided by the Court against Mr Smith in December **1846**, and he was ordered to take down the wall. The case was thereupon appealed to the House of Lords, which in **1848** confirmed the decision.

Smith tried to prevail upon the Town Council to allow him to build his wall in line with that of a Mr Marshall, on the west side of Smith's property, who had also taken in a piece of the sand. The Town Clerk replied that it was inadmissible, the Council having no right to consent to any encroachments on public property. The aforementioned Mr Marshall was compelled to give up the piece of sand which he had taken.

Had it not been for the action which Sir William Rae took, these encroachments would have multiplied and the fine continuity of the beach would have been destroyed.

**Sewers came before the Promenade** Lord knows where the sewage and waste matter would have found an outlet had Sir William Rae not taken the action he did, which was disposed of in **1848** by the House of Lords.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the main drain, or sewer, runs under the Promenade, but such is the case. We learn that, in **1859**, the intercepting sewer on the beach from Bath Street to Melville Street should be protected by a stone-faced terrace so as to make a walk 20 feet wide. The 'good' people of Joppa objected to the continuation of the sewer to their end etc.

Another petition from the Joppa people objected to the making of the Promenade along the beach to Joppa. No reason was given for their objection.

The Townspeople of Portobello were deeply indebted to **Lieut. Col. Johnson**, Provost of Portobello, for the work he did in bringing the £9,000 drainage scheme to a successful termination. The Promenade, so far built from Bath Street to Melville Street, was opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> June **1860** under the name of : *The Prince of Wales Terrace*, in honour of His Royal Highness, who during the preceding year, while residing at Holyrood, had been almost a daily visitor to Portobello.

***Portobello Pier and Pavilion*** In March **1869** the Portobello Pier Company's Bill came before Parliament and was passed Houses of Parliament in July **1869**

The Pier was built in **1871** at a cost of £10,000. It was formally opened on 23<sup>rd</sup> March **1871**. Mr **Thomas Bouch**, who designed the Pier, also designed the ill-fated Tay Bridge. The project was financed by a company floated by Provost Wood, with a capital of £7,000, in 700 shares of £10. The length of the Pier was 1,250 feet; the main body or gangway being 1,080 feet, and the Pierhead or Pavilion making up the remaining length. Originally, the gangway was 22 feet wide, but was reduced to 19 feet.

For some years the venture was successful, but structural alterations and repairs, involving heavy expenditure, led to the company being wound up. The Pier was disposed of to Mr **M. P. Galloway**, the Steam Packet Ship owner, for £1,500. The Pier was demolished in **1917** and no attempt was ever made to build another one.

See page 32 for some of the entertainments presented at the Pier and Pavilion.

**Run down housing: a challenge for the Town Council** Edinburgh has the name of being *East-Windy, West-endy*. The peculiar position regarding Portobello then, and to a great extent now (1963), is that industry is carried out at the west end of the burgh; even the Gas Works were in Pipe Street. Now, of course, the mighty Electricity Generating Station is at the extreme west end of the High Street.

Yes, the seaside has, undoubtedly, had its moments, but how long since. In the hinterland, to the north of the High Street, from the Pool to Bath Street, it is a festering sore, and those aspirants for municipal 'honours', of all Parties,

come out at the appointed time and all, strange to say, with much the same theme song: Put me into the Town Council and everything will be all right. What they forget to say is, All Right for whom.

**Three Places of Amusement in Portobello in 1963** Then there were....  
Count them as you go along.

### **“Porty” – The Dream of my Childhood Days**

I first became acquainted with Portobello in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was the Mecca for children who lived in the big city of Edinburgh; the intervening three miles between the G.P.O. and Porty, or from the Waverley Station, was an added joy to the day's outing. The mountains of 'pieces', called packed lunches in the 1960's, it little matters for they find a common resting place. Ice-cream sliders just did not have the sale they have today. Then it was Ice-Cream Joe with his little cart who dispensed the ½ d. slider. Now, Big Business has turned the ½ d. into the minimum charge of 9d., or thereabouts.

Donkey rides, once in a while, and it had to be a very special occasion for that treat. The Pier was something to look at, as there was an admission charge. I remember Galloway's steamers at the Pier, but I never experienced the pleasure of a sail from Porty. However, I sometimes sailed from Leith Pier, and, of course, on the old *Wullie Muir* between Granton and Burntisland. If you wish pictorial evidence of the above, see the dozen or more enlarged photographs, which are to be hung in the lecture hall in the new Portobello Library.

The Portobello as described above is dead. The 'killing' was a bit more serious than that of 'Cock Robin'. There is a good and well-authenticated case for the time when the 'killing' started and for the culprits

Through the decades amusements do not drop out of business just fore the fun of it. Summer visitors who once went to Porty in droves, now have good reason for staying away. The reader may and will be told various stories anent the decline and virtual death of Portobello as a seaside resort, except the real reason.

Prior to the first Thursday in the Merry Month of May (the day set aside each year for electors to choose a representative for the Town Council) it is

one of the strange quirks that Portobello gets an annual ‘airing’ at meetings or through the medium of the Local Press.

Those aspirants for municipal honours, of all Parties, have not learned the simple truth that the dead cannot be brought back to life. This applies equally as well to one-time humans as to dead or dying towns. Letters to the ‘Editor’ appeal for something to be done for Portobello only at, or near, the Local Elections.

**The Sand Thieves** A woman’s crowning glory is her hair. If, for any reason, a woman should lose her hair tresses it would be bad, very bad. But in the 1960’s a woman could buy a 25s. wig, which would, to some extent, restore her confidence and cover her partial nakedness. I have in mind the story of Lady Godiva who depended upon her flowing tresses as a cover.

Prior to and for a year or so after the First World War one could step down on to the sand from the Prom in perfect safety. The sand was to Portobello what hair is to a woman. However, the sand was carted away in thousands of tons; then ‘they’ started all over again and carted further thousands of tons away. [From A. Foley’s *Portobello in picture postcards*, 1985. P.C. 43 vividly shows how it was possible to step from the promenade on to the beach, in the late 1920’s; but in P.C. 39, taken ‘about 1930’ Mr Foley comments, “how much sand has been lost from the beach...The Promenade is now about five feet above the level of the sand.” G.F.B.]

On enquiry you may be told this, that, or some other reason for the demise of Porty, so far as the loss of the ‘summer’ visitors is concerned. Those of you who may have seen Yarmouth, East Anglia, with its sand in abundance, will realise what Portobello looked like before the **sand thieves** got on the job.

