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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**  Respondent: Kenneth MacAldowie  Year of Birth: 1944  Age: 79  Connection to project: Respondent  Date of Interview: The 18th of April 2023. Interviewer: Janet Pryor  Recording Agreement: Yes  Information & Consent: Yes  Photographic Images: Yes (1 )  Length of Interview: 1 Hour,35 minutes.  Location of Interview: Kenneth’s home in Glasgow  Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | | **Glasgow Story Collective** | |
| Time  (from: mins/secs) | Description | | Transcribed Extract  (from- to:  mins/secs) |
| 0.50 | Interviewer asks the respondent about working on Glasgow’s Highstreets. | |  |
| 1.02 | Was non-executive chairman of GE Williamson Photographics. Retail photographic business. Charing Cross, Shawlands and Ayr. | |  |
| 1.23 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his role at GE Williamson Photographics was. | |  |
|  | “I was non-executive chairman [GE Williamson Photography, Sauchiehall Street etc] but I have a finance background. So, I was also in charge of the finance of the business. The business was set up by a guy, George Williamson who’d been an RAF pil…RAF photographer during the war. And came back and set…he was always interested in photography. And it was in competition…And we closed about 2000. The market had changed. We had agencies with Leica and Hassleblad, who were two of the top manufacturers of cameras in the world. Leica was German. Hassleblad was Swedish. And then the Japanese came in. And we were involved with Minolta and various other suppliers like that afterwards. We also had our own developing and printing. And that was quite profitable. Unfortunately, the new cameras came in that people were able to develop their own. And that business slipped away. And that’s why we ended up in liquidation. Members voluntary liquidation…So, the business lasted almost forty five years…” | | 1.36-3.10 |
| 3.41 | Interviewer asks the respondent about GE Williamson Photographics shop front. | |  |
| 3.59 | Decline of Sauchiehall Street in last 20 years. Department stores when he was young. Copland & Lye, Pettigrew & Stephens, Watt Brothers. Mentions businesses taken over by Frasers. | |  |
| 5.34 | Paisley’s. Rowans, school outfitters. Sloan’s dairies. Ross’ dairies. Bakeries-Peacocks and City Bakeries. | |  |
| 6.40 | Interviewer asks the respondent, if, in his role as an auditor he went into a lot of the shops on Glasgow’s highstreets. | |  |
|  | “Going back to the 1950s. My mother would meet a whole lot of her friends at Daly’s for coffee. On a Tuesday. And in these days, the half day, I think was Tuesday with a lot of retailers. Apart from hairdressers who closed on a Thursday for a half day. So that people who were involved in the other shops could use the hairdresser facilities. So, that was, sort of, standard practice. And Sundays there was no shops open. The Presbyterian outlook on life was such, that Sundays were not for shops to open unless they were newsagents. And they were often only open in the morning. But there were sweet shops too, like Birrells and R.S McColl.” | | 6.49-7.50 |
| 8.30 | Interviewer asks the respondent what these stores looked like inside. | |  |
| 8.35 | Jars of sweets, wooden counters. Peacock’s bakeries manufacturing part in Ibrox. City Bakeries. Many pubs didn’t do food. GE Williamsons wooden shop fittings durable carpets. | |  |
| 10.30 | Still sees liquidator of Copland and Lye. Has circular door ornaments in attic. | |  |
| 11.20 | Paisleys, Sir Hugh Frasers jnr’s take over. Arnott’s bought by him too. Paisley’s Rowans Copland’s school uniform outfitters. | |  |
| 12.20 | Lewis’s knickerbocker glories. Big food hall. Santa Claus. | |  |
| 13.45 | Henderson’s Jewellers, Argyle Street. Family squabble like Nardinis. | |  |
| 15.05 | Jenners big store in Edinburgh. House of Fraser took over. Patrick Thomson. Binns. | |  |
| 15.56 | Interviewer asks the respondent to describe the exterior and interiors of the buildings that were visited the most. | |  |
|  | “The buildings were just traditional sandstone. If you go to Sauchiehall Street. Marks & Spencer’s have just closed. Copland’s and Pettigrew’s were in the block opposite. And it’s now a car park. And as Prince Charles would say, a blot on the landscape compared to the buildings that were there. They were all sandstone fronted and there would maybe be six…six floors. And that was the Sauchiehall Street ones. Copland’s and Pettigrew’s were in one block. And the next block, at the start, was Daly’s. And Daly’s were the, sort of, top of the market, if you like. The same as McDonald’s on Buchanan Street. And again, the buildings there haven’t really changed in Buchanan Street. So, if you looked at that you would get an idea of what the Sauchiehall Street shops looked like. BHS which is now shut, Sauchiehall Street and Renfield Street. They knocked down some nice properties there. And there were…Along from that was The Empire Theatre where I saw Cliff Richard and so on, way back in the late ‘50s. Duane Eddy…And they were there…” | | 16.10-17.54 |
