

# DRINKING IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS - FINTRY STYLE

An archive clipping in the Stirling Observer last week caught my eye. It was headed: ***Watered Down Whisky.***

*"Stirling County Licensing Court, sitting in March 1949, refused to renew the inn and hotel licence held by Mr Ronald Clark Ferguson, **Fintry.** Chief Constable Whyte reported that Mr Ferguson had been fined £4 at Stirling Sheriff Court for selling, for eight shillings to a sampling officer, two glasses of whisky that mostly contained water.*

*"An agent for Mr Ferguson said that the whisky was poured from a bottle which had been returned with a number of empties. It looked as if it contained two or three glasses of whisky. Mr Ferguson had put the bottle under the bar but 'unfortunately' his wife had served the sampling officer with it."*

What I loved about the reporting was the use of quotes round 'unfortunately' which today is the equivalent of *Aye.. right!!*  
A bit Piers Morgan, even for the Stirling Observer.

I had to investigate further, so I socially-distance interviewed Hugh Edmond as he took his daily 3 mile exercise past my drive end. Hugh had kindly also phoned the lovely Robert Aitken, farmer at Bogside, to get more information for me. Both these gentlemen are in their eighties and have sharper minds and memories than when I was 21. Both are Fintry born of several generations.

## **TRUE or FALSE**

They were a little taken aback by the account and challenged it on several fronts. Although they totally agreed that in the old days, you would get watered down whisky if you didn't watch carefully! Yes, it was the Fintry Inn they confirmed, but in the old days a'budy called it The Pub. But they never, in all their years, recollected it ever losing its licence. That would have been the talk of the steamie.

As I learned more of the old runnings of The Pub I secretly wondered if landlord Ronald Ferguson perhaps managed to keep the ban quiet and flouted the law? The Police Station at the cross was built about 1935 and the first Policeman in it was Donald Taylor who would be serving at the time of this incident. Today this is a house owned by Paul and Sue Wallace, current owners of the Fintry Inn.

Hugh and Robert had few issues with the story. Hugh's research suggests it should have been 1948. They also felt the price of two glasses of whisky was wrong. Using an inflation rate calculator it would be a charge today of £14.23! In 1946/47 Craig's Grocers Fintry, Main Street, at the cross, regularly delivered a bottle of White Horse Whisky to the Edmond household at Craighton for about 12/6d to 13 shillings (That's about £22.00

today). Hugh also compared the price to a Glasgow pub in which he worked, where in 1959 a 'half and a pony' (a whisky and a very small chaser of beer, about 100cc) was priced at 1 shilling and 9 pence (£1.75 at today's value.)

What very likely happened is that Mr Ferguson appealed the decision, twice. His appeal was refused the first time and then upheld the second time. So perhaps this saved the day and the pub was never closed pending appeals.

### **WEE BOBBY**

Even more interesting was Hugh's recollections of the publican at the old Fintry Inn. He never called him Ronald Clark Ferguson. The locals all called him Wee Bobby! He strutted up and down Main Street, a well puffed-up, small man with a walking stick, aye in his kilt with his little terrier dog following him. He claimed to be a friend of Harry Lauder and he had a knarled stick with an inscribed brass plaque, which was on the rafter beam of the pub even after he died. (Now, if anybody knows where this is today, it would a great object for the future Fintry Museum!)

Wee Bobby arrived in Fintry around 1930. Then 'The Pub' was run by Sarah Young who was quite old and she was still there in 1936/37. Wee Bobby then married Fintry girl, Daisy Sturrock. The Sturrock family stayed upstairs opposite the Menzies Hall. There were three daughters who all ended up running the pub: Daisy, Barbara and Hazel.

Daisy was well known for having an extra bottle under the counter. This was the cheap watered down dram. If you had too much to drink, or you didn't know your whiskies, this was the one you would be served. But clearly, one day, someone "clyped" or blew the whistle and the sampling officer turned up and caught out Daisy.

The family lived in the Fintry Inn and Hugh explained it was not as well appointed a bar as it is today. "You felt like you were disturbing them in their home. The slightly large sisters would be seated at the fire and have to get up to go to the bar to serve you and then return to the hearth."

A lovely glimpse of life in our village past.

*David Smith 2020*

### **Hugh Edmond researched some additional interesting information:-**

In the Press Archives of the Dundee Evening Telegraph on 16 March 1949, previous to the report at the start of this article, Wee Bobby had appealed the loss of his licence but it was refused.

Ronald Clark Ferguson was born in 1889 and died in 1954 aged 65.

He married Isabella Margareta (Daisy) Sturrock in Blythwood, Glasgow in 1940. It appears he was previously married in 1915 to a Jessie McConnachie. She must have died or been divorced.

### **Sturrock Family**

The Sturrock Family were still in Maryhill at the time of the 1911 census.

So they must have moved here between then and 1930. (Marriage of Hazel & Tom Welsh)

There were 3 sisters:-

Barbara Muir, born 1887. Could not find any reference to her death.

Isabella Margareta (Daisy), born 1894, died 1960, aged 66.

Williamina (Hazel), born 1898, died ?? Married Thomas Welsh in Fintry in 1930 but he died aged 55 in 1953. He was in the First World War and his photograph is on the board in the Church.