For what purpose ‘they’ used the sand I do not know, but the day came when their ‘friends’ in the High Street, Edinburgh, had, through the outcry of the citizens, to tell ‘them’ that the **sand racket** had to stop. Between the sand thieves and the Old Pal Club, who must have been descendants of Nelson, ‘they’ stole the birthright, not only of thousands of children, but of generations of children yet unborn

‘They’ lined their pockets. Without rain the ground becomes parched and growth ultimately ceases. Without sand in abundance at a seaside resort, it ceases to attract the parents and their children in sufficient numbers to

maintain established places of amusement; and thus Porty simply became a suburb of Edinburgh, where the residents slept and worked in Edinburgh. [Following work carried out in the 1970's there is now (2000) sand in abundance, but the weather, Oh the weather. G.F.B.]

Many of my friends sigh for the old days that are gone, never to return. 'They' have much to answer for.

## **PORTOBELLO AMUSEMENTS**

### ***C I N E M A S***

#### ***BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE, 26 BATH STREET also known as the ELECTRIC THEATRE and the VICTORY***

I was fortunate to come across 17 *Portobello Street Directories*, covering the period **1895-96 to 1914-15** in the Edinburgh Room. It is not known whether the 1914-15 edition was the last to be issued. The first Directory was published in 1867 and there are many missing in the series, but, Glory Be!, the Directories contained vital information for the Portobello story; each bit will appear in its proper place.

In **1903-04** there is an entry 'The Bungalow, 26a Bath Street', which was the first mention; in **1902-03** the entry for 26 Bath Street was for 'Mr P.E. Low, Photo Studio'.

From **1903-04** 'The Bungalow' was mentioned until in **1910-11**, when the entry read 'The Bungalow, 26 Bath Street, The Scottish Roller Skating Company.' Prior to **1910-11** there was no indication to what use 'The Bungalow' was put.

I rejoice that by a stroke of Luck, Chance or Good Fortune has enabled me to unearth further information about amusements and the various addresses where entertainments were housed. I append an extract, full page, from the **1912-13 Portobello Street Directory**, page 85:

#### ***"THE ELECTRIC THEATRE, BATH STREET, PORTOBELLO***

Change of Programme Monday and Thursday

Always Presenting the Best Motion Pictures



7 to 10.30 Continuously Matinee, Saturday at 3.

Prices: 3d., 4d. and 6d.”

The rule for having Entries inserted in the Edinburgh Post Office Directory is that all details must be in the Office not later than February for publication in June. It is possible that the same policy applied to the Portobello Street Directory; in which case it would serve as a guide anent the opening of the *Electric Theatre*.

EN Monday, 11 August 1913 First Advertisement relating to the *Electric Theatre*

**“ELECTRIC THEATRE, BATH STREET, PORTOBELLO**

*Les Miserables* 3 nights

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, August 11, 12 and 13

Twice Nightly: 6 and 8.30 Wednesday Afternoon at 2.30

Prices: 4d., 6d. and 9d. Reserved: 6d., 9d. and 1s.”

As in the case of The *Imperial Electric Theatre, Leith, 1911*, the term *Electric* was used in the title; in both cases it was soon dropped. That it reverted to the name *Bungalow* is no surprise, as that was the name by which it was known in the year 1903-04.

EN Tuesday, 26 August 1913

**“BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE, BATH STREET,  
PORTOBELLO”**

When it dropped the *Electric Theatre* from the above name I do not know, and it would not add much to its history to have the exact date. In any case it retained the name *Bungalow* for the next 29 years (?) and, we have seen, in the year 1942 that a third name was added to the Bath Street Picture House.

For interest, the entry in the 1920-21 Street Directory was: ‘Bath Street, 26, Portobello Pictures Ltd.’

**VICTORY, BATH STREET**

EN Thursday, 12 November 1942

**“George – Victory”**

Both advertised on the same day.

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415 and 416

“Victory, Bath Street, Portobello

Proprietor: Forth Cinema Co. Ltd., 149 West George Street, Glasgow.

Seats: 575 Proscenium Width: 16 feet

Continuous from 6 p.m.; Saturdays from 2 p.m. Price 1s.”

The Victory closed in **1956** and the premises were taken over by Messrs James Scott & Son Ltd. of 308-314 High Street, Portobello, as a furniture store. Nevertheless the Street Directory for **1961-62** continued to show: ‘No. 26 Bath Street, Victory Cinema’

[From A. Foley’s *Portobello in picture postcards* Volume 2, **1990**, “Originally named the Bungalow, its architecture and décor were influenced by the Indian sub-continent. This photo was taken after the change of name (Victory) and although somewhat faded by the passage of time, the Eastern influences are still evident.” G.F.B.]

All told, a cinema weathered the storm at No.26 Bath Street, from 1912-13 to 1956, (possibly longer).

### ***CENTRAL PICTURE HOUSE, 281 HIGH STREET also known as the GEORGE***

*1914 –15 Portobello Street Directory:* There was an entry for *New Picture House*, 281 High Street. But it soon became known as *Central Picture House*.

EN Monday, 22 March **1915** This was the only advertisement for this house in the year 1915.

***“Central Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello***

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday: *The Slave of the Poppy*

Thursday, Friday Saturday: *Lead us not into Temptation*

No increase in Prices”

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 85, New Companies registered during the year. “March **1914** Central Picture House, Portobello, Ltd.

Capital £4,000 in £1 shares. Registered Office, 104 West George Street, Glasgow.”

This extract does not necessarily mean that the *Central Picture House* was built in **1914**. However, between the *News* advertisement and the *YearBook* extract, a ‘near’ date of opening can be guessed at.

EN Thursday, 1 October **1942**

“*Central Picture House*

*281 High Street, Portobello*

C L O S E D UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

OPENING DATE WILL BE DULY ANNOUNCED”

The *Central* remained closed until the following announcement appeared in the *News*, November 12<sup>th</sup> **1942**, when it re-opened as the *George*.

“**GEORGE - VICTORY  
PORTOBELLO**”

Both cinemas advertised the same programme [A possible explanation for the cinemas having the same programme is that both were owned by companies having the same address, 149 West Nile Street, Glasgow, albeit the Proprietor in the case of the *George* was ‘Ass. G.P. Cinemas’ and that for the *Victory*, page 235, was ‘Forth Cinema Co. Ltd’. G.F.B.] The following week the first advertisement with the name *George* appeared in the *News*, Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup> **1942**.

