

# The Bathgate Procession Arch

Dedicated to Bathgate Procession Arch builders past and present, for the manner in which they carried out their ancient craft, without which it would not be Bathgate Procession.

***‘The art of arch-building is a tradition in Bathgate. Happily, there is no sign of diminishing skill, and long may it be that way. These Bathgate Procession arches are the most symmetrical, graceful and beautiful addition to any public decorative scheme one can see anywhere. They are an indispensable part of the Procession Day. The money prize does not pay for them, for they are a duty and a tradition, a labour of love in fact.’***

*West Lothian Courier 1953*



1. High Street arch 1924, a first prize winner, with the Livingstone Cup being held aloft.

## Summary

*Street decorations were part of the first Bathgate Procession in 1844. In the early 1850's, street decoration evolved further, with the erection of triumphal arches across the principal streets of the town. Arch construction consisted of wood and metal frames covered by evergreen foliage and decorated in a variety of ways. The classic arch photographs, familiar to Bathgate Bairns, date mainly from 1900 onwards. Newspaper reports from the first fifty years give detailed descriptions of a variety of arch shapes and decorative styles. In the modern era, the typical arch was of a three span gothic design, covered with Norway spruce foliage, and decorations formed from thousands of crepe paper roses or dottals. Despite numerous challenges and a few years where no arches were erected, the tradition still survives with one large scale triple span arch erected in George Street each year.*

## Some Procession facts

For the first 80 years, until 1924, the procession was held on a weekday on the of 17<sup>th</sup> April or the closest Friday to the 17<sup>th</sup>. The 17<sup>th</sup> of April was thought to be John Newland's birthday although this was later found to be the date of his baptism.

Although the Procession has run since 1844, 182 years ago as of 2026, the number of Processions held is 165. Processions were not held due to world wars, strikes/depression in the 1920's, a lack of committee members in the 1950's and the Covid years more recently.

The Procession route could vary from year to year. A determined effort was made to pass underneath every arch. The Procession would go up a street, then turn and come back down the same street. The route in the early days proceeded from the Academy, through the streets and returned to the Academy for speeches and entertainment. When sports and entertainment were introduced, locations such as the Burgh Muir, the grounds of Balbardie House and Bathgate Thistles original ground at Waverley Street were used. The Meadow Park was not created until the 1930's.

Some of the principal streets for arch erection no longer exist, being completely cleared from the town. Hill Street, North Street, Market Street, Brown Square, Paulville and most of Main Street and High Street, all hosted arches and are gone. Remaining streets have also changed substantially, with extensive building demolition in Cochrane Street, Livery Street, Gideon Street and the west end of Marjoribanks Street.

The majority of the classic photographs of triple span arches date from after 1900, when the procession was 56 years old and arch building a feature for at least 48 years. After 1900, arch building declined in terms of numbers but not quality. The newspaper descriptions before 1900, detail a variety of arch styles, types and locations than the later photographs portray.

Newspapers in the early days of the Procession were limited. The first Procession was reported in the 'Glasgow Saturday Post' but not reported regularly until 1851 in the 'Falkirk Herald' and then in the 'Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser' from 1871. The 'West Lothian Courier' did not start publication till 1873. The 'Linlithgow Gazette' also covered the Procession from 1891. A few random reports appeared in newspapers further afield such as the 'John o' Groats Journal' (1846), the 'Dundee Courier' (1886) and the 'Glasgow Herald' (1875). For the majority of years, there are reports with good detail but there are a few years where reports are frustratingly poor in detail or non-existent. Descriptions of the arches in this article, for example, the earliest, the biggest, the tallest, the widest and the number erected in a particular year, are described from

what is recorded in the newspaper reports. The reality may have been slightly different but so much of the detail is way beyond living memory, the newspaper records are the best we have.

## Why Arches?

What is the origin of the Bathgate Procession arches? Are they a relic of an earlier festival or tradition? In 1967 a 'West Lothian Courier' correspondent described a visit to Lucerne, Switzerland, where he saw what could have passed for a Bathgate arch being used in the decorative scheme for a religious festival. The three span design, the greenery and design, were pretty much the same but the arch used real flowers. No photograph or subsequent detail was provided for this arch.

