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GLASGOW KEELIE

June 2021

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# RADICAL PAISLEY

*Celebrating*  
**PAISLEY'S  
RADICAL  
PAST**

*... and future!*

## THE BIRTH OF RADICAL PAISLEY

Radical Paisley began in the 1790s, at the time of the French Revolution.

In 1799 unions were formed, and there were strikes and food riots due to a turn down in trade. The authorities felt that the ideas of the French Revolution were being taken up, and the Charleston area became known as 'The Republic'. Seven weavers were jailed in 1812 for forming a union, or combination, and starting a strike.

By 1819, after the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, up to 18,000 people attended a protest meeting at Meikleriggs Muir. A provocation by the magistrates after it led to 4 days of rioting. Barracks were built at Williamsburgh, near where the Burgh Bar stands, and the whole area was flooded with Hussars, Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry.

An underground organisation of radicals called a general strike on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1820. A massive military clampdown including house-to-house searches and arrests of radical leaders followed.

The strike failed, but a tradition of liberty, egalitarianism and republicanism had been formed.



**WE'RE NO AWFY KEEN** on some of the statues in Paisley, but here is one we have a soft spot for.

Alexander Wilson was a weaver poet, influenced by Burns. He used his poetry to condemn the treatment of the weavers by their employers, and his work was seen as being libellous and inflammatory.

Jailed twice for his radical activities, he eventually decided that the best bet was to leave for America.

In the United States, he turned to publishing books on Ornithology, with illustrations of birds painted by himself.

# Paisley Daily E

No. 32204

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1978

## Paisley college probe upholds student claim in **SPECIAL BRANCH RAPPED IN 'SPY' REPORT**

PAISLEY'S POLITICAL POLICE were undone when a student asked to spy on his friends went instead to the Press.



HAI!HAI! FUNNY POLIS: Paisley's Punk scene livened up the late 70s/early 80s



Paisley is more and more a student town, but in the not-too-distant past it was famous for its mills and engineering. And in engineering, the biggest player by far was the car factory at Linwood, originally Rootes, then Chrysler, and finally taken over by Talbot.

From the beginning, management employed the most brutal of American industrial methods, often provoking strikes at times of over-production.

For instance:

"If you were on nights and bursting for the toilet – bearing in mind you were on a production line and had a limited time, a lot of the guys would go round the back of the building."

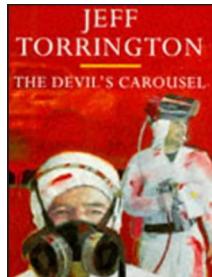
"One night they rounded up half a dozen of these guys and sacked them, knowing full well that the workforce would go on strike."

When it closed in February 1981, 6000 workers were sacked, and the knock-on effect in the local job market was 13,000 redundancies, leading to the famous

line in the Proclaimers 'Letter from America': Linwood No More.

The best memorial to the plant is the novel 'The Devil's Carousel' by Jeff Torrington, who worked there and lived in Linwood. In his thinly disguised 'Centaur' car factory, Jeff captures the boredom of the assembly line, and the stress induced illnesses, but also the humour and candour of the workforce, including the fictional subversive newsletter circulating in the plant 'Kikbak'.

Well recommended.



IN 1856, THE 7000 WEAVERS IN PAISLEY won their long fight with the manufacturers for payment of the sma' shot yarn, and on the first Saturday of July, the victory is celebrated by a March from Brodie Park into town, led by the famous Charleston Drum. The day ends with the 'Burning of the Cork', an effigy of a manufacturer.

We are going to need all the determination and organisation of those old weavers to resist attempts by the Government, Bosses, and Banks to make us pay the cost of the Coronavirus epidemic!



## What to do with the Coats statues at the Cross?

We would be perfectly happy with heaving them over the bridge into the Cart, same way as they dumped Paisley when they found they could pay dirt-cheap wages elsewhere. They would still have their monument to vaunting vanity further up the High Street at the Coats Memorial Cathedral.

But maybe a more fitting scenario would be placing a simple statue of a mill girl in the space between them.

It would be a tribute to the real people who built Paisley, and just as in real life, the Coats would have their backs forever turned against her.



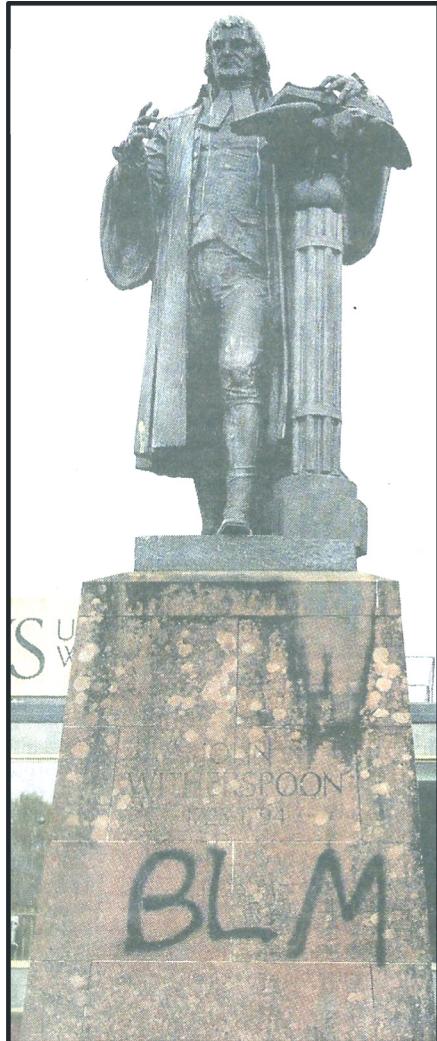
# FROM HERO TO ZERO

REVEREND JOHN WITHERSPOON was seen as a hero in the strong anti-slavery campaigns in Paisley during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Much later, a street in the town was named after him, and a statue erected outside the University in the High Street.

But when he emigrated to America in 1768, he bought slaves to work on his 500-acre country estate. A researcher pointed out that while he voiced his disapproval of owning slaves, 'he appeared to make a distinction between the act of enslaving people and holding them as property after they had already been enslaved'.

**Time to get rid of every connection to this chancer!**



# Paisley Daily Express

No. 32169

TUESDAY, February 5 1985

FIRST  
WITH THE  
LOCAL NEWS

Police 8p

Police barrier stops protestor... and big rent rise gets go-ahead

## FURY AS MOB IS REPELLED

Legal move  
to cut  
house  
cost



From the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when 50% of Paisley families stayed in a single room home, housing has always been a major issue.

Here are some scenes from the early 1980s, including the time angry tenants invaded a Council meeting.



Check out **LIVING RENT**: Scotland's Tenants Union. [www.livingrent.org](http://www.livingrent.org)