*1954 Kinematograph Year Book, pages 415 and 416*

“George Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello

Proprietor: Ass. G.P. Cinemas, 149 West George Street, Glasgow.

Seats: 847 Prices: 1s. to 1s. 9d.”

Between **1954** and **1961** the name reverted to *Central*. As such, it finally closed its doors as a Picture House on Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> **1961**. The last advertisement as a Picture House was on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> **1961**. There is an entry for The Central Picture House in the 1961-62 Street Directory.

**Bingo Club** The old Central Picture House opened its doors as a Bingo Club on Friday December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1961**. It took some time to unravel the tangle

between the two Portobello Picture Houses named *George*; the one in the High Street, the other in Bath Street, Portobello. However, I got it straightened out and in the long run it was worth while. All in all, the Central – George – Central was a place of amusement for just on 46 years and well-situated to cater for the good folk of Joppa.

***CINEMA THEATRE, 189 HIGH STREET see page 30.***

***COUNTY CINEMA, BATH STREET, also known as THE GEORGE***

**EN Saturday, 25 March 1939**

***“COUNTY CINEMA BATH STREET PORTOBELLO***

Phone Portobello 82410 FREE CAR PARK

Page GRAND OPENING CEREMONY THURSDAY,

MARCH 30, 1939 at 2.30 p.m. by BAILIE JAMES EDWARD, J.P.,  
F.R.S.A.

STUPENDOUS OPENING ATTRACTION EXCLUSIVE TO THE  
DISTRICT

*SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (A)*

And

LARRY BLAKE, DICK PURCELL & BERYL WALLACE in  
*AIR DEVILS*

Admission: Balcony, 1s. 3d. and 1s.; Children, 9d. and 6d.

Stalls: 9d. and 6d. Children, 6d. and 4d.

Matinee Prices till 4 p.m., Saturdays 3 p.m.

Balcony, 9d. and 6d., Children, 4d.

Stalls, 6d. and 4d. Children 4d. and 2d.

Deaf Aids on Request

Note: SPECIAL CHILDREN’S MATINEE on SATURDAY APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>  
AT 11 a.m. to commemorate the Opening, at which each child will receive a  
Souvenir.”

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415 and 416**

“County Cinema, Bath Street, Portobello

Proprietor, County Cinema Co. Seats, 1,284. Prices: 1s. to 2s.5d.”

On Friday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1963 I noted that the admission prices were: Balcony, 2s.9d.; Stalls, 1s.9d. Old Age Pensioners: Matinee Prices up to 3 p.m., 1s.2d.”

The *County* (now the *George*) has the distinction of being not only the last picture house to be built in Edinburgh before the Second World War, it is the only remaining Picture House in Portobello (1963).

S Saturday, 29 November 1954 Film Notes  
“**The George – Portobello Cinema Reconstructed  
To be opened Monday November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1954**”

**Festival Use Envisaged** The reconstructed *George Cinema, Bath Street, Portobello, formerly the County Cinema, will be used for the showing of foreign and classical films during the next Edinburgh Festival.*

Mr **George Palmer**, the owner, says that this will be done, “in order to meet the demands of the many patrons for this type of film.”

The *George* will be the first cinema in the East of Scotland to use **four-track stereo-ponic sound** with the wide screen; this system requires 32 loud-speakers in the cinema, 16 of which are behind the screen.

The official opening will be on Monday night, and members of the public in the queue for the cinema will be filmed and will see themselves on the screen later in the week. The festival film for the opening programme will be: *The Robe* Starring Richard Burton and Jean Simmons”

Note: I could not find an advertisement in the *Evening News* for *The Robe* during November 1954; nor was there any criticism in the usual column of in the Tuesday edition of *The Scotsman*.

***ELECTRIC THEATRE, BATH STREET see under BUNGALOW  
ELECTRIC THEATRE***

***GEORGE CINEMA, BATH STREET see under COUNTY CINEMA***

***GEORGE CINEMA, 281 HIGH STREET see under CENTRAL CINEMA***

*MARINE CINEMA THEATRE See page 26.*

*PICTURE THEATRE, HARBOUR GREEN*

*1915 Kinematograph Year Book:*

*“Picture Theatre, Harbour Green. Proprietor: W Cadona.”*

*PORTOBELLO THEATRE AND CINEMA See page 30.*

*STAR PICTURE HOUSE, 189 HIGH STREET See page 31.*

*TOWER PAVILION, see page 33.*

*TOWER PICTURE PALACE, see page 34.*

*VICTORY, BATH STREET see under BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE*

### *OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT*

*CONCERTS, PORTOBELLO TOWN HALL, 1863-1864*

**Portobello Concert** (S Friday, 26 July 1963 This included a report of a concert which took place on Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup> 1863.)

**“In the Town Hall, 189 High Street** The **Edina Quartet** gave a concert last night in the Town Hall under the patronage of the Provost and Council. This being the first time that a musical performance has taken place within this new building; its adaptation for a concert-room was fully and successfully tested. The programme was well selected, and the efforts of the performers, who, on this occasion, were assisted by Miss **Isa Robertson**, were rewarded by repeated rounds of applause from a crowded audience”

Editor’s Footnote: “The first Portobello Town Hall, in a mixed style of French and Flemish, was built by a limited liability company at a cost of £3,000 on the south side of the High Street, to the east of Brighton Place.”

**LBP Saturday, 22 October 1864**

**“Portobello Town Hall To-night**

**Mr Kennedy** The celebrated Scottish Vocalist is coming

**Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> and Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October**

**Tickets and Programmes to be had from Mr Taylor, Post Office.”**

Note: Not only was it the first advertisement for a Portobello place of entertainment, it was also the first advertisement to appear in the *Leith Burghs Pilot*, anent entertainment. The Baptist Chapel, 189 High Street, now occupies what was once the Town Hall.

### ***LETTA'S SHOW AT THE PAVILION, BATH STREET***

**EN Saturday, 9 June 1928**

“Let Us Go To Letta’s Show *Portobello Pavilion*  
Royal Portobello Entertainers, Bath Street  
In Letta’s Show The Entertainment of To-day  
Book Early - Telephone 231 Portobello”

For a number of years I observed advertisements for *Letta’s Show*; he placed advertisements in the *News* of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> 1932 and Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1933 (the last I came across), for the *Prom Palace*. I do not know how long his show lasted beyond 1933.

