



The History of
the Rotary Club of Lochaber
1949 - 1996

by

Bruce Tulloch

The History of The Rotary Club of Lochaber

Rotary came fairly late to Lochaber. Before the war, Fort William was a smallish town and, in spite of the railway, was still remote from the larger centres of population. Only the better-off owned motor cars and public transport was relatively expensive. For these reasons the town tended to be socially self-contained. Employees of the British Aluminium Company formed a close-knit community of shop-floor workers on one hand and technical and office staff on the other. The other industries - distilling, agriculture, railway - likewise formed their own social groupings and only organisations like the churches and the Masonic Lodge cut across them.

The war brought an influx of population and, with it, increased prosperity to the town and this tended to continue after the hostilities ended. At the same time, the fairly rigid prewar class structure was breaking up. The shared hardships had made people more aware of and concerned about the welfare of their neighbours, not only in a local but also in a wider sense. World organisations, like the United Nations and its subsidiaries, were highly thought of and great hopes for the future of the world rested upon them.

In this climate of benevolence and international altruism, coupled with material prosperity, it was really only to be expected that Rotary, with its worldwide philanthropic ideals and its underlying spirit of fellowship, would become increasingly appealing, both to the men who had served in the Forces and to those who, for the first time, felt secure enough financially to contemplate lending a helping hand to others less fortunate than themselves.

On July 1st. 1949, sixteen good men and true met together in the Grand Hotel and decided that they would try to form a Rotary Club. It would meet in the Grand Hotel at 1.10 p.m. - this, presumably, to allow for a brief sojourn in the bar beforehand - and go on till 2.30p.m. These times were to be 'rigidly adhered to' so that there would be plenty of time available after the meal for talks and discussion. It was only in 1966 that the starting hour was officially set at 1.00 p.m. and at the same time, one presumes, 2.00 p.m. came to mark the end of the meeting.

Events moved swiftly and within a week, on July 7th, the first Council Meeting of the Lochaber (Formation) Rotary Club was held at 9.00 p.m. Shops

closed later in those days and business men were not able to attend at an earlier hour. The 8.30 p.m. arrival of the train from Glasgow may have been another factor as it brought perishable goods, papers and various other items whose arrival was attended with a fair degree of urgency.

Jimmie MacBean, Category - Beverages, was elected Chairman and Charlie Steel was appointed Secretary. Charlie went on to become President in 1953-54, before emigrating to Canada in 1957. Happily he is still alive and is probably the only surviving founder member. He actually paid a return visit to Fort William in 1995.

It was decided that membership would be limited to men residing in the parishes of Kilmallie, Kilmonivaig, Arisaig and Moidart. Oddly enough, the areas to the south - Onich and Kinlochleven - were excluded and, in those days before the bridge was built, Ballachulish was impossibly remote. By April 1950 Glenelg was included and the burgh of Fort William itself was specifically mentioned.

Membership of at least 20 was demanded but, to be on the safe side, it was decided to aim at 24. Each founder member was asked to prepare a list of eight suitable men who might be asked to join. All the names suggested would be placed on a list and the members would then vote. The eight who secured the highest number of votes would be invited to join. Alas! dissension reared its head immediately. In the view of one of the founder members one of the eight was not 'worthy'. To avoid damage to 'the harmony of the club' his name was removed from the list 'forthwith'. Who this unfortunate outcast was we shall never know.

The official inaugural meeting of the club was held in the Grand Hotel on December 9th, 1949. A photograph was taken and a copy of this still hangs in the foyer of the hotel. The membership fee in those happy days was fixed at 3 guineas, i.e. £3.15. The club was given a probationary period of three months in which to prove its ability to sustain a reasonable attendance. In January, February and March of 1950 an average attendance of nearly 90% was attained and by June 1950 the Rotary Wheel had been proudly placed outside the Grand Hotel, where it has remained ever since. The club soon settled into routine. The first Club Assembly took place on 16th August, 1950 and the first Charter Night on 30th November, 1950.

For the first 10 years of its existence the club membership remained about the 30 mark or just below it. In 1961 it was 29 but members felt that the figure of 30 was 'about the limit the Club could accommodate'. At that time meetings were held in what is now the residents' lounge of the hotel and not, as at present, in the large dining-room. In 1969 it was decided to increase the membership to 35 or 36 and by 1979 it had reached 45. In the early eighties it dropped to 37 but it rose again and in 1995 it reached 48. Attendance has never been particularly good since those halcyon days of 1950 and usually has run about the 70-75% mark, though at one time, when we had a very understanding keeper of the roll, much better figures were achieved. In July 1986 'attendance for the month was the worst that the Club Service Convenor could remember' at only 65%. His plangent cry was effective and in August it soared to 79.4% but bad habits die hard and the wretched offenders were again being castigated in April 1988 when 54% was disgracefully recorded - but that really was an exceptional figure.

In earlier times most members lived and worked in town. With the influx of national companies and organisations such as Woolworth and British Alcan and the centre of local government services moving away to Inverness, more and more of our members have jobs which demand attendance at frequent meetings outside Lochaber and so it becomes more difficult for them to achieve the attendance demanded by Rotary rules.

Throughout the club's history the meeting-place has been the Grand Hotel and only when renovations have been taking place there has the venue been changed, usually to the Alexandra Hotel. A lunchtime meeting is still favoured although, in the seventies, a once-per-month evening meeting was held. Attendance at this was so poor that the idea was dropped after a year.

The lunch charge in 1949 was 5/- (25p) but this was considered to be excessive and it was soon dropped to 4/6d (22.5p). By 1951, however, the hotel was demanding an extra 6d. Very reluctantly the club agreed but in retaliation the practice of giving the staff a gratuity was discontinued. This would appear to fly in the face of the Rotarian philosophy of benevolence and the helping hand and, to their credit, the members must have realised this because, a month later, they shamefacedly reversed their decision. By 1965 the charge had doubled to 10/- (50p). In 1971 it had crept up to 65p and by 1972 to 70p in summer but only 60p in winter. In return the hotel promised a

choice of three starters, eight main courses and three sweets, 'with fresh potatoes' no less. It was too good to last of course and by 1985 a figure of £3.25 had been reached - with no mention of choice, nor of potatoes. This was held for a considerable time and only in recent years has the current charge of £6 been levied. Inevitably, perhaps, friction did occur from time to time. In November 1955 one proud-stomached member resigned because of his 'dislike of the catering which made attendance at luncheon meetings impossible' for him. One rather nice custom, dating from 1966, was for the newest member to go round the tables each lunchtime, collecting the dues and thereafter settling up with the hotel. In that way he very soon came to know all the members and the hotel staff and his face likewise became familiar. This practice ceased when the lunch charge became payable at the desk.

