

Glasgow, fickle folk, talking patter

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Glasgow has a history in which prosperity and depression continually take turns. At the end of the nineteenth century it was the second city of the Empire, a glorious episode that gave the city its characteristic facade. City parks were created vigorously, and as result there are currently seventy parks all through the city. Appropriate, since Glasgow means dear green place.

Subsequently poverty, booze and violence took over. Street gangs combated with knives and hammers. Round 1980 a change set in and at the present Glasgow looks lustre, with an historical centre filled with art galleries, trendy pubs and clubs and classy shopping streets.

But the most special feature of Glasgow are the Glaswegians. Comedian Billy Connolly says that almost everybody in his birthplace is funnier than he is. Writer William McIlvanney claims that Glasgow isn't so much of a city as a twenty-four hour cabaret. And like they say themselves: you can have more fun at a Glasgow funeral than at a wedding in Edinburgh.

CITY REPORT

'Aye, d'yenaehaewae?' a robust man mumbles. Or something like it. 'The patter' as the dialect of Glasgow is called, is barely comprehensible even with proper pronunciation, so this is chanceless. Sorry? The mumbler opens his coat. He's got illicit cigarettes for sale.

Here at The Barras, the huge East End market, they sell practically everything: toys, sneakers, antique or brand-new furniture, vintage clothing, domestic appliances and knickknacks. There's also a thriving business in illegal computer games and DVD's, which explains the manifest presence of policemen. However, for a bargain, you should visit The Barras. Or for the atmosphere. Because the main attraction are the Glaswegians.

There are rows of people in front of the butcher stall. The young butcher looks a bit like a pop star, he wears a headset with a microphone and talks incessantly. 'So how can I make you happy, madam? Three pounds of beef?' He tosses meat on the scales. 'You know what? I'll put in a little bit extra for free.'

A big woman nudges her companion, 'You think he does that in bed too?' The friend laughs. 'Talking continuously? Or put in the extra bit?'

It's also busy at the chippy, one of the many, in the city where the fried mars bar was invented. And where the deepfreeze pizza isn't heated in the oven, but in the fryer. Sometimes it's dipped in batter first (crispy pizza) just like the fish (and mars bars). Even the people behind their fish supper look a bit 'battered', pasty and pale as they are.

The notion that the Glasgow diet can't be very healthy is dismissed carelessly. They eat plenty of vegetables, usually in the form of chips, since the potato really is a vegetable, as a short man states. 'We have mind of our own, and we're not afraid of scurvy'. The man laughs loudly. He probably already had a bevy.

There is still plenty of drinking going on. And not only in the common East End. The historical centre brims over with trendy bars, pubs and clubs, often situated in splendid buildings. Like the former bank branches, that are transformed to stylish clubs. Actually nothing's changed, Glaswegians say: you still take all your money there.

Quite remarkable is the fact that even in the weekend some of the places are deserted, while the adjacent pub is jam-packed. 'Actually there are too many bars, and not enough people', professes James, the manager of the Crow Bar, a trendy refurbished bar that recently and noisily opened. It's not quite bursting yet. 'Well anyway, it's a break from the havoc at home,' James grins.

Glaswegians are susceptible of trends, they want something new all the time. Just like the city that is constantly renewing itself, the crowd follows hype after hype. They're fickle, the Glaswegians are the first to admit that.

The traditional pubs a bit further away from the city centre are less affected by it. One is loyal to the local boozier. So the Islay Inn is packed. And with a bit of luck, as the cabdriver told us, we'll have a lock in (continue drinking after closing hour).

There's a band, standing on a small platform, playing a up-tempo Scottish tune. Thirty something David and John work 'in software'. They like (to start) drinking in local pubs, only after twelve, closing time, they head off to the centre, where the clubs stay open till three.

'Yaewannaweedoddy,' declares David, or maybe it's a question. Then the bagpipe starts playing. The piercing sound is so deafening that it's impossible to have a conversation. A blissful break for non-Glaswegians. But John points at the dance floor, an open space amid the tables, where a small bunch of people are dancing about. It's no use claiming ignorance, because everyone can dance the Scottish jig, according to John. There's only one rule: just go wild. It works. The penetrating bagpipe is sort of inciting, and the jig turns out to be an surprisingly easy dance.

By the time the music has stopped it seems prudent not to wait for the voluntarily confinement. The combination of enormous pints of lager and whirling round and round has an odd effect. All of a sudden talking in a clear and comprehensible manner has become impossible. Maybe it's patter.