*The Pavilion in Bath Street* was, in the first instance, a large tent near the site on which the *George Cinema* now stands. It had no connection with the *George* nor the *County* as it was first named. The owner of the Pavilion, Mr **Andre Letta**, seemed to be known to everyone in Porty; his family were Show People.

Mr Letta had passed three score years and ten years when he donned the garb of Santa Claus in the years 1954 and 1955 during the Xmas Season in the “Store” Toy Bazaar, Bread Street Emporium. It was only advancing years which curtailed his active life. Alas, the man with the scythe is no respecter of persons and fortunately for mankind he **cannot** be bribed to extend life by the finest fraction of a second.

**MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD**

S Saturday, 8 May 1909 Preliminary Notice

**“THE EDINBURGH MARINE GARDENS  
SCOTLAND’S PLEASANCE BY THE SEA  
OPENS MONDAY, MAY 31<sup>ST</sup>**

Season Tickets: Price 7s. 6d. for the first 10,000  
(Price will be 10s. after first 10,000 are sold)

ADMITTING TO SKATING RINK – GROUNDS – BAND COURT –  
PROMENADE HALL AND CONCERT PAVILION (The latter with  
Reservations)

The USUAL ADMISSION will be SIXPENCE, but the Directors, in  
response to a general request have decided to RESERVE ONE DAY PER  
WEEK AS A SHILLING DAY.

SEASON TICKETS WILL BE AVAILABLE.

101 Agents have been appointed for the Sale of Tickets in Edinburgh and  
District, including the Edinburgh and District Company’s Officials, 1 South  
Charlotte Street, Edinburgh, and all their Conductors on the Cable Cars.

WILLIAM HOLLAND, General Manager  
J. RUSSELL AUSTIN, Solicitor, Secretary  
Edinburgh Marine Gardens, Limited  
13 George Street, Edinburgh”

S Monday, 31 May 1909

**“THE EDINBURGH MARINE GARDENS  
BY THE SIDE OF THE SILVER SEA  
GRAND OPENING DAY - TO-DAY**

The Rt. Hon. JAMES GIBSON, M. P., Lord Provost of Edinburgh, has  
kindly consented to declare the GARDENS open at 2.30, and will be  
accompanied by the MAGISTRATES AND TOWN COUNCILLORS of the  
CITY.

BAND OF THE ROYAL SCOTS (EDINBURGH CASTLE)

At 2 and 7.30

BAND OF THE ROYAL MARINES (PORTSMOUTH DIVISION)

At 2 and 7.30

27 ACRES OF ORNAMENTAL GARDENS

By The Side Of The Silver Sea

CONCERT PAVILION at 1, 3 and 8



HERR MENY'S WHITE VIENNESE BAND Personally conducted by Herr Meny; HANID ALEXANDER, Entertainer; STELLING AND HIS A DOG KISWASKI.

SKATING RINK – Absolutely the Finest and Largest in Scotland. Sessions: 11 to 1; 2 to 5; and 7 to 10.

BOSTOCK'S JUNGLE and American Animal Arena,  
And a Host of Sensation Devices and Laughter Compellers.

Admission: Sixpence. Opening Day (May 31) and every Tuesday (except June 1<sup>st</sup>), One Shilling.”

**S** Tuesday, 1 June **1909** Criticism of Marine Gardens, a precis

“Inclement weather marked the Opening ceremony which was held in The Concert Hall; there was a large attendance of visitors. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir **J.P. Gibson**, M. P., and the Magistrates & Town Council, The Town Council of Leith, headed by Provost Gibson, attended with Robes of Office, the Provost of Musselburgh, and a distinguished Company including Lord and Lady Dunedin.

Ex-Bailie **Moxon**, chairman of Directors presided. He said, *inter alia*, the success of the **1908 Exhibition (Saughton Park)** had influenced the “Gairdens” and that they were acting on proper lines having open air amusements and entertainments (Applause). It was, he said, the first in Scotland, although they were numerous in America and the Continent. The Hall in which they met was the 1908 Exhibition Concert Hall and many of the buildings had also been in the Exhibition.

The grounds in the afternoon were fairly well filled by the public, although the attendance was affected by the rainfall.

#### THE AMUSEMENTS

The **Royal Scenic Railway**. Each car held 28 people. A switch-back 3 tiers high. The run takes 4 or 5 minutes. On the dips the cars travel at 40 to 50 miles per hour. The track is about a mile long, and will be illuminated by over 3,000 electric lamps. The figure 8 was also popular. (The figure 8 found a home in the Fun Fair on Portobello Promenade for a few years). Architects: Messrs. Walker & Ramsay, Glasgow.”

## ***MARINE CINEMA THEATRE***

EN Friday, 16 May 1913

**“Marine Gardens In the Marine Cinema Theatre**

A continuous Programme of Star Films will be shown. These include:  
*The Unwritten Law 3,000 feet”*

In the same issue of the *News* **Season Tickets** were advertised at 5s.6d.

EN Monday, 18 August 1913

**“Marine Gardens Fortnightly Tickets – 2s.”**

EN Wednesday, 23 July 1913

**“Marine Gardens - To-night**

**Aeronautical Displays Daring Parachute Descent”**

[From A. Foley’s *Portobello in old picture postcards*, 1985, P.C. 71, “..A number of spectacular attractions were staged to keep the customers rolling in. ...**Captain Spence** made daily ascents in a balloon then thrilled the crowds by making a parachute jump into the sea. There was ten shillings (fifty pence) for the first boatman to reach and pull him out of the water. In July 1912 the pioneer aviator Mr **W.R Evans** successfully demonstrated his flying machine.” G.F.B.]

## ***TEMPORARY BARRACKS***

In 1914 The Marine Gardens became a glorified “Lodging House”; I was one of those to make use of its facilities. My first visit to the Marine Gardens was in the autumn of 1914 and it came about thus:

I joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, Territorials, on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1910; my regimental number was 1079. I could not have wished for a better company of comrades. Captain McLagen was the Officer Commanding “A” Company, with Lieuts. Turnbull and “Bertie” Maule, both killed at the Dardanelles. Lieut Maule, son of Sir Rober Maule, draper etc., West End of Princes Street (Binns now occupy the site.) was killed a few yards from me.

The battalion mustered in the Moray Maltings, off London Road, in August 1914; from there we went to Redford Barracks; then to Craiglockhart

School; and finally to the *Marine Gardens*, the Ballroom, which at the moment of writing I see from my living-room window [Wakefield Avenue] on 24<sup>th</sup> August **1963**. A number of other places in the Gardens were used as sleeping quarters by ‘other ranks.’