Charter Nights have had a chequered history. In 1953 a charge of 18/6d was made. One hundred places were booked but only eighty members and guests turned up and the club was asked to stump up £9.10s.0d in compensation to the hotel. A violent protest was made, as a result of which the balance demanded was dropped to £3.2s.0d. Lessons were not learned and in 1954 another loss - this time of £7.16s.0d was recorded. Two years later, however, there was a profit - of 13/6d - but Council was not happy. It agreed that the 'service was unsatisfactory and the price excessive' and that 'the Manager should be interviewed'. In May 1957 the club decided, by 20 votes to 8, to discontinue Charter Night and to devise some other suitable function. An 'annual dinner' was held in December of that year but it could not have been a roaring success because, by December 1958, Charter Night had been restored - at 25/- per head. Next year 32/- was demanded and rebellion broke out. The Council cravenly hoisted the white flag and the charge of 25/- was reinstated. The protest proved to have been fully justified because, the reduction in price notwithstanding, a profit of 5/- was shown. In 1961, blood rushed to the head, the price was slashed to 21/- and the club lost £16. Woe was forecast but in spite of all difficulties, Charter Night has gone on, with prices rising inexorably to £2.50 in 1973, £6 in 1978, £8.50 in 1982 and £20 in 1995.

Attendance fell away in the late seventies and it was decided that each member would be required to take two tickets, whether he proposed to attend or not. Bachelors and widowers were only required to buy one. Needless to say, this ploy resulted in a magnificent upsurge in attendance but questions were raised about the morality of placing what was effectively a surcharge on

the membership fee, which had itself risen from the original 3 guineas to 5 guineas in 1957 and ever upwards to £17.50 in 1978, £27.50 in 1980 and £60 in 1995. At last, in 1996, the Charter Night charge was officially incorporated in the membership fee.

Possibly because of the low subscription, the club seems to have operated on a shoestring in the early years. End of year balances were at levels which appear surprisingly low to us. One year ended with £1.12s.5d in the kitty and in 1962 prospects looked so bleak that 'it seemed that it might be necessary to call on members for a subsidy'. That dire departure was, thankfully, not required and by June 30th of that year the club was once more rolling, with £4.8s.9d in the coffers. By contrast - and, possibly, reflecting the feeling of affluence of the eighties - the balance carried forward in 1983 was £2,000, in 1985 over £3,000 and in 1993 over £6,000. The cost of supporting the good causes with which the club has been concerned has risen dramatically too, of course, but the figures do indicate how substantial that support has been.

Throughout the club's existence certain problems have continued to come to the surface. In the fifties the Council was much exercised about the question of banners. Discerning judgement was shown when it was decided that our banner should have a tartan backing - an unusual feature which always appeals to our visitors. Trouble was experienced when it came to the price - all of 13/6d. In 1995 a similar problem arose with regard to the cost of tartan. Happily a solution was found, when one of our members donated the kilt of a relative who had passed away. It is pleasing to think that its tartan will be carried all over the world to symbolise the hospitality of Lochaber.

Because of Fort William's role as a tourist centre, the club has always attracted a large number of visitors. Charlie Steel, in a letter from Canada, recalls that, in his days in the club, there were sometimes more visitors than members at lunch. On one occasion the club was honoured by a visit from a member of the Fort William Club - in Canada - now renamed Thunder Bay. On another occasion the meeting was well under way when the door opened and a smiling Japanese Rotarian appeared. He spoke no English but he was warmly received and an extra lunch was set before him. Protesting politely, he was urged to eat up and he eventually did so. Only when the plate was empty did the door open again, to admit an English coach-driver, who explained that our guest was one of his party who had already consumed his lunch when he

learned that a Rotary meeting was taking place next door. As a good Rotarian he had felt obliged to convey his club's greetings to our members. One imagines that he returned home with a somewhat inflated idea of Highland hospitality.

Very early on, the banners brought by our guests were proving difficult to store. In 1953 it was decided 'to see Johnny MacLellan about a box' - a somewhat macabre ploy as Johnny was the local undertaker. A solution came to hand when Hugh MacKenzie brought forth a supply of material to provide backing for the fine display of banners which we have today. Generally speaking, banners are much less popular than they once were, possibly because of their high cost but also because of the difficulties involved in storing and displaying them.

Another problem over the years has been that of the provision of speakers. In larger towns it is not difficult to secure the services of a varied succession of speakers but, in Lochaber, resources in that direction are bound to be always limited. The situation has been accepted and we now have a speaker perhaps once a month on average.

Members have always been nobly supported by their wives in the club's social activities. As early as 1953, Ladies' Day - on the Wednesday nearest to St. Valentine's Day - was instituted. Originally the ladies were invited to lunch but this meant that the occasion had to be cut short to allow their partners to return to work. An evening function was tried but it proved to be less popular and once again Ladies' Day has become a lunchtime feature. Strenuous efforts have been made by District to institute an Inner Wheel for our ladies. The proposal has been made on at least eight occasions but the ladies have always rejected it, indicating that most of the activities associated with the Inner Wheel were already being engaged in by other organisations to which they belonged. A suggestion in 1995 that ladies, in these days of sex equality, should be allowed to join our club was soundly rejected - *nem. con.*

As is the case with every other Rotary club, our club has devoted a large proportion of its energies to the raising and disbursing of funds for charitable purposes. A complete list of all the causes, projects and individuals helped in the last forty-odd years would run to many pages. Virtually every Council meeting in that time has given consideration - usually sympathetic - to requests for aid.

