



Blackford Highland Games

Extended article from the Blackford Cares May 2020 Newsletter

This year should have been Blackford Highland Games 150th gathering. In living memory, the Games have been called off just once—on a Saturday morning in the early 1950's when the torrential rain won the competition.

The games have been a feature of village life since their inception in 1870; the Covid-19 pandemic achieved what two world wars could not.

The first Blackford Highland Games of 1870 was a modest affair and the Strathearn Herald reported on the winners and the prize money. Victorian Britain, driven by Queen's passion for all things Scottish, had gone "Highland mad". All over the UK Highland societies were being established to promote Scottish tradition and the appetite for Highland mythology was insatiable. This was the inspiration for many towns and villages in Scotland to form their own events; neighbouring Crieff held its first games the same year.



Blackford's popularity went from strength to strength due in no small part to its main line railway station and proximity to Edinburgh and Glasgow. The beautiful location, number of public houses and local breweries in the village may well have helped!



The games continued on through the 1st World War into the interwar years of the 1920's and 30's. The motorcar was making its presence felt and rail and bus companies were advertising day trips all over the country, Highland games proving particularly popular destinations. Blackford benefitted from this extra business and competitors from all over Scotland now "worked" the games circuit and solo piping competitions came to the fore. Blackford was proved a popular venue for many of Scotland's leading pipers.



The outbreak of the 2nd World War halted all non-essential travel throughout Scotland. Blackford games succumbed to the downturn and most of the country's young men were conscripted. The games continued through the war reverting back to a small local event once again. A brief change to this pattern happened in 1940 when the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, newly rescued from Dunkirk, were sent to Blackford to recuperate. Their pipe band performed at the games and many of their soldiers competed.



After the war the enthusiasm for day trips to Highland games returned. The late 1940's and 1950's are remembered by our older residents as a golden time for Blackford Highland Games. In 1947 Blackford helped setup the Scottish Games Association, now the Scottish Highland Games Association. Blackford station closed to passenger traffic in 1956 but the vastly improved road network and regular bus service helped to maintain the games popularity.



The 1960's saw the start of the decline of many local Highland games as attendance dwindled and events closed. Blackford continued bucking the trend and many villagers still speak fondly of the heatwaves of the late 70's and the record crowds. By the 1980's Blackford was attracting world class athletes; double Commonwealth Games Champion and three-time Olympian Geoff Capes still holds the ground record for the shot put at the 1982 games. Today many of our heavy athletes are from overseas. One of





Blackford's most successful competitors of recent years is Vlad Tulacek from the Czech Republic.

Blackford Highland Games has evolved to reflect changing tastes and attitudes and we believe this is the source of our continued success. Last year the Mrs. M. Mitchell Trophy for the best performing Blackford Primary School pupil was won by Lexie Head (below).

If you would like to compete at Blackford Highland Games have a look at our website (www.blackfordhighlandgames.co.uk); can you better the results recorded? Next year we will have our 150th gathering opened by the current Blackford Gala Queen Emily Sinclair and you are all invited to help us celebrate 151 years of tradition.



Lexie's picture by Simon Head; Emily's picture by Gordon Roy; All other pictures by Bill Robertson, Sauchie.

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