The battalion marched out of the *Marine Gardens* on the evening of Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> **1915**, at 9 p.m. The Band of the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots played us to Portobello Station. I was fortunate to see my mother in the crowds lining the pavements. The next time I saw her was in 17<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Birmingham University, in July **1915**.

The troop train left Portobello at 10.35 p.m. for an unknown destination. Rumour had it here, there and elsewhere. In any case the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, the only Territorial Battalion in the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade, landed on the Dardanelles on Sunday morning, 25<sup>th</sup> April **1915**. I left the Dardanelles on 6<sup>th</sup> May **1915**, after having been wounded twice.

In due course, after the conclusion of the 1914-18 War, the *Marines* got under way again, minus many of the amusements. I came across this advertisement in the *News* of Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> **1931**.

**“Marine Gardens Roller Skating  
Every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday”**

**Leith Athletic Football Club** used that piece of ground at the extreme east end of the Gardens as their home ground. For a year or two it was used as Dirt Track (known in the 1950’s and 1960’s as Speedway Racing).

The **Dirt Track** started in 1928-29. I paid several visits to the ground but soon tired of it. On the occasion of the World Championship a crowd estimated at 34,000 was present. I remember **Drew McQueen**, who had a motor-cycle shop in Argyle Place, Meadows; **George Mc Kenzie**, a tubby, cheery lad who had a motor-cycle shop in Dalry Road; Eric ?; and Mr **Porter**, a staid ‘elderly’ rider, just about made up the ‘home’ team of Dirt Track Riders, with, of course, ‘guest’ riders from Australia and America, one of whom was Hank something. It lasted a while and then faded out. [I remember being taken by my father to see Dirt Track Racing at Marine Gardens in 1938 or 1939. Like him I found it boring. G.F.B.]

**Dog Racing** The sports ground was also used for dog racing. Yes, it was an entertainment for those who liked it. I have, however, a large collection of photographs of the terracing, track, showing overhead lamps, Judge's Box, and the Tote, which was sited at the east end of the ground.

That, I think, exhausts the entertainment part of the story so far as the football park, dirt track and dog racing is concerned.

**Admiralty Shed** Lying to the west of the Ballroom this huge shed was erected on the site of the Scenic Railway, one of the chief amusements of the *Marine Gardens*. In the early years of the Second World War the 'shed' was erected for the purpose of building 'landing craft', without which there would have been little hope of ever landing an army on the Continent. The 'shed' had its own launching pad, of which I was fortunate to get a photograph just two weeks before it was cut for scrap. The 'shed' was used by Messrs Graham Enoch, Engineers, who normally manufactured Dairy Machinery. The firm was beset by a continual number of strikes caused, it has been stated, by members of the Communist Party.

**Corporation Bus Garage, Seafield Road** A start was made on earth removal at the old playing field, Marine Gardens, on Thursday, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, by Messrs Smart of Hanover Street, Edinburgh. After an estimated 1,400 tons of earth was removed the job hung fire until Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> 1961, when Messrs Baxter of Tranent, started earth moving. George Smith was the driver of the bull-dozer. Big Geordie, an experienced man, estimated that between 95,000 and 100,000 tons of earth was removed.

I have a peculiar photograph that shows the sewer at the east end, which was and still is, the drain for the waste from Nos 1 to 16 (King's Cross Bar), Seafield Road, Portobello. The outlet, or lid of the sewer was on the top of the terracing, some 30 to 35 feet above ground level. George Smith carefully cleared the earth from the sewer manhole until he reached his objective. There it stood, for all the world like a factory chimney; I was photographed standing at the base of the Manhole. Indeed, I have one shot with the 350 feet Power Station Chimney as a background to the manhole. I was fortunate to snap it being demolished on Monday, July 24<sup>th</sup> 1961. All my photographs relating to the Bus Station will be lodged in the Edinburgh Room.

**£222,000 Corporation Bus Garage Opened ED** Friday, 7 December 1962. “Sir John Greig Dunbar, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, performed the opening ceremony.” In an accompanying photograph, Sir John, is seen seated at the wheel of a bus. “Details: Staff of 471. Accommodates 130 buses. Provision is also made for the parking of visitors’ cars and buses, namely 150 cars and 60 buses.” Dimensions (not in newspaper): Length, 390 feet; Breadth, 258 feet; Height, 26 feet.

**The *Marines* Ballroom Building is still there in August 1963**

For a number of years the Scottish Motor Traction Co. used the Ballroom as a maintenance depot for their fleet of buses. In course of time more space was required by Scottish Omnibuses.

**Post Office Telephone vans** For some years the ‘shed’ was used as a garage for the Post Office repair vans; thereafter the Scottish Omnibuses Marine Works, to give it the name by which it is now known, made a partial demolition of the old Admiralty Shed; that is, nothing but the iron was left standing.

I took a photograph of the actual start of the demolition on Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1961; and have photographs of practically every phase of the rebuilding of the Scottish Omnibuses Works, which was opened by Sir John Greig Dunbar, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, on Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1962. [I donated these photographs to the Edinburgh Room in May 2000. G.F.B.]

The foregoing account of how some of the ground occupied by the old *Marines* was developed will, I think, be of some interest to future citizens of Edinburgh.

***OLD TOWN HALL, 189 HIGH STREET, IN THE 20th CENTURY*** Prior to 1900-01, it was usually referred to as the “Old” Town Hall, and was numbered No. 107 High Street. From 1900-01 its number was changed to 189 High Street. The second Town Hall (and Police Chambers) was at No 118 High Street, on the north side

S Monday, 31 December 1900

**“PANTOMIME *PORTOBELLO THEATRE AND CINEMA***

**TOWN HALL – PORTOBELLO 189 HIGH STREET**

***LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD***

**TO BE REPEATED TO-NIGHT AT 7.30 BY REQUEST**

**ADMISSION, 1s. ALL OVER”**

***CINEMA THEATRE, 189 HIGH STREET, PORTOBELLO***

From 1913 to 1915 the *Cinema Theatre* was housed in the Old Town Hall. From 1916-17 to 1919-20 there was no entry in The Edinburgh Street Directory; perhaps it was on War Service.

***Star Hall, 189 High Street, Portobello*** In the 1920-21 Directory the name ***Star Hall*** was first mentioned; that name appeared until 1938-39, after which the premises became the property of the **Portobello Baptist Church**. The church appeared for the first time in the 1939-40 Directory; and it is shown as such in the 1961-62 Directory.