We are involved of course with the work of Rotary International and in connection with this, we have supported such schemes as drilling wells for pure water in India and Haiti, building houses in Bangladesh and supporting financially the work of eye clinics in India and East Africa. For years we have organised the collection of old spectacles which are cannibalised and recycled for use in the third world and of drug samples from local surgeries which again are sent overseas. In addition, young medical personnel have been helped to work in hospitals abroad. Hospitality has been given to overseas visitors, exchange students and Rotary scholars. Many disaster and emergency boxes have been filled by the club and clothing and equipment of all kinds have been collected and despatched to such places as Romania and Ethiopia, etc. At one time we helped to pay for the training of a Ghanaian plastic surgeon, the only such specialist in that country. International funds such as Save the Children have benefited from our efforts and two campaigns to reduce and finally eradicate the ravages of polio and other childhood diseases have been nobly supported.

Nearer home we have been much involved in District projects, helping to fund a hospice, a hydro-therapy pool, an extension to Erskine House and, in complete contrast, a Guide Dog for the Blind scheme whereby one of our members looked after a puppy for a year, while the club raised £1000 to pay for its further training.

In Lochaber itself, hundreds of much-needed helping hands have been given over the years. These have ranged from the £22,000 raised, (along with Round Table and Jimmy Savile) for the purchase of an ultrasonic scanner for the Belford Hospital, to some modest bags of coal for the old men who used to live up at Stronaba.

In the club's early days, members took a keen interest in civic matters. Complaints were made about the traffic in the High Street, queries were raised about the numbers of unemployed and, interestingly, great efforts were made to set up a tourist office. Although that project was taken over and developed by other organisations, we may well claim that the club was at least one of the begetters of the modern tourist bureau. Visitors to the town were encouraged to scale the Ben by way of a bridge on the path rebuilt through Rotary's efforts. Many of those passing through on charity walks or climbs were given hospitality and help. In recent, environmentally-conscious times, we have been

responsible for planting thousands of bulbs throughout Lochaber and we have provided seats at suitable places in the town.

The local hospitals have benefited greatly. Scanners of several types, here and at Raigmore, various pieces of technical equipment and, more prosaically, eight wheelchairs have been supplied. Transport for donors to blood transfusion sessions, for taking a kidney patient to Inverness, for elderly visitors to relatives in Glencoe Hospital has been supplied on a long-term basis. Help was given to a handicapped person who wished to attend a handicamp and to disabled riders, canoeists and yachtsmen. For years groups of handicapped people were given caravan holidays and were entertained while they were here with boat trips, ceilidhs, fishing expeditions and even helicopter flights.

The older generation in Lochaber has always been our special concern. One of our earliest projects was the supplying of Christmas parcels to the elderly and this developed into a massive effort involving over a hundred parcels and well over £1,000 each year. Nowadays Lochaber High School pupils have relieved us of most of the work involved but we still give financial support to the scheme. In 1966 we even gave out Hallowe'en parcels.

Less fit old people, in homes, have not been forgotten. Bingo sessions and ceilidhs at Invernevis have achieved lasting fame. Again, equipment ranging from microwave ovens to wheelchair gardens have been supplied and trips by car, bus and gondola have been organised. Outside organisations, such as Crossroads, have been regularly supported.

Young people too have benefited. Dozens of individuals hoping to participate in adventure courses, musical scholarships, educational cruises, etc. have been helped. Schools, both primary and secondary, have likewise been aided. Trophies, dux medals, essay prizes, help with school trips, mock interviews, contributions towards the cost of minibuses - the club has produced them all. Other youth organisations - the Judo Club, Scouts, the Junior Pipe Band (and, on one occasion, a Bermudan Pipe Band) the Junior Football Club, the Gaelic Choir, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the Dudley Boys - have also been given a helping hand. We take particular pride in our sponsoring of the Young Musician of the Year award at the local Music Festival and many other young artistes have been encouraged.

Two rather quaint individual cases are perhaps worthy of mention. Early on, the club received an appeal to find employment 'for a fit but elderly mechanic'. The minutes do not reveal if the plea was successful but as they reported about the same time that 'unemployment in the district is negligible' there is reason to hope that it was. Another unusual request in the fifties certainly was acceded to. An old couple in Fort William, who were in a poor state of health, were presented with a tape-recording - a great novelty then - of their daughter who had emigrated to Canada some years before. Our club had contacted the Rotary Club of Toronto and it had arranged for the lady to come into a recording studio in town to tape the message and we even paid her travelling expenses of \$5!

For nearly 50 years the club has been supporting these charitable activities and the total amount of cash needed to do so must be considerable. The value of money has altered so much that it would be difficult to work out an exact figure but it must be at least £100,000 and possibly much more. To realise such a sum has taken a great deal of hard work by the members, as the wide range of their fund-raising events shows. These have varied from ceilidhs and fiddlers' rallies to Las Vegas nights and much-enjoyed whisky-tasting evenings, from safari suppers to treasure hunts, from cheese and wine parties to teenage dances. It has not all been hard work though and members have derived a lot of pleasure from these ventures, which are as much a part of Rotary fellowship as the purely fun activities which the club arranges - bowls matches with Round Table, cruises on Loch Linnhe, pitch and putt, target golf, sailing evenings, fishing days and clay-pigeon shooting. More seriously, the years have seen members do extremely well in national Rotary golf, curling and fly-fishing competitions.

Looking back over the last 40-odd years we can see a club which has well fulfilled the aspirations of those sixteen men who gathered together in the Grand Hotel in 1949. Throughout that time the members have striven to uphold the Rotary motto of 'Service above Self' and in so doing have managed to enjoy to the full an enviable degree of warm fellowship and fun. Long may they continue to do so.

PREVIOUS PRESIDENTS

In the following pages we have attempted to give as much information as we have been able to obtain about previous presidents of the club. Not unexpectedly, details of some of the earlier ones are rather sketchy and sparse and this, in its way, underlines the importance of compiling this record now, before our previous officials are forgotten altogether.

