



Many people visiting Dundee (if they ever do) these days will admire the magnificent Quay area, explore the V&A museum, and be astounded by the exploits of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his ship Discovery. In the days of 'Juteopolis' however, the Hilltown area personified a unique way of life devoted entirely to the production of jute and the prosperity of the Barons who controlled it.

I often compare it with Maryhill in Glasgow, on a hill rising from the main metropolis with its own individual identity. The latter however had a diversification of industries, which brought some profit to the population such as a magnificent Town Hall, swimming baths, and public buildings of note.

The Hilltown however shared only the profusion of pubs and cinemas together with an array of notable characters, and worthies.

Playing dominoes in the pub was one of the main pastimes of the 'Kettle Boilers'. The derogatory term for Dundee men, who supposedly kept the kettle boiling while their wives were working in the Jute Mills. The 'double six' being the highest 'bone', would always be played with a great flourish, to the accompanying delighted calls of "Wellgate Steps". Why this was I could never fathom, as the celebrated steps coming up the Wellgate from the town centre to the bottom of the Hilltown were never confined to twelve. Depending on the angle of approach (they came up from a curve in the road) it could be anything from three to sixteen. Dominoes apart however, once you physically scaled the renowned steps, a pause was in order, not only to get your breath back from travelling all the way up the Wellgate with the anticipation of the climb ahead, but more to reflect upon the extraordinary vista presenting itself in front of you. The Hilltown would rise majestically into the sky, paving the way, if not to the 'Promised Land', perhaps to the 'Land of Promise' for those optimistic job hungry settlers from other parts of the country (my mother Jessie came down from Elgin and her best friend Monica from South Shields) who rallied to the cry "Jobs in Jute" - Or at least leading to the 'Land O' Cakes' the slogan of one of the leading bakery shops (Wallace's) on the Hill. For me though, in the 40/50's, it was 'Home Land' as I was one of its children.

The Multimedia Talk (approx. 1 hour) gives an insight into Mill culture, the workers, the unemployed, millionaire mill owners, cramped living conditions, the pubs, the schools (St. Patrick's day rivalry), the Picture houses (Foreign Films at the Tivoli), and most of all, the unique characteristics of the Hilltown people and environment.

We also relate some of the stories of Jock McCool the central character in Hilltown jokes, and diversify into fringe Hilltown history – Bonnie Dundee (the one time proprietor of Dudhope Castle) – Winston Churchill (disquiet in the cinema) – Jessie Jordan (Hilltown Spymaster).

With music, song, Joy, tragedy, fascination, and a sprinkling of humor, the Hilltown comes alive once more for your delectation.

*Patrick Murray*