I have attempted to give the reader some idea of the uses to which the ***Old Town Hall*** has been put over the past 60 years. Like the ***Tower Picture Palace*** at No 62 Tower Street, both are doing a useful job in the religious scheme of affairs.

***STAR PICTURE HOUSE OR STAR HALL, 189 HIGH STREET, PORTOBELLO*** On Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1963, I met Mr Andrew Jack, an attendant at the newly opened *Empire Mecca Bingo Club, Nicolson Street*. While Mr. Jack conducted me ‘Back Stage’ the conversation veered round to ‘Houses’. He asked if I had the *Star* picture house on my list to which I replied “Yes”. However, we seemed to be at cross-purposes. The *Star* I had on my list was in St. Mary’s Street, Edinburgh; while Mr Jack’s *Star* was, he said, in the Old Town Hall, High Street, Portobello; and that he was the ‘chocolate boy’ at the *Star* when he was 10 years of age. The manager was a Mr Lambie during the years 1910 to 1912.

I give the information in good faith. Although I have given the chronological history of the Old Town Hall from 1900, there is reason to believe Mr Jack’s reminiscences anent the *Star* between 1910-12. Just across the road in Bath Street, the Bungalow was in being and mentioned in the 1903-04 Directory, although it was never advertised until 1913. Was the *Star* in the same category? I would cast my vote in favour of Mr Jack. But that however, does not preclude me from recording the “Official History” as it appeared in the Press, as follows:

**EN Thursday, 6 March 1913**

“Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1913 Grand Opening Night

***Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street, Portobello***

This Comfortably and Luxuriously Furnished Drawing-room Theatre will open to the Public on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March, with a Continuous Programme, from 6.30 to 10.30. The Theatre will be run on the most up-to-date lines, and the Programme will comprise the Pick of the World’s Latest and Best Pictures.

**Prices: 4d., 6d.; 9d. and Reserved 1s.**

**Family Matinees, Wednesdays and Saturdays.”**

**EN Tuesday, 11 March 1913**

“An attractive programme is being submitted at the *Portobello Cinema Theatre* this week, and it brought together a good attendance last night. A strong drama was *Yvonne the Spy*, telling the story of high political life. *A Lesson in Courtship* proved a laughter-maker of the first order. Others were: *Carmen of the Isles*; *Tweedledum*, *Anarchist* and *The Leopard and the Burglars*.”

Quite a Programme for a modest 4d or 6d., by any standard.

***PORTOBELLO PIER AND PAVILION BUILT 1871, DEMOLISHED  
1917***

**S** Saturday, 4 August **1877**

“By kind permission of Colonel McKenzie and Officers,  
the Band and Pipers of the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders will perform on the Pier  
(weather permitting). Today from 3 till 6 o’clock”

**S** Saturday, 10 June **1893**

“The Pier Band and Variety Entertainment  
Two Performances Daily - 3 and 7 p.m.  
Grand Sacred Concert on Sunday  
M. P. Galloway, 24 Shore, Leith”

**S** Friday, 16 April **1897**

“Opening of the Season Spring Holiday, Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> April

First-class Refined Variety Entertainments

Twice Daily at 3 and 7 p.m.

Saphrim, *The Gay Deceiver*, and Miss Ada Montrose along with the *Gaiety  
Girls*; Mr J.P. Lannon, The Great Eccentric and Refined Irish Comedian  
Vocalist; Miss May Lear, the Charming Serio-Comedienne and Dancer; Mr  
Andrew Sheldrake, Musical Director and Pianist.

Admission: Fourpence

Proprietors: The Galloway Saloon Steam Packet Co.”

***PORTOBELLO TOWN HALL, 1914***

[Inexplicably, my father failed to mention the Town Hall which opened in  
1914. In **Archie Foley’s** *Portobello in picture postcards 1985*, the text  
about the Town Hall, under postcard 9, reads: “...fully equipped with stage  
and auditorium and over the years has been well used by local community  
organisations. However, it has also housed top-class professional  
entertainment and many will remember the regular visits of Scottish  
comedian **Tommy Morgan** and his Company for the summer season.”  
G.F.B.]



***PROM CONCERT PARTY***

EN Saturday, 9 June 1928

**“PORTOBELLO THE PROM CONCERT PARTY**

**AT THE PROM CONCERT HALL (Foot of Wellington Street, Portobello)**

Twice Daily - Season 1928 - 3 and 7.30 p.m.

All Star Cast

Ten Talented Artistes including Harry Whitehead, the Popular Revue Comedian; Sylvia Watt.

Opening Date - Saturday, June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928, at 7.30

Prices: 2s. and 1s. 3d., Reserved; 9d and 6d., Unreserved”

***TOWER STREET AND ITS VARIOUS PLACES OF AMUSEMENT Promenade Saloon, 1876; Tower Pavilion, 1907; Tower Picture Palace, 1910; Tower Amusements; Tower Street Hall; New Ocean Skating Rink; St Anne’s Mission Hall***

***THE PROMENADE SALOON***

S Saturday, 4 November 1876

“The Saloon at the Foot of Tower Street, will open for a few Sundays longer in consequence of the fine weather. Saloon for Sale”

This was the first advertisement I noted regarding Tower Street. The premises were used for many purposes: Theatre Turns; Pictures; Skating Rink. The next time I came across a Press advertisement for Tower Street was in 1907. It must be remembered and strongly **emphasised**, as I have repeated many times in this history, that some places of amusement had a penchant to advertise by means of Hand Bills or Window Bills.

***TOWER PAVILION***

EN Tuesday, 23 July 1907

**“Tower Pavilion, Portobello Now Open**

14 First Class Artists Latest Animated Pictures

3 and 7.30

Prices: Stalls, 1s.; Pit, 6d.; and Gallery, 3d.

Harry Marvello, Sole Proprietor.”

## *TOWER PICTURE PALACE*

EN Tuesday, 9 August 1910

*“Tower Picture Palace, Portobello*

Great Success of the New Pictures

Twice Nightly 7 and 9

Prices: 2d.; 4d. and 6d. Children, Half-price”

## *TOWER AMUSEMENTS*

It will be noticed the plural is used in this case at: 47 Tower Street and Promenade.

On Friday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1963, I had a chat with the owner of the Amusements, **Erin A. Deane**, who gave me some particulars about his tenure of the premises and, while meagre, had some historical value. He acquired the premises in the year 1936. Previously to his taking over the premises they were used by Messrs Rankin, Fruit Merchants, as a garage.