After some thought - and legal advice with regard to the laws of libel - we have decided, for the time being, to limit these entries to those who have died or who have moved far away from Lochaber. It is hoped that this section will be updated from time to time in the future - a possibility which may invoke a degree of sombre contemplation among some of our older members!

It is also hoped that, among those who read this compilation, there will be some who can recall further details about the gentlemen described. Any such items should be handed in to the secretary and will, again, be used to update this record in the future.

JAMES MacBEAN

The Founder President, because he had to nurse the club through its gestation and birth, is the only one to have held office for two years, from 1949 to 1951. He was the proprietor of the Argyll Hotel, a noted howff on the High Street, which, in recent years, has become the Crofter Bar. A football enthusiast in this stronghold of shinty, he founded and encouraged a football team which rejoiced in the somewhat mystifying name of the Argyll Rovers. Jimmy left Fort William to take over the Railway Inn in Perth and lived long enough to attend a club meeting in its 25th anniversary year.

FARQUHAR KITCHEN 1951/52

Farquhar Kitchen represents one recurring strand in the membership texture of our club - that of the professional man who comes to Fort William, lives and works in our community and then either retires or is promoted out of the district. Such men often carry out sterling work during their stay but their memory tends to fade, which must be a matter for regret. Our club has owed and still does owe much to their influence.

Farquhar was perhaps unfortunate in being a dentist who pursued his calling in a surgery at 48 High Street. Family doctors kindle warm memories of the relief of pain, convalescence, recovery. The very word, dentist, conjures

up, quite unfairly, recollections of probes, needles, crunching forceps and blood. No doubt Farquhar, in his time, also brought much relief from abscess and decay but little is known about him except that he left Fort William some 40 years ago.

DAVID SYDIE 1952/53

David was a master painter of the old school, who ran a painting business and shop on the High Street near where Marshall and Pearson's D.I.Y. shop now is. He was a small man, with a comfortable waistline and a large nose, which gave him a rather bird-like appearance, a resemblance accentuated on Communion Sundays when he, as Session Clerk of Duncansburgh Church, appeared clad in striped trousers and claw-hammer coat. He must have been the last Kirk Elder in Lochaber to wear that traditional uniform and again, true to custom, he was never known to appear at church without a bag of pan-drops, which he was very happy to share with his fellow elders. He bore his church duties with great solemnity and he took a bleak view indeed of any unseemly levity among the younger session members as they went about their pious business.

His righteous wrath would also fall upon his workmen should they be given to strong drink or gambling. The Christmas-New Year period was a time of sore trial for David as he sped from job to job, his eye seeking out the hastily concealed playing-card, his nose fine-tuned to the faintest whiff of alcohol. Even if his quest was successful, however, there was little chance of the guilty party's suffering serious punishment. Instant dismissal would have been anathema to David for he was, at heart, a very kindly, gentle man.

He and his wife had no children and when the time came for him to retire he decided to do two things. One was to go on a world tour, visiting as many Rotary Clubs as he could, or, as Bishop Henderson put it -

'David Sydie, with cheque book unfurled,
Is bound for a sail around the world'.

The other decision was to hand over the operation of his business to two of his long-serving employees. Unfortunately his generosity did not have a happy outcome. The firm had been heavily involved in the building of an extension to the High School, as sub-contractor to a large civil-engineering concern which went into receivership. This forced several small, local firms, including David's, into bankruptcy.

Although he sounds, from the foregoing, a rather dour and formidable character, he was actually a good and well-doing man, warmly hospitable, courteous, affable and honest. In the town, as in Rotary, he was highly-regarded and popular - and rightly so.

CHARLIE STEEL 1953/54

Charlie was the first secretary of the club and later became its president. For some years he was manager of the Ben Nevis Distillery, which, at that time, was owned by Joseph Hobbs of Inverlochy Castle but in 1957 Charlie left Lochaber for Canada, where he has lived ever since. He fortunately carried his interest in Rotary with him over the Atlantic, joined the Elliot Lake Club in Ontario and twice became its president.

When he left Fort William he was presented with a clock by his fellow Rotarians, a gift which he still remembers with almost as much pride as he took in the award of a Paul Harris Fellowship, which he achieved some years ago.

Charlie, though a very old man now, returned for a visit to Lochaber in 1995 and he has helped in the compilation of this club history.

CHARLES CONNOCHIE 1954/55

Chae Connochie was the sort of character who has vanished from today's society. In his young manhood he served as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps and came to Fort William in the twenties, when the British Aluminium power scheme was being constructed, as a temporary assistant to Dr. Brander - - and stayed for the rest of his long life. In many ways he was the typical old family doctor, respected and loved by all his patients, well-known throughout Lochaber, full of stories, full of humour. Devoted to his practice and his people, he was not a man to stand on ceremony and one wonders how, with his bluff ways, he would have coped with today's highly-managed, NHT medical world. Rather tumultuously, one would imagine. Busy though he was, he participated fully in the life of the community and for many years he was a Town Councillor and eventually Senior Baillie. His interest in Rotary remained strong to the end of his days and he took great pleasure in regaling new, young members with tales of life in the frontier times of Fort William.

ALAN RIBBECK 1955/56

Alan was a quiet, gentlemanly and scholarly man, well suited to his trade as watch-maker and jeweller. His shop, beside the present Scottish Crafts and Whisky Centre, bore little resemblance to the highly-polished gem shops which are scattered along the High Street today. In his little, cluttered, dusty empire he was delighted to welcome visitors as friends, rather than as potential customers. Paradoxically, time was of little importance to him but his advice on the selection of clock or watch was considered, wise and strictly honest and his principles far removed from those of most modern salesmen. One of his duties was the maintenance of the Town Hall clock, a rather temperamental timepiece. Try as he might, even Alan could not keep its wilfulness from showing itself and, as can be imagined, much teasing from his fellow-Rotarians was bound to ensue.

ROBERT KEAN 1956/57

Robert Kean was another 'real character' - 'one of the old school', phrases which probably mean that it is easier for one to take a humorous view of his foibles across a forty-year gap than it would have been had one been a contemporary.

