





Foreword

I was chatting with Dad about the beginnings of Laurieston Hall. “What did you eat on the first day?” I wondered. There wouldn’t have been any veg in the garden yet, no animals, no food coop. Those first days... a blank canvas... How adventurous and fearless (how naive?) you all must have been to take such a massive leap into the unknown and attempt to revise the rule book on living. I would have been three months old back then, the youngest founding member. Now, with young children of my own, I am awed by the challenges in parenting there must have been in those times; when it seems every aspect of existence was up for review.

Over the decades Laurieston Hall has evolved and grown up and is a lot more comfortable and organised nowadays. Many people have played their part in Laurieston Hall’s story - and isn’t it a story well worth telling?

This place is more than the sum of its parts. There is a vitality here which extends far beyond the physical place. It exemplifies the possibilities of alternative ways of living. But, in a more subtle way, it is a touchstone for countless people. There’s a real sense of belonging here. This is echoed in the reflections in speech and turns of phrase which are unique to Laurieston; as I remember well with each little re-assimilation I went through during childhood, moving between my times living in a farm cottage nearby and staying here.

Laurieston is in my bones, yet I get butterflies when I turn into the drive after a long period away. I am drawn to being here yet have always found it quite an overwhelming place to be. Above all though, I am proud to be a Laurieston Hall kid and hold very dear my big family of Laurieston ‘siblings’ and adult mentors.

With LH turning 40 in 2012 I felt compelled to do something to celebrate this amazing place. But what? Something, in the spirit of the Hall, that we could do as a group to mark this milestone that we all feel we are part of somehow, however large or small... Some kind of book perhaps...

Messages spread through the grapevine that a book was happening. We sifted through our LH memory boxes and so many touching photos and memorabilia came through

and a whole variety of stories. I pondered how best to bring these various pieces together. Well here is the result - a kind of scrapbook!

This scrapbook format allows for the most free representation of everyone’s input, hopefully with a light editing hand that is inclusive and enables the individual contributions to speak for themselves. Very loosely the material is organised chronologically.

Included are fond recollections on the one hand and a few more gritty memories on the other. Inevitably - and unwittingly - we tend to erase the latter in favour of the former in our accounts, but all together they mirror LH in all it’s glorious shades of light and dark and there are plenty of sparks in here for further discussion amongst ourselves.

Certainly there are two or three other retrospectives that could have been made. This one is remarkably resident oriented, given the People Centre plays such a huge part in LH’s life. It also weighs heavily towards the more formative early years - perhaps because a forty year reflection is most poignant to those who were part of LH’s early decades. No doubt a 50th celebration book would raise the more recent past!

Big thanks to everyone who took the time to contribute to this project. Particularly those who put in extra time: Dave (Treanor) and Patrick for their editing support; Dave (Edwards) and Alice for photos; Maya for her presentation tips. Also to the many photographers whom it would have been too big a task to credit individually. Thank you also to my lovely family for putting up with me sneaking off upstairs to tap tappity tap away on the computer for more hours than I ever imagined.

It has been an interesting project. My childhood impressions of people and events have been brought into oddly shifted focus. I have really enjoyed making it and I hope I have done it justice. I have had to reign in my perfectionist tendencies by keeping in mind the guiding principle that, ultimately, “it will be what it will be”.

So here it is - Enjoy!

≡♥Tiffy



Diary musings from Mix Café



March 1972

Laurieston Hall was this immense, pink-pebble-dashed, Victorian manor house. Early-spring sunlight swirled down the green-slatted bell of the tower, cascaded off the roof, splashed past the portico and finished on the lawn with a thirties song and dance number. Clouds of daffodils curtsied from the long grass. The lime and the ash, the oak and horse-chestnut, gave slight, formal bows. It was warm for March. The whole scene was pure Walt Disney. I should have known better.

We gathered across the main lawn, by the ash. Stuart with his long straggly beard and pixie hat. Paul, running up from photographing everywhere: the walled garden, its quadrants neatly ploughed; the cottages, stables, laundry, beech mound and so forth. I carried Paul's clipboard of notes. Maureen, five months pregnant, had an armful of daffs and a smile for the camera.

'But it's so massive,' says Maureen, 'It's so..' We looked back and thought: Wow!

It had taken two hours to tour the indoors. The famous 65 rooms, richly silent. Our whispers hanging in the air.

'Could have the kids playroom here.'

'Perfect for a workshop.'