The premises are at the north end of Tower Street and front the Promenade on the east side. The floor space is covered with dozens of machines of Chance; I believe some of them are called ‘One Armed Bandits’. As this was my first visit to such a place of amusement, I could be wrong in giving this description to the machines.

The inevitable Bingo was sited in the centre of the building with, perhaps, 36 seats. I understand Bingo was originally known as “Housey”. My first contact with it was while en route to the Dardanelles in March 1915. We had just passed the Rock on our way along the Mediterranean, when bits and pieces were brought to light by one of the ‘Regulars’. At that time it was taboo in the Army and the Sergeant Major was never far away to see that the ‘Law’ was not violated. I mention ‘Housey’ simply to point out that it is not something altogether new. Or, call a rose by any other name, i.e. Housey or Bingo.

Without such a place as the *Tower Amusements*, Portobello would be completely dead as far as the young people are concerned. I found it hard to believe that the *Tower Amusements* building was the first place of amusements on that site, but such is the case.

As the name 'Tower' appears several times in connection with Portobello amusements, it will be well to differentiate between *Tower Amusements* and the *Tower Hall*.

I would refer the reader to **William Baird's** *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello, 1898*, for a very full account of the local history, including how Tower Street got its name.

The building at the north-east end of Tower Street [the Street is now known as Figgate Street/Lane; only the Masonic Hall and the buildings at the corners with the High Street and 47 Tower Street, now known as 47 Figgate Lane, remain G.F.B.] is called Portobello Tower, built in 1785. From its top windows watchers could observe the approach of ships while yet a long way off shore; hence the Tower.

On what is now 47 Tower Street was built a beautiful house in the style of the period. From the Promenade the house stands 35 yards south on the east side and a few minutes spent looking at it would be time well spent.

The Street Directory for 1900-01 shows that a Mr Wm. Gray lived at the Tower, No 47 Tower Street, at which time it could be seen from the Promenade as there was no building to obstruct the view of the house. The Tower became a hotel as can be seen in the **1905-06** Directory, with Mr W.A.M. McKinnon shown as the proprietor.

In the Edinburgh Directory for **1919-20** the entry for 47 Tower Street was 'Tower Engineering Company.' I would suggest that the Company was floated during the 1914-18 War to assist in the War effort. The next occupant was a William Blows, whose name was entered in the Directories from **1924-25 until 1930-31**. From **1931-32 until 1934-35** Messrs A. Rankin, Fruit Merchants, used the premises as a garage. A Miss M. Shaw is shown as the occupant of No 47 in **1934-35 to 1936**.

And Finally.... as stated above Erin A Deane took over the premises known as *Tower Amusements*, as shown in the Directory for **1936-37**, and is still there in August **1963**.

### ***TOWER HALL***

I will now show how the ***Tower Hall*** comes into the picture. In the *News* advertisement for Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1907, the Tower Pavilion was stated to be 'Now Open' with Harry Marvello, the sole proprietor.

Call it coincidence or what you will, but the ***Tower Street Hall*** was first entered in the Directory in 1907-08, with its address at No 62 Tower Street. To continue the coincidence a step forward, in 1908-09, the occupant at No 47 Tower Street, that is the Tower, is none other than Harry Marvello, the sole proprietor of the Tower Pavilion at No 62. [From A. Foley's *Portobello in old picture postcards*, 1985: P.C. 31, "Henry Melville, or Harry Marvello to give him his show business name...was a colourful character who later took over the Tower Hotel and ran a Boxing Booth and Amusement Arcade; P.C. 43, "Behind the Tower is the large Victorian mansion...which was owned for a time by Harry Marvello...who built the Arcade on the Promenade near the Tower." G.F.B.]

### ***ST ANNE'S MISSION CHURCH***

In the Portobello Directory for 1910-11 the entry for No. 62 Tower Street was the Mission Church. In the 1962 Edinburgh Directory the Mission was still there but the spelling was given as "St. Ann's"

Note: The Tramway Stables were at No. 14 Tower Street in 1905-06-07.

## CIRCUSES AND SHOWGROUNDS

### **ORD'S CIRCUS, PORTOBELLO, 1777-1859** Extracted from **William Baird's Annals of Duddingston and Portobello, 1898**

Page 329 of Baird's *Annals*

It would appear that **Ord's** had first claim to being the oldest travelling circus to have visited Edinburgh, when they pitched their tent at Portobello Links, now Elcho Terrace, in the late **1790's**. **Ord's** was a travelling circus, as distinct from those which settled for a period in a building, such as **Ducrow's** at 19 Nicolson Street from **1820**.

His stay generally lasted two or three days and evenings. For over half a century he visited every village and town of any consequence. He was well known in the late **1790's**. When in better circumstances, he pitched a large tent and charged admission, but during the latter half of his career the tent was abandoned, and the exhibition was an open one.

A ring was formed on the turf of the Links, within which the performance took place, the spectators watching the show on the elevated ground nearer the highway (London Road). On one side he had a covered stand with seats, for which a small charge was made for those who used them; they were usually well patronised by the 'gentry'.

He was a tall, rather slenderly-made man; carried himself with much dignity of manner, and his grave and reverent appearance always commanded respect. His exhibitions of horsemanship, whether of *Dick Turpin the Highwayman*, *Mazeppa*, or *Rob Roy*, were certainly very remarkable, especially performed by one who had reached the allotted span of life.

Note: This description of Thomas Ord fitted another great equestrian, **John Henry Cooke**, 1835-1917, both in appearance and type of programme engaged in.

### HOW TO MAKE THE SHOW PAY

Towards the close of each evening's entertainment, the crowd round the ring were canvassed to buy tickets for the **lottery**, at 6d. a ticket. The prizes consisted generally of light ornaments or fancy goods with one or two superior articles by way of inducement, such as an eight-day clock, a gold or

silver watch, a cheese or a load of meal. Suffice it to say, the larger proportion of the audience purchased tickets and thus helped to support the show, in a precarious manner.

In the year **1858** he made his last appearance on the Links, an old man of eighty, still taking an active part in the performance with his son-in-law, **Delaney**.

**His last ride** (page 331) His last appearance on horseback was at Thornhill, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September **1859**. He became ill and at his own request was taken home to Biggar, where he died on the 27<sup>th</sup> December **1859**.