He was a chemist, with a shop at 99 High Street, but he was also, in his spare time, a very successful operator in the stock market, which made him, over the years, a wealthy man and this may have encouraged him in his brusque, no-nonsense approach to customers, colleagues and all those with whom he came in contact socially.

As Senior Elder in the MacIntosh Church he became a bit of a martinet with regard to the dress, demeanour and decorum of his younger fellows.

He also took a great interest in the electricity supply which, in those days, was operated by the Town Council. Each failure was the subject of a penetrating enquiry carried out by Robert and, as can be imagined, this habit did not endear him to the workmen whose job it was to service the plant. Driven to exasperation by his interfering and infuriating activities, they turned on him one day and told him to clear off. They did not know their man. Spurred on by this blow to his amour-propre, he entered local politics, was elected to the Council and - final triumph - had himself appointed Electricity Supply Convenor! One can imagine the reactions of the Council workmen when he presented himself to them with the query, 'And who's going to chase me off now then?'

In fairness to Robert, who appears from this sketch to have been a rather unattractive bully, it must be pointed out that, when he grew to maturity, a successful, wealthy businessman expected and was accorded much respect in a community which was vastly more deferential than it is now. Such men looked upon it as their proper duty to uphold the standards which they judged to be vital to the well-being of the society in which they lived. They were prepared to accept a fair degree of unpopularity by so doing and thus they were, in their own way, placing service above self.

A.K. MacDONALD 1957/58

Of A.K. MacDonald it was said, perhaps unfairly, that because of his job as County Road Surveyor he had plenty of time for his real interests in life - fishing, curling and Bridge. In his spare time he was known also to design houses for his friends and to act as Clerk of Works during their construction.

He was a man who fitted well into his environment and took full advantage of what it had to offer. He could do this perhaps because his view of life was nothing if not practical.

At times this realism could become almost brutal in its directness, as on the occasion when the MacIntosh Kirk, of which he was an Elder, had an extremely active minister, much given to dashing round his parish and even, it was alleged, neighbouring parishes, earnestly, if tactlessly, seeking new members for his church.

'Minister', said A.K., in measured and judicial tones, 'you must study the Scottish character before you go knocking on folks' doors. You should never make things easy for them. They don't like it that way. If you want more members, you should charge them admission or make them sit a test and you'd find them queuing up at the kirk door'. He could have been right.

His laid-back approach to life was, to some extent, only possible because of the time in which A.K. lived - a time when bankers could slip off to the golf course for a quiet afternoon round, when Rotarian shopkeepers could nod away their Wednesday afternoons in gentle discussion in the Grand Hotel lounge and when lawyers could indeed spend the odd hour or two at the bar before heading back to the office. O! fortunate A.K.

MURDO MacKENZIE 1958/59

Murdo was another local character who lived and had his being in a leisurely age which is now almost forgotten. He was the owner of a good quality furniture shop - Fraser's of Fort William - which was situated opposite the Masonic Hall. His business and the fact that he lived in Glen Loy allowed him to give free rein to the passion of his life - angling, a hobby which he must have missed sorely when he moved, about 1964, to Glasgow to work with the well-known firm of Wylie and Lochhead.

He, like many of our early Rotarians, was an Elder of the Kirk - in his case Duncansburgh. On his departure for Glasgow he presented the church with a harmonium which had belonged to his mother. It was a delicately made instrument, decorated with fretwork, and it did much to add a certain artistic grace to the somewhat drab surroundings of the Church Hall.

Unfortunately, the Boys Brigade company met each Friday in the same hall to indulge in much rough and tumble involving footballs, medicine balls and the like - equipment which came in frequent and harsh contact with the harmonium, greatly to the latter's disadvantage. For some years after Murdo's departure therefore, meetings of the Duncansburgh Church Board were embarrassingly enlivened by recurring references to the state of 'Murdo's mother's organ', references which new recruits to the Board were apt to find both mystifying and hilarious.

WILLIAM CUTHBERT 1959/60

William Cuthbert was another Fort William worthy. He was a lawyer - the Cuthbert of the law firm Cuthbert and Hogg, absorbed by MacArthur Stewart and reborn as part of MacPhee and Partners - and part-time Procurator Fiscal in the local courts.

Session Clerk of MacIntosh Church, he was also a Burns enthusiast who thoroughly enjoyed the local Club's Burns Suppers and, long after his retirement to the East Neuk of Fife, he was known to make the long trip back to Fort William to take part in the conviviality for which that Club is notorious.

He was a typical Scots lawyer, dry, shrewd yet possessed of a pawky sense of humour, as was evidenced by his citation of a Scottish lawyer's bill as the most accurate, detailed and correct account of services rendered in the professional world, with the following example: -

1. To walking along the High Street and observing client on the opposite side of the street 2/6
 2. To deciding to cross street and discuss case with client 2/-
 3. To giving details of progress to date and outlining future strategy .. 5/-
 4. To realising that you were the wrong client and returning to the original side of the street 2/6
- Those were happy days when a lawyer's bill came to 12/- or 60p in today's terms.

DONALD REID-THOMAS 1960/61

Donald was always regarded as a 'B.A. man', though he was, technically, an employee of the company which supplied power to the factory. Donald was, to most members, the archetypal public schoolboy - easy to talk to, self-assured in the good sense, very articulate, kindly, ever polite. In the early days of the club the B.A. was a very patriarchal organisation and Donald was one of the patriarchs. After his retirement from the B.A. he acted as Resident Engineer for the firm which constructed the by-pass along the front. Sadly, soon afterwards cancer claimed him and he died, as he had lived, in a quiet and gentlemanly fashion.

He was a good Rotarian, pulling his weight, attending well and being always willing to chat to - and impress with his charm - lunchtime visitors to the club.

On the occasion of the club's 25th Charter Night Dinner he was one of the stars of the 'Dad's Army' sketch put on by some of the more volatile members. Donald played the part of Sgt. Wilson, a role to which he was ideally suited, because of his immaculate accent. Those in the audience who did not know him imagined, naturally enough, that he had assumed it specially for the part and applauded to the skies this latter-day Olivier.

ROBERT STUART 1961/62

Bobby was a quiet and highly respected member of the club and an electrician whose premises were situated behind the present Harvester Restaurant.