'Maybe make this our main room, for meetings.'

'Be nice to have a proper darkroom.'

Alice, Tina and Gerry had made the same long haul north the previous week. 'Huge,' they'd said, 'You'll have to see for yourselves.'

'It's in first-class condition,' Paul breathed, 'storm guards on the top-floor windows.' Paul the Architect. I liked him a lot. In Spring, '72, we were mentally still in the late sixties, when everyone was beautiful.

'Great for the Regional Arts Centre idea,' Stuart cut in.

'Tongue and groove flooring throughout,' Paul beamed, 'brass door fittings.'

'And the Alt. Tech. Project,' Stuart's voice over. He was another architect, more into grand plans than details. A bit crazy. Nice-crazy.

'What do you think,' I asked the sky.

'Fantastic,' say Paul and Stuart.

I can remember the little shiver, the bubble of a laugh. Could we really live here, in this fairytale palace? The idea was enticing, but scary, too.

Mike Reid

Heavenly gardening

It was a dark and windy night in the winter of 1972/3 and I drove up from Liverpool with Rich, Bill and George to the wild south west of Scotland; we were late and it was cold and full of friendly strangers. We wanted to live in a commune and they wanted to fill some gaps in there London core member couples, two of which were away back to the city.

In the morning there was Laurieston Hall, one hundred year old trees and one third of an acre of walled garden in all their glory. Before coming to visit I had dreamt about a wonderful dark potting shed and there it was behind the vegetable garden's thirteen foot back wall and greenhouses. It smelt of soil, compost, pots, shed and damp and was absolutely perfect. That was the start of three years of heavenly gardening and mutual bad behaviour. Oh dear we won't go into that.

I will talk of George climbing the little oak on the back track on the way back from walking Bill, Sonya, Joel, Sophie and Polly to school at Laurieston primary; painting a bedroom lime green and magenta, glass beads round Bill and George's lovely necks. Think of all that space and stonework and sandy soil, so light and workable – wonderful. Weren't we sad, brave, incapable, resilient, determined and brilliant people.

Julia Langley



The back pasture on a sunny afternoon

By Hazel the cow



Hello! My name is Hazel. I heard on the celestial grapevine that you are making an anniversary book of Laurieston Hall, and I just wanted to make a contribution. I am a daughter of the Hall. I was born there in 1993 and came from a long line of distinguished cows, who you may remember. My mother was Juno and my grandmother was Diana. My mother Juno obtained a certain notoriety for kicking off the cluster during milking - not a desirable trait in a milking cow let it be said.

I remember my time at the Hall with great fondness. Over the years I was responsible for supplying you people with many, many gallons of wholesome Ayrshire milk for your tea and coffee. I hope you enjoyed them. I had several human keepers but the one I remember best was called Eric. He spent an inordinate amount of time fussing over me. I admit to being a spoilt cow and I liked being fussed over. After milking was finished he would

always brush me down with a stiff brush which was very invigorating. And then, with a bucket of warm water he would wash all the clarty bits off my tail and nether regions. So refreshing! Personal hygiene at the rear end can be a bit of a problem for a cow, you know.

My most abiding memory of the Hall was sitting in the back field in the sun in the afternoon. The morning's ingestion of grass had been completed and it was an afternoon of lazy rumination. Sometimes Eric used to come and sit with me in the field. He would scratch my ears and my neck. So delightful and so comforting. Then he would chat away to me. I have no idea what he was talking about but I am sure it was uplifting. Well, the sound of his reassuring voice uplifted me anyway.

Anyways, that is my abiding memory of the Hall. Bye for now. Back to my celestial pasture.



Laurieston Hall
56 hectares (140
around half is
This is long e
woodland. Re
of the larger
recently still
conifers. We
as essenti
retaining the

“What! You’ve been going for forty years!
I thought all hippy communes folded in
acrimony after three or four at most.”

Not so Laurieston Hall. Founded by idealists
determined to change their own lives and,
if possible, those of other people too, the commune
soon discovered a pragmatism that has underpinned
daily life here ever since.

This book is not an attempt at the definitive history,
rather it’s a collection of words and pictures of
and by the many people who have lived here at
Laurieston Hall. It celebrates the spirit that has
carried us through from commune to coop and some
of its members from youth to the verge of old age.
It’s a scrapbook of memories to wallow in for anyone
who has ever been down that beech drive and then
maybe wondered, “Could I live here...?”