Page 332 After the ring at the Links ceased to be used as a showground, the boys and girls played all sorts of games including cricket and golf. But the building of Elcho Terrace somewhat reduced its scope for such games.

For many years afterwards, Ord's old circus ring was visible, until, in **1878**, what remained of old Portobello Links was enclosed with an iron railing by the surrounding feuars (who had in some way acquired a right over the ground).

Note: The phrase in brackets is made to sound ominous by William Baird. He pointed out an authentic case of encroachment in **1842**, Rae V. Smith See page 12. I wonder whether the take-over of the Links by the Elcho Terrace residents was also a case of encroachment but on a smaller scale; and could the feu holders of Elcho Terrace show Clear Title to all **their** land in the year **1964**!

### ***EVAN'S SHOW GROUND***

**1908-09** *Portobello Street Directory:*

**“EVAN'S SHOWGROUND  
NO. 47 PROMENADE, NEXT VICTORIA TERRACE.”**

### ***MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD***

**S May 31<sup>st</sup> 1909**

In the programme of attractions mention is made of *Bostock's Jungle and American Animal Arena*.

## ROLLER SKATING RINKS

### ***PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

S Monday, 6 November 1876

#### ***“PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

OPEN DAILY AT 10.30; 2.30; & 6.30

ADMISSION – AFTERNOON – ONE SHILLING

FORENOON AND EVENING – SIXPENCE

FASHIONABLE PROMENADE ON THURSDAY

GREAT PROMENADE ON SATURDAY

SPLENDID BAND OF 78<sup>TH</sup> HIGHLANDERS

AFTERNOON & EVENING”

S Saturday, 4 August 1877

#### ***“PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

OPEN EACH DAY

A BAND EVERY SATURDAY

AFTERNOON AND EVENING

REFRESHMENTS, TEAS, COFFEES, ETC.”

### ***MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD***

#### ***MARINE GARDENS SEAFIELD ROAD, ROLLER SKATING***

The Marine Gardens opened on Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1909. The following is quoted from a programme appearing in *The Scotsman* of that date.

“Skating Rink – Absolutely the Finest and Largest in Scotland.

Sessions: 11 to 1, 2 to 5 and 7 to 10”

EN Thursday, 12 March 1931

#### ***“MARINE GARDENS SEAFIELD ROAD***

***ROLLER SKATING***

***EVERY WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY & FRIDAY”***

***OCEAN SKATING RINK, TOWER STREET, PORTOBELLO***

EN Saturday, 14 August 1909

**“OCEAN SKATING RINK TOWER STREET, PORTOBELLO  
GRAND OPENING OF THE NEW OCEAN SKATING RINK  
(LATE TOWER PAVILION) PORTOBELLO**

TONIGHT (SATURDAY) THE ABOVE RINK WILL BE OPENED TO  
THE PUBLIC

SPECIALLY SELECTED MAPLE FLOOR, AND IS FULLY EQUIPPED  
TO MEET THE REQUIEREMENTS AND COMFORT OF PATRONS

ADMISSION 6d. SKATES 6d.”

***THE BUNGALOW, 26a BATH STREET, PORTOBELLO***

**1910/1911 *Portobello Street Directory***

Reference is made in the Directory to, “The Scottish Roller Skating Coy.,  
The Bungalow, 26a Bath Street”

The Bungalow is mentioned in the Directories from 1903-04 until 1910-11.



**A summing up** And there I have come to the end, as far as could be gleaned from a multitude of newspapers and other sources, of the Portobello story, which started with the hut erected in Tower Street, in **1808**, by strolling actors for the entertainment of villagers and summer visitors. Alas, neither ‘villagers’ nor summer visitors have much in the shape of entertainments to beguile an hour or two away. For proof of this statement let members of the Portobello Hoteliers’ and Traders’ Association say their piece through several newspapers.

### **Closure of Portobello Railway Station**

**EN** Wednesday, 28 August **1963** a precis

“Monday Talks on Station Closing Councillor Kenneth Borthwick, a frequent spokesman for the Association (he is a trader). “He understood that at present about 100 people a day used the station to commute.” “Sometimes as many as 3,000 passengers arrive in a day by train.” “The threat to the station has come at a time when the Association are planning a winter campaign for a “Brighter Portobello”.”

*Daily Express*, Wednesday, 28 August **1963** Some extracts

“**Portobello High Street Gets a Beeching Shock** Portobello, Edinburgh’s declining seaside resort, was shocked yesterday ... that Beeching’s axe would fall on December 2.... For the Association had been planning a winter campaign... to put the resort back on its feet. Last night Councillor Borthwick described the shock announcement as a ‘set-back’ to their ‘face-lift plans’. “We were hoping to attract more visitors with our “Brighter Portobello” campaign”, he said. “This included painting the High Street, putting coloured lights all along the promenade and re-surfacing it. But now?”

**ED** Tuesday, 3 September **1963** Some extracts

“**Portobello Fights Closure** Portobello Merchants’ and Hoteliers’ Association are to protest ‘most strongly’ against the closure of Portobello Railway Station, and letters are to be sent to the Minister of Transport and the Lord Provost of Edinburgh”..... “Schools, church organisations and institutions, as well as Glasgow people, come to Portobello by rail, and if facilities are denied these people, Portobello and the city will suffer.” Said Councillor Borthwick.”

Whether by accident or design, I do not know, but the Dispatch had the following advertisement in the next column to the news item about the Monday meeting of the Hoteliers' and Merchants' Association.

**ED Tuesday, 3 September 1963**

“Rail Excursions to Blackpool For Illuminations

Hereafter Times of Departure for Saturday, September 14  
and Sunday, September 29.....

Return Fare 45s. , 35s.

Weekend Excursions from Princes Street Station on Fridays and Saturdays  
until October 26. Fare 45s.

BRITISH RAILWAYS”

Gie like someone was taking the mickey out of puir old Porty.

Comment: Let Portobello Councillors take an excursion ticket to Blackpool, have a good look at the “Brighter Blackpool Lights”, then come away home and let Porty lie in peace.

I know full well that Councillor Borthwick and his two colleagues in the Ward can only go as far as the Town Council cares to travel – and this applies for **any** project for Greater Edinburgh. I have lived a long time and, throughout the years, Edinburgh has been as well dressed as the Income would allow. For example, 35 new schools since the termination of the Second World War made a queer dent in the Income.

A betting slogan runs, “If yer don’t put it down, yer can’t pick it up.” Conversely, if higher rates are objected to, yer can’t expect to get extra amenities. It is as simple as that.

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