Like several of those mentioned previously, Bobby was a traditional craftsman - a master of every aspect of his trade and one who knew his business and his customers thoroughly. Because of his skills, he was held in high esteem in commercial circles and was contracted to look after the electrical aspects of

most of the local hotels and firms such as the Highland Lime Quarry and the Ben Nevis Distillery. No matter what the emergency, he was never known to let a client down. No one carried out the principles of Rotary in his business life more faithfully than Bobby.

JOE MacPHERSON 1962/63

Joe belonged to a generation of motor mechanics which really knew the operational ins and outs of even the most idiosyncratic of internal combustion engines. What he would have made of today's multi-valved, all -electronic, computerised power-plants is hard to say but in his day he served the community well. His business - the Parade Garage - stood where Nevisport now stands at the east end of the High Street and it was here that many young apprentices learned to become highly skilled mechanics, under the ever-watchful eye of Joe, who ran a tight ship.

As a good citizen and good Rotarian, he took a lively interest in the work of the community. He became a Town Councillor and a Baillie but still found much time to devote to shinty. He was chairman of Kilmallie Shinty Club and he was indeed a proud man when his team achieved the game's highest honour - the winning of the Camanachd Cup. Many of his garage lads became stars of the team - which raises the question, Were they good shinty players because they worked for Joe or did they work for Joe because they were good shinty players?

He combined business with pleasure by becoming involved in motorcycle trialling and again, several of his boys distinguished themselves in that sport. Always quiet, always polite, Joe nevertheless left his mark on Lochaber.

JOHN MacLELLAN 1963/64

Anyone who saw Johnny MacLellan carrying out his undertaker's duties at a funeral was bound to have been impressed by his calm dignity and courteous gravitas and could scarcely have imagined that, behind that solemn and decorous facade, there lurked a truly humorous personality and a very lovable human being.

It is alleged that the Scots, as a race, are much attracted to the macabre and Johnny certainly had no inhibitions about seeing the funny side of life and death. It is recorded that on one occasion he was carrying out his duties at a funeral at Cille Choirill near Roy Bridge, a graveyard which, at that time, could

be reached only by way of a long and steep footpath. For the elderly it was a stiff test and on this day an old gentleman had reached the graveside only with the greatest difficulty. Ever ready with the kind word, Johnny spoke sympathetically to his aged friend but rather spoiled the effect by remarking,

'Man, Donald, I doubt it's hardly worth your while leaving!'

And to Peter MacLellan, whose yacht had not done well in a race,

"I have every confidence in your sailing ability, Peter, but you will have noticed that yours was the only boat with the undertaker's motorboat behind it. I thought it just as well - in case!"

Because of his jovial personality, Johnny was a very popular member of the club, much sought after as a table-companion at lunch, and he is remembered by more than one present member as a warm and welcoming senior Rotarian in the days when, to the newcomer, many of the older inhabitants were rather cold, remote and god-like figures.

JOHN CAMPBELL 1964/65

It is not really possible to give a true description of John Campbell in a few lines. One could say that he was a plumber and builder in a long established family business, a Councillor, a keen curler and angler - but John was much more than that.

In his younger days he was a noted badminton player and a skilled performer on the dance floor. Because of these attributes, he was much admired by members of the fair sex and John soon became a noted ladies' man. Always immaculately dressed, consciously charming, he must have cut a dashing figure in the Fort William ballrooms of the thirties and to the end of his life this white-tie-and-tails aura clung to him - a Hollywood actor transported, a Lochaber Fred Astaire.

This image did not really accord well with the mundane life of a master plumber and John retired as soon as he could from the world of ball-cocks and blocked drains and assumed the role of Regional Councillor, contriving to be on as many committees as possible. With a couple of Council meetings in Inverness, a prison visit to Porterfield, a fire-station opening in Nairn and a site meeting in Thurso, John could fill a week in very comfortably, with the added bonus of mileage allowances and several convivial evenings at up-market hostelrys, in the company of like-minded colleagues.

On the occasion of the Charter Night dinner in his presidential year, it fell to him to arrange for Bishop Henderson to give the main toast. John, full of

charm, invited the bishop and his lady but quite forgot to mention the speech - until the sweet course was on the table. John was lucky. George Henderson rose to the occasion and even concluded his toast with the stirring words,

'To President John we owe our thanks.

If he prospers so does Shanks'.

A character was John.

ANDREW HONEYMAN 1965/66

Andrew was a decent, kindly headmaster who was appointed to Fort William Senior Secondary School when it was established in the premises now occupied by Fort William Primary School. In spite of the very cramped surroundings he was probably happier there than he was when the new school was opened on the Blar in the late 50's. It was a difficult time for education in Lochaber. The Pulp Mill brought a much inflated roll, with a mixed bag of pupils. Social conditions were altering at an unprecedented rate and the attitude of young people towards authority was being completely redefined. These developments gave rise to problems which worried a concerned man like Andrew and made his later years as head of Lochaber High School very difficult. Like many of today's headmasters, he was only too glad to retire when the time came.

He enjoyed Rotary greatly, no doubt because it offered him respite from the pressures of work, and his genial company brought pleasure to his fellow-members. His last years were spent in Edinburgh where he did sterling work in his new club but he regularly visited his old friends in Fort William, right up to the time of his death.

GEORGE MacPHERSON 1966/67

George was a true Highland gentleman, courteous, pleasant, obliging, humorous and tolerant. The club has been fortunate to have included so many such men in its history and indeed, there are still one or two of the same stamp on the roll. Like many of his predecessors, he played his full part in the life of the town as businessman, Councillor, Chairman of the Tourist Association and curler and he was always ready to lend a hand in the organisation of sporting events.

His family roots went far back into Lochaber history and George took much pleasure in recounting anecdotes of worthies of the past, always with a gentle irony.

For many years he was manager of MacRae and Dick's Garage which stood across the square from the front door of the Grand Hotel and it must have been a sad day for him when the business closed. Not long afterwards he suffered a serious heart attack from which he made only a partial recovery and his latter years were not too happy. Perhaps the brightest spots of those last months were the times when he was brought to our meetings, a duty carried out very willingly by a fellow-member. One likes to think so.