Another traditional example is from Sweden, where birch foliage and wildflowers are used to decorate poles for mid-summer celebrations. A completely different tradition in a different country but similar in the use of natural materials for decoration.



Photo 2 Mid-summer Pole from Sweden. The pole is decorated with birch foliage and wildflowers.

However, it is more likely that the Bathgate Procession arches originated as part of a tradition of erecting triumphal arches for celebrations or to welcome notable visitors. Two examples from Brighton and Margate (about as far away from Bathgate as you can get in the UK) show that this tradition was active around the time of the first Procession arches.



3. Brighton Victoria triple span arch



4. Margate arch

The Victoria arch is from Brighton and was erected for the Queens visit in 1837. The Margate arch dates from 1865 and commemorates the visit to the town of the East Kent Mounted Rifles. In common with a Bathgate Procession arch, they are both triple span, decorated with foliage, flags, crowns and in the Margate example the motto ‘Seek every opportunity to do good’, to inspire those passing underneath. Bathgate developed its own style of triumphal arch, most likely from this tradition, rather than an older religious tradition.

## Decorating with Foliage

The first Bathgate Procession was in 1844 before the time of mass production. Even if it existed, ordinary folk would have no access to (or at least very limited access to) manufactured decorative material such as paper, paint etc. The use of natural material, such as foliage and flowers, would be the best option. An example from the early 1800’s in nearby Falkirk is described in a letter to William Forbes the owner of Callendar wood from the estate factor. Every 4th June, the King’s birthday, the people of Falkirk entered the wood in large numbers, removing leafy boughs to attach to the front of the buildings lining Falkirk High Street.

*Thus adorned there was a day of great celebrations upon the fourth of June last.... Every door & window was ornamented with branches of trees. Trees stood in the middle of the streets by bonfires in honour of the day, and every carters horse was trim'd with foliage from Callander Wood (177/29) (Forbes Papers 172/32).*

The use of evergreen foliage in Bathgate can be explained by the April date of the Procession before 1924. Mid-April is still early in spring and the availability of non-evergreen foliage will be very limited. An oak tree for example doesn’t get into full leaf until early June. This will also

explain the use of artificial flowers. The first recorded arches at the Academy are described as being covered with holly and laurel. Both of these evergreens would be difficult to trim to a neat finish and holly of course is spikey to handle. Box-wood and yew foliage are also mentioned in reports. Box is a shrub used for topiary so would be ideal for a neatly trimmed arch but it is small in size and slow growing. Yew is also slow growing.

For a long time, Norway spruce has been the favoured foliage. This would have been an abundantly planted conifer at the time. It is relatively fast growing, bushy and can be trimmed to a neat finish. A description of the Norway spruce from a forestry book highlights the qualities helpful for arch building.

*“The needles are a fresh mid-green colour...Since the needles are blunt pointed and point ‘forwards’, the twig can be grasped in the bare hand without pain”.*

Nowadays, Sitka Spruce is a much more commonly planted spruce species but this has big, spikey, blueish needles which are difficult to handle and to trim neatly. Norway spruce is therefore still the favoured foliage for arch decoration.

## Arch Terminology

From the earliest reports, right through to modern times, there is consistent terminology used to describe the arches and decorations. The process of decorating the arch with spruce and the variety of adornments is ‘busking’. The arch builders are ‘buskers’ and the bunches of spruce are ‘buss’s’. Busk is a Scots word, meaning to dress or adorn, relating to clothing and people primarily, but also to objects. Buss has a few meanings but the definition of ‘a clump of bushes or a clump of ferns, grass or heather’ fits in this context. Arch builders are buskers, busking the arch with spruce buss’s and Bathgate Bairns always admire a well busked arch!

Many of the decorations were created from ‘the dottal’, a bud of crepe paper with a short tail of thin wire. Thousands of these were used to create designs. Dottal (or dottal or dottel) derives from another Scots word meaning a small particle or a very small person.

Another term is ‘festoon’ which is used to describe the suspended spruce ropes. Festoon is defined as a chain or garland of flowers, leaves or ribbons, hung in a curve as a decoration.

## Arch Types

The Three Span Gothic arch is viewed today as the classic type, perhaps inspired by the Kirkton Park gates which seem to date to the mid 1800's.