| 18.45 | Interviewer asks the respondent what type of specialist stores there were on Glasgows highstreets. | |  |
| 18.54 | Crockett’s for hardware, Grieve’s for sportswear,family former pupils of his school. Tam Shepherds, Clyde Model Dockyard for toys. Argyll Arcade for jewellery. Henderson’s, Porter’s and Laings. Agnes Brogan Florists. | |  |
| 21.54 | Talks about the decline of manufacturing in Glasgow during time as a chartered accountant. | |  |
| 22.53 | Theatres, Kings, the Alhambra, theatre royal. | |  |
| 24.09 | Liptons, gives short history. | |  |
|  | “School book sellers. There was Grant Educational in Union Street. And W&R Holmes in Dunlop Street. Down the side of where Lewis’s were. I used to get my school books there. Because one of my school friend’s dad’s was the manager in Holmes. And we would go each summer to leave our list. And it would be ready by the time we were starting school…These were for school and university. Smith’s were the other big one. John Smith’s. And they’ve still got a shop at Caledonian University. But, they used to have one on St Vincent’s Street between Buchanan Street and West Nile Street…” | | 24.52-25.52 |
| 27.15 | Interviewer asks the respondent about the interiors of the big department stores. | |  |
| 27.22 | Stores were like the Fraser’s Store, central staircase and departments. Was white goods department. No furnishings in Marks and Spencer’s at that stage. | |  |
| 28.17 | Talks about the different summer holidays for Scottish cities. This meant people could go and shop in other cities on their break. | |  |
| 29.25 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he got a bit more behind the scenes in the shops that he would go into and audit. | |  |
| 29.35 | Talks about the method he was taught for auditing. | |  |
| 31.40 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he has any stories about Glasgow highstreet shops not doing so well. | |  |
|  | “I think one of the major problems is that people didn’t move with the times…And that is probably why a good number of businesses, department stores, weren’t able to compete with some of the Sterling’s…People would go out of town. And that’s another reason for the decline. And the highstreet is poorer that they aren’t there…” | | 31.58-33.39 |
| 34.20 | Interviewer asks the respondent how people generally got into the city centre. | |  |
| 34.23 | Trams, underground system. | |  |
| 38.33 | Interviewer asks the respondent what era he first remembers Glasgow’s Highstreets. | |  |
|  | “If we went to school in the car. The Royal Ulsterman or the Royal Scotsman boat came in from Belfast to park at the Broomielaw Berth there, overnight.” | | 38.36-38.56 |
| 39.03 | Talks about M8 and buildings raised for the construction of that. Plans to get rid of all the tenements foiled by the 1967 storm. Labour council and private building. | |  |
| 46.34 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he remembers any characters from Glasgow’s Highstreets. | |  |
| 46.47 | Malcolm Campbell. Short history. Liptons. Hugh Fraser. Sloanes. | |  |
| 52.58 | Interviewer asks the respondent about the nightlife in Glasgow in his younger years. | |  |
|  | “The nightlife…Well, I tended to go to the university union. The CAs [Chartered Accountants] were not let in until your academic year. But, we would climb through the toilet windows. And [laughs] hopefully not be caught. There was a story of one of our number had a broken arm. And he was halfway in and half way out. And the Bailiffs [?] the janitorial staff were trying to haul him in to see who he was. And we were trying to haul him out We won. We got him away. But that…the Queen Margaret Union. There was a girl’s union then too. And we used to get into that. Strathclyde. Some of the dancehalls…I was…I went to The Locarno once and was not impressed. And The Majestic. The Plaza on the Southside was more gentile. And we used to…In fact , at school…There had been some misbehaviour at a school dance and the next one was pulled and we organised one ourselves at The Plaza. It wasn’t licensed, so that was fine. Although there was plenty of licensed premises round about.” | | 53.07-54.27 |