JAMES HOGG 1969/70

A lawyer, the other half of Cuthbert and Hogg, Jimmy was very proud of the fact that he was Scotland's last part-time Procurator Fiscal and took a keen interest in that aspect of his work. He was also a deeply religious man, at one time a Reader in the Church of Scotland. However, on a matter of belief, he left the latter and became a pillar of the United Free Church. Because of his background, he was a man of firm principles, which he applied to his work in Rotary. Under his watchful eye the constitution was firmly upheld but in spite of that, he was a respected and popular member and one who concealed, by a mordant wit, a kind and Christian character. His sudden death, at a relatively early age, was a sad loss to the club.

During the war Jimmy was a Flight Engineer in Bomber Command and took part in raids over Germany. During one of these he was wounded and lost the toes of his right foot. This resulted in his having to wear a surgical boot and it is a matter of speculation whether or not this was a factor in the car accident that caused his death.

WILLIAM MacINTOSH 1970/71

Bill MacIntosh is another president of whom relatively little is remembered. He came to Lochaber from Glasgow and was manager of the local bus depot when it was owned by MacBrayne's. Older members recall him as not a particularly demonstrative person and one whose circle of friends was rather selective. With those with whom he was intimate, however, he was a popular companion at meetings.

In the early seventies he retired and left Fort William, settling for a life of golf at Irvine.

WILLIAM SLATER 1971/72

Willie was a gem of a man. His career in civil engineering brought him to Lochaber and eventually to the position of manager in the firm of P.L.J. Heron, which operated from a base at Nevis Bridge, where the Woollen Mill now is. Civil engineering in those days of little equipment and much horny-handed navvy-power was a tough background but Willie remained what he had always had been - a very civilised, quietly spoken, infinitely polite gentleman. He was never known to lose his sang-froid, nor to swear and a twinkle was never absent for long behind his gold-rimmed glasses. He exemplified the best type of Rotarian and it must have broken his heart when his firm went into receivership and he felt that he had to resign because of that unhappy development. Even more tragic was the fact that he developed Alzheimer's disease and spent his last years in a world of his own - completely oblivious to the existence of the Rotary Club which he had so graced by his membership.

SANDY KINNEAR 1972/73

Sandy, like Donald Reid-Thomas, was very much a B.A. man - public school educated, articulate, well-mannered and completely at ease in any company. He was, for much of his career, in charge of the B.A. estates and for that reason was much involved in forestry, sheep-farming and fishing. Sandy had served in the Royal Navy and, like most sailors, could spin a yarn or two - and he did, especially on convivial evenings. He possessed that virtue of his background - unflappability. On one occasion during his year of office it fell to him to announce the death of an old member. For some reason Sandy became momentarily confused over names and reported sombrely that another member altogether had passed away - much to the dismay of that same person who was actually present at the meeting. When this error was pointed out to Sandy he grinned cheerfully and remarked, 'I should have known you weren't dead. You were sitting right in front of me', and carried on with 'Rotary the World Over', completely unperturbed. We were saddened when he retired to Findhorn and died shortly afterwards. Some of us still miss him.

DONALD CURRIE 1975/76

Donald, another civil engineer, came to Lochaber at the time of the Pulp Mill development. In the course of his work he came in contact with Joe Hobbs, at that time owner of Inverlochy Castle, the Great Glen Cattle Ranch and the Ben Nevis Distillery. The two men took a liking to each other and

Donald was persuaded to give up his civil engineering and become Joe Hobbs' right hand man. After Joe's death, Donald took over much of the running of the business, which now included the newly-opened Inverlochy Castle Hotel. This job gave him a degree of freedom, much of which he devoted to Rotary good causes. He was an extremely popular president, not least because, during his year, Council meetings were always held in the office of the Distillery. They were very well attended.

He masterminded the 25th Anniversary celebrations and the club looked forward to his continuing help as an elder statesman. Unfortunately, the old order changeth. The business was split up, parts of it were sold and Donald moved away to manage a hotel in Nairn. Eventually he joined the Hydro Board as a way-leave officer, where his engaging manner and diplomatic approach must have been a great asset.

CHARLES COCHRANE 1976/77

Charlie was an architect and a very good one. As in the case of his eminent professional predecessor, Sir Christopher Wren, his memorials can be seen about us, particularly in Glen Creran where he built two superb modern country houses. One is now Invercreran Hotel and it can of course be visited at any time.

In his earlier days as a member, he filled the role of club jester and, with his wit and bubbling chuckle, he was well suited to it. He was a popular figure and because of this he was the recipient of many a jovial reference to his lack of stature. This he appeared always to take in good part but halfway through his presidency Charlie formally requested, in very definite terms, that members should thenceforth make no allusion to his size. We shall never know what brought about this change but the sparkle seemed to have left Charlie's life. His wife died and he changed his job. He gave up Rotary and became a rather sad and lonely figure. Various members offered fellowship and help but he did not seem to want it. Sadly he died last year.

DUNCAN STUART 1980/81

Duncan came to Fort William as Chief Engineer of the new Pulp Mill. The company was having a lot of problems with the main boilers of their power station. Duncan, an expert in this field, put in a great deal of hard work and managed to solve all of the problems. He then negotiated a deal with the Hydro Board whereby the Mill achieved the lowest electricity unit cost in Europe,

with the exception of a small mill in Holland which benefited from the output of an old power station nearby.

In spite of Duncan's work, Wiggins Teape decided to close their Corpach pulping operation and so he had to supervise the run-down of that part of the plant, with its subsequent loss of jobs. Duncan then emigrated to Perth, Western Australia, where he died in 1994.

He was a natural engineer and when his wife, Moira, wanted a small runabout car, he built one for her. It looked like a roughly-hewn, leaky jeep. Moira was a large and billowy lady, who tended to overflow the little vehicle, and to observe her exuberant progress through town was an experience.

It was, she reported, a delight to drive -- but only on a good day!