5. Early photo of Kirkton Park gates

However, a variety of arch styles, sizes and span numbers are described in the reports. There were four principle architectural arch types; the Gothic, the Norman, the Saxon and the Compound arch which is a mix or combination of styles (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4). Some compound arches and more miscellaneous styles are difficult to picture from the written description alone. Architectural experts may say that these terms aren't exactly correct but this is the terminology used by the arch builders and in the newspaper reports.

As well as triple span arches, single spans were common in each style, often but not always described as small, juvenile or boys arches over paths and pavements. There are two examples of double spans in Whitburn Road (1880) and in Paulville (1902). A five span arch was erected in 1908 and 1909 at the South and North Bridge Street junction (more detail on this below).

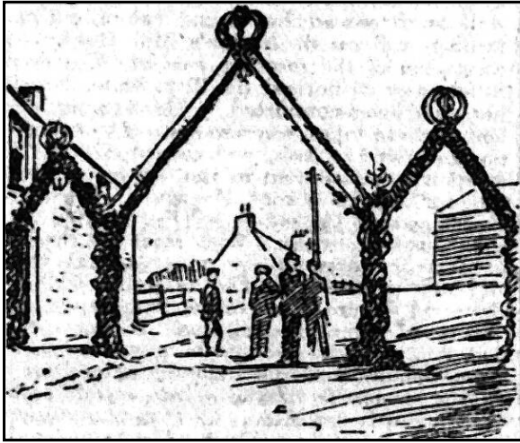


Figure 1 Sketch of Triple Span Saxon Arch at Hill Street from West Lothian Courier report 1901



Figure 2 Sketch of Triple Span Norman Arch in Whitburn Road from West Lothian Courier report 1901



Figure 3 Sketch of Triple Span Gothic Arch in Cochrane Street from West Lothian Courier report 1901. There is also a small single span arch over the pavement on the right hand side of the image.

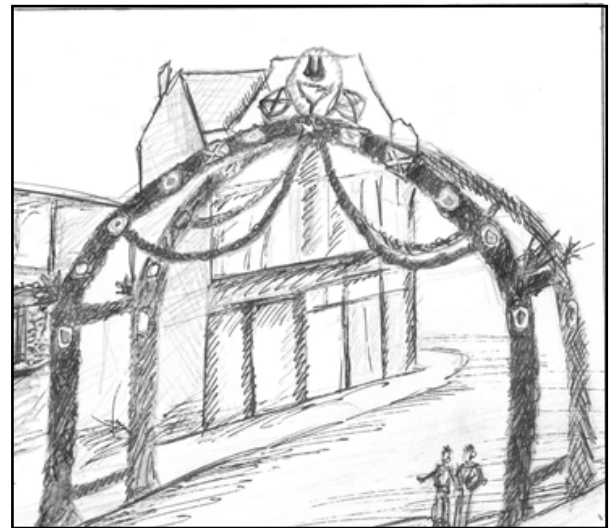


Figure 4 Sketch of a Compound Arch in North Bridge Street. Author sketch in the old style.

## Arch Chronology

### The Early Arches 1852-1877

There is a description of the first Bathgate Procession in the 'Glasgow Saturday Post' of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1844. Although no arches are described, it does state that the inhabitants '*graced some of their houses*' with '*flags and decorations*'.

The first description of a Procession arch is in a Falkirk Herald report of 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1852. The arch is over the gateway into Bathgate Academy.

*By the kindness of Andrew Gillon, Esq. of Wallhouse, evergreens were abundantly provided for decorating the Academy. A tasteful arch was thrown over the gate, and the balustrade was neatly interwoven with branches of laurel and holly.*

In 1853 and 1854, the Falkirk Herald describes an arch in the same location.

*Early in the morning the Academy gate was surrounded by a tasteful arch of evergreens, interspersed with lilies, and other flowers of the season. (1853)*

*A graceful arch, variegated with holly and flowers of the season, was thrown over the gate. (1854)*

An arch over one, or sometimes two, of the Academy gates is described in subsequent years. Although it is sometimes missed from the round up of the arches, it does seem to be a regular feature and is last described in 1876.



6. The eastern gateway to Bathgate Academy the location of the first recorded Procession arch.

The first clear mention of street arches is in the 'Falkirk Herald' on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1856.