| 54.28 | 50p for bus fares and cinema. Went to Blythswood cottage, Doublet, Tennant’s then all male. Rugby players went there. Curlers. | |  |
|  | “Rio Stakis changed the Glasgow restaurant and bar scene. He opened a bar, The Byre [?] in Byre’s Road. And people used to queue up to get in there…” | | 55.43-55.55 |
| 1.00.5 | Interviewer asks the respondent about Glasgow eateries. | |  |
|  | “Before Rio Stakis came, it was…it was, maybe Guy’s Restaurant at the top of Hope Street. There was the Royal Restaurant on West Nile Street. And it was the hotels. La Fourchette was the Central Station… And then after Stakis came, eateries sprang up everywhere. And he changed the culture. And ok there were steak houses and there was a restricted menu. But that started in the early ‘60s. And it was all…And then he went into hotels and so on…But. If you were going out for a meal at Christmas…I remember we went to the hotel in Buchanan Street. But it was hotels you went to. You didn’t have the restaurants until the 1960s and then the choice just…The Buttery, which is still there, is in an island site down at Finnieston. And it was a neighbour of ours, Peter Lamont, a Northern Irishman who opened that in the 1950s. And it…the reputation just grew, grew and when it came to knocking down all round about they’d to leave the Island site. Because they couldn’t afford to pay the compensation…” | | 1.00.15-1.02.21 |
| 1.03.11 | Had to be a bone fide traveller to drink on a Sunday. Travel 6 miles. Barrhead popular. Had to sign in. People would use false names. 9.30 close. Lots of pubs men only. The Georgic, Shawlands. Tennants, Byres Road. Horseshoe bar 3 shilling lunches for students. Horseshoe would give half pint and change for student/work vouchers, which was unusual. | |  |
| 1.10.00 | Interviewer asks the respondent for his view of the Highstreets today. | |  |
|  | “I think one of the major problems is because outside places have places for cars and so on. But people will go there. If it’s difficult to get in and carry heavy shopping they won’t go into the highstreet. And there has to be a sea change in the attitude of the council. To be…They’ve doubled the price of parking. It’s now 80p for a short space of time where it used to be twenty. In fact they’ve quadrupled it recently and people are not going to…If they can’t get their car…The only thing that will stop that. If people stop driving. It would have to be…But the impact of the Amazons and so on. Home delivery. Has meant that people will do it online. Rather than…They won’t go in. Although, I think, I still like to go and feel things if I’m buying it. But, I’m maybe an old fogie as far as that’s concerned. And there has to be a change in attitude by the politicians to allow people to go back in...” | | 1.10.05-1.11.37 |
|  | “Although, it’s interesting, I use the Portuguese baker in Byres Road and there’s a new French patisserie as well. And that may…There may be special niche products that people will go there for.” | | 1.12.21-1.12.39 |
| 1.12.45 | Byres Road in ‘50s, ‘60s. Didn’t have big department stores. Grocers, fishmongers, butchers, cafes. Antiques dealer. West End-Coopers. Hubbards Bakers, Lawrence and Lang [?] school book sellers. Cosy Neuk café. | |  |
| 118.07 | Cinemas-The Moss Park Cinema, Paisley Rd West. The Westway Cinema and the Aldwych Cinema.In town, The Capitol and the Lauren [?] cinemas. James Bond, West End-queues every Saturday night. Grovesnor, Divans in the back. Hillhead Salon. | |  |
| 1.20.57 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he felt safe when he was on the highstreets at night. | |  |
| 1.21.00 | Respondent never had a problem. Late wife’s Royal Nursing scarf kept her safe. She had tales to tell from A &E. | |  |
| 1.25.35 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he had the chance what advice he would give to Glasgow’s current high street planners. And what the future will be. | |  |
| 125.40 | Parking must be improved. Will be for leisure purposes otherwise. | |  |
| 127.47 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he has any other memories about the highstreets that he would like to share. | |  |
| 127.55 | Did open nights for camera clubs at GE Williamson. Good for bringing people to the area. Bowies, photographic developing business. Dairies and pharmacists mainly local until big companies came in as competition. Corporate structure didn’t suit many if they joined up. | |  |
|  | Interviewer thanks the respondent very much for his contribution to the project. | |  |
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