PETER MacLENNAN 1981/82

Peter was a quiet man but not one who could be overlooked, because he possessed the gift of generating fun wherever he was. He was a pipesmoker and one has a lasting picture of him carrying out the ritual of filling and lighting his pipe, then almost immediately removing it from his mouth and allowing it to go out while he made some wry observation on the passing show.

Perhaps his strong sense of humour was a reaction to the rigour of his young life when he worked in the shop under the severely critical eyes of his two elderly uncles. Astute businessmen themselves, they viewed Peter as an irresponsible youth, quite unable to work without their supervision. This view was not borne out by the facts because once Peter was left in sole command the outfitting business prospered greatly. It must have been galling for him therefore to recall the occasion, one holiday season, when he sold the entire stock of luggage - only to be rebuked by Uncle Peter. 'What have we got to show the customers now? Never make that mistake again!'

He was never happier nor more at ease than when he was on his yacht with a crew of ancient, trusty and always drouthy cronies, though he also took great pleasure in fishing, shooting and tending the sheep which he kept up country.

His early and sudden death came as a great shock to us all.

DENNIS LAWS 1987/88

Dennis is remembered as a quiet, gently humorous man with a ready smile and endless courtesy. One could not have guessed from his appearance, that, behind the gold-rimmed glasses and neatly trimmed beard was a character whose wartime record as a Royal Artillery officer had been more than impressive, culminating in his winning of the Military Cross.

In civilian life he entered the business world and rose to the position of head of the Institute of Professional Secretaries and in that office had much to do with the setting of standards in such matters when Britain entered the E.C.

Ill health forced him to settle for a quieter life and he moved to Fort William as manager of the Underwater Centre when it was set up. He retired from that position but carried on work as a freelance financial adviser, until he moved up to Inverness where he became one of the founding members of Inverness's second Rotary Club and a leading light in it till his death.

DAN RYAN 1984/85

In every way Dan was a perfect gentleman. Blessed with good looks, he took great care always to be well groomed. One could never imagine Dan appearing with an unshaven chin or unkempt hair. His clothes were likewise immaculate, his shoes polished, his tweed hat at a correct but vaguely jaunty angle. When he spoke, each word was carefully enunciated and each sentence grammatically correct. His voice was never raised but always clear and when he spoke to someone that person had the comfortable feeling that he had Dan's total attention and concern.

A stranger, on meeting him, would have had no hesitation in assuming that he belonged to one of the learned professions - a lawyer perhaps, or a surgeon but Dan was in fact what used to be called a commission agent or bookmaker.

Born in the States, with a Northern Irish background, he returned as a child to Scotland and, in time, came to Fort William to work in the B.A. Factory as an electrician. When the man who carried on a bookmaking business in town made a swift and unannounced departure after a series of unhappy racing results, Dan took over and built up a thriving concern, with branches in Kinlochleven, Caol, Oban and even in Ross-shire. His success was the result of natural ability, of course, but an additional factor was his utter and absolute honesty in a trade where such qualities were not always to be found.

In those stuffy and perhaps hypocritical times, Rotary had no classification which embraced those in the gambling business but as soon as that restriction was relaxed Dan was welcomed into our club and he soon became a popular member and a first-class Rotarian. His brother, Pat, was an active member of the Cambuslang club and as a result strong links were forged between the two clubs, links which have continued in some measure until the present day.

From the foregoing it might seem that Dan was rather a cool and aloof character but nothing could be further from the truth. He was excellent company, full of humour and possessed of a store of anecdotes, many of them dealing with his experiences with the betting fraternity.

As an elder statesman of the club he became the repository of all wisdom concerning the constitution of Rotary and was ever anxious to see that the rules were closely adhered to.

When he died, no fewer than four members spoke at the following lunch in warmest terms of Dan and their relationships with him. It was an unusual but well-deserved tribute.

CONCLUSION

As one reads through these brief descriptions, a composite portrait of the typical Lochaber Rotary Club President begins to emerge. Though they differed greatly in their individual characters -- some jolly, some serious, some brusque, some gentle, some complex, some relatively unsophisticated, -- and though each had his foibles, they are linked by a common thread of decency, kindness and dignity.

Over the last 40-odd years they did much to shape our club -- and, we like to think, they made a pretty good job of it.

We owe them much.

PAST PRESIDENTS

1949-51	James MacBean	1973-74	Ian Wynne
1951-52	Farquhar Kitchen	1974-75	Mick Sutton
1952-53	David Sydie	1975-76	Donald Currie
1953-54	Charlie Steel	1976-77	Charles Cochrane
1954-55	Charles Connochie	1977-78	Alex Duncan
1955-56	Alan Ribbeck	1978-79	Sandy MacFarlane
1956-57	Robert Kean	1979-80	Jim McWilliam
1957-58	A.K. MacDonald	1980-81	Duncan Stuart
1958-59	Murdo MacKenzie	1981-82	Peter MacLennan
1959-60	William Cuthbert	1982-83	Hector Maclean
1960-61	Donald Reid-Thomas	1983-84	Bruce Tulloch
1961-62	Robert Stuart	1984-85	Dan Ryan
1962-63	Joe MacPherson	1985-86	Will Adam
1963-64	John MacLellan	1986-87	David Dingwall
1964-65	John Campbell	1987-88	Dennis Laws
1965-66	Andrew Honeyman	1988-89	Russ Morgan
1966-67	George MacPherson	1989-90	David Blair
1967-68	Robert Michie	1990-91	David Anderson
1968-69	Hugh MacKenzie	1991-92	Ian Milton
1969-70	James Hogg	1992-93	Ray Sutherland
1970-71	William MacIntosh	1993-94	Duncan MacPhee
1971-72	William Slater	1994-95	John Hutchison
1972-73	Sandy Kinnear	1995-96	George Bruce

1996-97 Alistair Grant

SECRETARIES

1949-51	Charlie Steel	1975-77	Jimmy Brown
1951-57	William Cuthbert	1977-79	Bertie McBride
1957-64	Bob Morrison	1979-84	Harry MacKenzie
1964-70	Willie Slater	1984-86	Denis Laws
1970-75	Bill McKie	1986-88	Bruce Simpson

1988-date John Harvey