*Many of the houses in town were decked with branches of trees and other emblems of rejoicing. Graceful arches, hung with tasteful garlands, were thrown across several the principal streets.*

There are intriguing descriptions in the 'Falkirk Herald' in 1852 and in 1854.

*The streets, here and there, heightened the zest the enjoyment by the sprightly branches evergreens fixed, some of them in rather ludicrous positions (1852)*

*An immense crowd of spectators flanked the procession along the principal streets of the town, several of which had tasteful wreaths of evergreen swinging from one side to the other. (1854)*

Could these be either, a misunderstood or second hand description of an arch? It is impossible to make a definitive conclusion. Unfortunately, there is no report for 1855, so 1856 is the first unambiguous statement that street arches were erected. The fact that several arches have been erected in 1856, suggests that the tradition is already well established. There are some hints in later reports on where and when the first street arch was erected. In 1903, Mr John Lawrie states 'that he has supplied fir' to the Cochrane Street arch for exactly 50 years, which would give 1853 for the first Street Arch. Hints are made in various later newspaper reports that Cochrane Street is the originator of the street arch. Another candidate is Hill Street where John Newland's house stood until 1896. Again, reports are clear that the arch at this location was long established and consistently erected from the early days.

In 1857, there is again, a clear mention of Street arches.

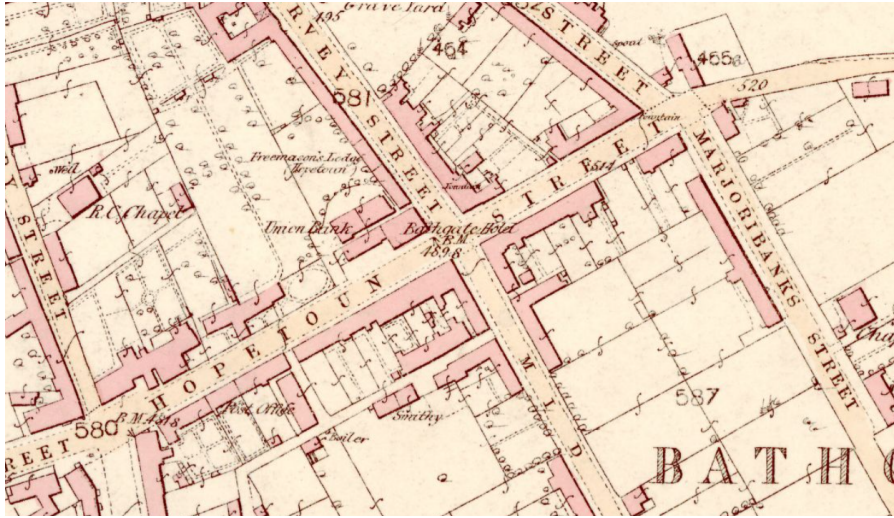
*A number of the young men of the place commenced to erect arches of evergreens in the various streets, the evergreens being kindly supplied for the occasion by A. Dillon, Esq. of Wallhouse*

A Procession report in the Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser of 1858 gives the first recorded arch location and description.

*As soon as the day began to break, numbers of young men were busy building arches across the streets decorating the houses with evergreens, adorning house tops with flags and making everywhere look gay with vernal splendour.*

*Great credit was given especially to the young men for decorating the town so handsomely. The two arches at the hotel which crossed each other and were so tastefully and beautifully decorated with evergreens and flowers attracted general attention.*

The location of this compound arch is at the junction of Mid, Hopetoun and Jarvey Streets. The Bathgate Hotel was located in Hopetoun Street at this time (Map 1).



Map 1 Ordnance Survey 1856 showing Bathgate Hotel on corner of Hopetoun Street and Jarvey Street

Arch erection was well established in several streets by the end of the 1850's. From 1859 onwards, the number of arches and the streets where they were located is described in reports. Street names and a general description of 'Triumphal Arches spanning the streets' is typical, with the arches described as being decorated with evergreens and flowers.

In the 'Falkirk Herald' of 21<sup>st</sup> April 1864, the first clear description of an individual street arch is given along with a list of the arch builders. It was again located at the junction of Mid, Jarvey and Hopetoun Streets and is another example of a compound arch.

*Triumphal arches, adorned with evergreens, were far more numerous than last year. At the corners of Hopetoun Street, Mid Street, and Jarvey Street there was a quadruplicate arch, or in other words, combination of four arches, each crossing the end of one of the different streets which meet terminate at that point. These were tastefully erected under the superintendence of Messrs Wm. Martin, Frank Benson, Alexander Walker, Barron Donaldson, Win. Porteous, etc*

In this year, there were also two arches spanning Cochrane Street, one in Livery Street, one over Whitburn Road and one in Academy Street. No description of these arches or the arch builders was provided.

For the next six years, the reports in the 'Falkirk Herald' reduce in length and detail. They do state that triumphal arches of evergreen are erected in the streets but provide no detail in terms of locations or numbers. The best description, is the report of 17<sup>th</sup> April 1869, where the Cochrane Street arch is described as follows

*In Cochrane Street an arch of a fine build was much admired being beautifully surmounted with flowers and evergreens.*

In 1871, the 'Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser' starts reporting on the Procession and provides detail of arches, locations and builders. The 1871 article suggests the scale of what was not reported during the 1860's. Nine arch locations are described along with their builders. Arches were erected at Gideon Street, High Street, Main Street, Hill Street, Cochrane Street, Livery Street, Bridgend, Whitburn Road and South Bridge Street. Descriptive detail is limited though, with the Cochrane Street arch described as '*Gothic*', the Main Street arch is '*small*' and the High Street is a '*Triple Span*'. Like the 'Falkirk Herald' in the 1860's, the detail provided in the 'Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser' reduces and it takes a few years for the 'West Lothian Courier' to begin reporting in detail.

### The Peak Years 1877-1915

The 'West Lothian Courier' starts to cover the Procession and the arches in detail, from 1877 onwards. The reporter clearly spends time walking through the streets on Procession Day and makes detailed descriptions of each arch and lists their builders. A critique of the quality of build and decoration is often given as well. Although there doesn't seem to be a formal competition, it is clear that friendly rivalries have built up between the streets and the reporter gives his opinion on what arch is the best of that year. The arch builders experiment with a wide range of arch types and decorative styles and adornments which are rarely, if at all, captured by the photographs of the later part of the peak years.

Throughout this period, arch numbers were in double figures most years. Typically, there would be 6 to 10 large Triple span arches across the streets, with a higher number of small arches across pavements. The peak year for arch numbers was 1902 with 22 arches erected. The West Lothian Courier of 18<sup>th</sup> April 1902 gives the following description

*EXTENSIVE DECORATIONS. The decorations are even more elaborate and extensive than last year. There is a picturesque look about the town, the result of the display of the artistic skill of the many energetic workers, who last night and this morning were indefatigable in their efforts to make brilliant show. With their work the men and the boys who took part have every reason to feel satisfied, the arches are such as would do any town credit. There are seven large arches, mostly of the Gothic style, while there are many smaller, ones. All show signs of much preparation, and the decorations are most tastefully displayed.*

See table below for the list of 1902 arches.

<b>Large Arches</b>	
<p><b>Whitburn Road Triple Span Gothic</b></p> <p>Fine Triple Span Gothic arch, surmounted by Prince of Wales feathers with crowns, set off with rosettes, and painted ornaments suspended.</p>	<p><b>North Bridge Street Triple Span Norman arch</b></p> <p>Triple Span Norman arch surmounted by three thistles, two Prince of Wales feathers and flags, three crowns hanging. Mottoes; "North Bridge Street for ever." and "Let the 17th Flourish"</p>
<p><b>Engine Street Triple Gothic Norman Arch</b></p> <p>Triple Span Gothic Norman Arch with leaves in gold relief, hanging crowns and tassels and a shield suspended from the main arch, on one side are inscribed the well-known lines;</p> <p>"While generous actions generous thoughts impart. Newland's shall live every Bathgate Heart " And on the other side "The 17th of April not forgotten".</p>	<p><b>Cochrane Street Triple Gothic Arch</b></p> <p>Triple Norman Gothic arch with floral design on top, and three crowns suspended. It is noteworthy that this arch has been put up regularly for 40 years. Mottoes; "Knowledge is no burden." and "Be just in all thine actions."</p>
<p><b>Hill Street Triple Norman arch</b></p> <p>Triple Norman arch with Prince of Wales feathers and the mottoes "Auld Lang Syne" and "John Newland, founder of Bathgate Academy." Crowns suspended from Centre of each arch</p>	<p><b>South Bridge Street Triple Norman arch</b></p> <p>Triple Norman arch, surmounted by compass and square and having crowns hanging from centre. Mottoes in roses—"Welcome back again." and "Let his memory flourish"</p>
<p><b>Paulville Road Double Norman Arch</b></p> <p>Double Norman arch surmounted by thistles, dolls and Masonic designs and having two crown pendant and flags on either side</p>	
<b>Small Arches</b>	
<p><b>High Street Norman arch</b></p> <p>Norman arch, surmounted by thistles with pendant crowns, set off with hearts and flags</p>	<p><b>Hill Street Small Norman Arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman surmounted by floral design</p>
<p><b>Drumcross Road Small Norman arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch with thistle on top and crown of roses and a globe suspended from centre</p>	<p><b>Main Street Small Norman Arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman Arch with thistle on top and crown suspended from centre</p>
<p><b>Academy Street Norman arch</b></p> <p>Norman arch with Thistle on top and crown over centre</p>	<p><b>Cochrane Street Small Norman arch 1</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch surmounted by a thistle</p>
<p><b>Marjoribanks Street Small Arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch, surmounted by Prince of Wales feathers, crown suspended from centre, and set off with roses. stars, etc</p>	<p><b>Cochrane Street Small Norman arch 2</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch. surmounted by grotesque figures</p>
<p><b>Brown Square Small Norman arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch surmounted by Masonic emblem</p>	<p><b>Cochrane Street Small Norman arch 3</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch. with Masonic design on top and crown and ball suspended</p>
<p><b>Bridgend Small Norman arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch, with ornaments and floral design</p>	<p><b>Cochrane Street Small Norman arch 4</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch. set of with thistle crown and ball</p>
<p><b>Livery Street Small Gothic Arch</b></p> <p>Small Gothic Arch, with partridge on top and fans suspended from centre</p>	<p><b>South Bridge Street Small Arch</b></p> <p>Small Norman arch. with two foxes and bantam cock on top and crown suspended from centre</p>
	<p><b>Woodhead Cottages Small Gothic</b></p> <p>Small Gothic arch with pheasant and seagull on top, Prince of Wales feathers and crown and ball hanging from centre</p>

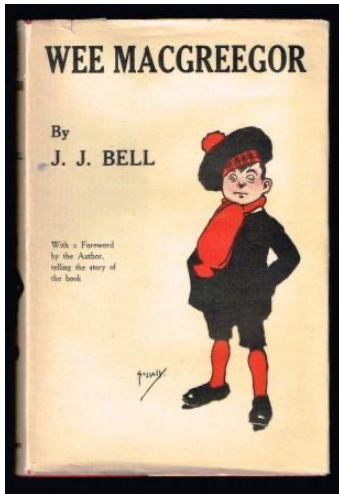
## Decorative features

The types of decoration are extensive and varied.

Animals are a frequent decoration, either as stuffed specimens or models. The following animals are recorded over the years; pheasant, seagull, hawk, bat, bear, fox, badger, ferret, red squirrel, partridge, butterflies, Irish setter, Irish terrier, bantam cock, owl, snipe, starling, jackdaw, pigeon and finally a Solan goose (Gannet) from Bass rock!

Another regular feature was mottoes written on the arch or suspended from banners, shields or pendants. Gold or silver lettering was used on some arches, as well as letters being formed using paper roses and dottals. The originality and aptness of the mottoes was taken very seriously and commented upon in reports. The majority of mottoes extolled the merits of education, such as the short "Education is our standard" or the longer "Honour to him who opened the gates of knowledge and bade his town folk enter". Others aimed to inspire good behaviour such as "Scorn to do a mean action" or "A good name better than riches". There are mottoes wishing success for the day such as "Success to the Academy Procession and to the good o' the bairns" and "Let the 17th Flourish". Along similar lines, there were street declarations such as "Let Hill Street flourish" or the more straightforward "Cochrane Street Forever". Mottoes decline but do continue into the 1900's.

There is a long list of other decorative features. Bathgate had a glass factory and the factory workers, Messrs Wilson and Co. erected an arch in Academy Street in 1874 and used '*fantastic specimens of their art*' to decorate the arch. Other arches used glass decorations in subsequent years. A remarkable use of glass, was the 1882 Whitburn Road Juvenile arch which had a glass ball and a glass model of 'the famous Jumbo' the elephant! Intricate carved wooden fretwork was frequently used as the decoration for the top of an arch. Figures and dolls were common, some described as being made of wax and others in Highland dress. Some of the dolls were designed to represent the town's children. Small spruce trees covered in roses were another regular feature. A few more random items were oranges, a locomotive train and large scale drawings of 'Wee MacGregor' (a fictional Scots lad equivalent to putting 'Oor Wullie' up today).



## 7. Wee MacGreegor story collection by J. J. Bell

Notable, innovative, decorative additions were an evergreen belfry on top of the central arch in Livery Street in 1881, 1882 and 1883. This had a real bell which was rung as the children passed underneath. Another innovation was a revolving crown, first described at Hill Street in 1881. The report hints that a clockwork mechanism was involved, 'the whirligig of time'! A revolving crown was also a feature of the Whitburn Road arch in 1905 and 1906, this time powered by electricity. These two arches were also lit at night with electric light which was a great attraction. An earlier attempt to light the Mid Street/Hopetoun Street junction arch with Chinese lanterns in 1893 was unsuccessful. The High Street arch was floodlit in 1953 and 1954.

Another significant decorative method was the use of paper and wire to make small flowers or roses, known in Bathgate as the dottal. These were combined to make decorative shields, crosses, hearts, stars, diamonds, various flags, national flowers such as the thistle, rose and shamrock, masonic symbols, Faith Hope and Charity symbols and Prince of Wales feathers. Thousands of dottals would be made in a variety of colours to make the designs. The use of dottals is explained by the April date, there would be relatively few natural flowers to use in early April. An 1882 Procession poem 'Bathgates Gala Day', written by R Fleming in 1882, uses the phrase 'Gum flooers' so this method of decoration seems well established by that time.

***An' here an' there wi great delicht***

***The "architects" are bustlin',***

***Wi "croons" and "gum flooers" gay an bricht,***

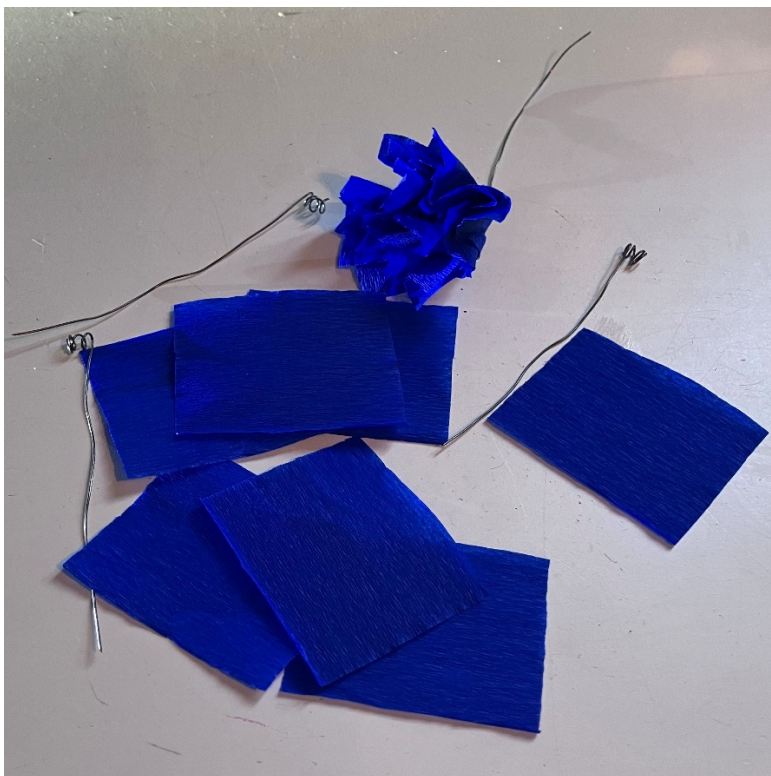
***Some singin' an some whustlin';***



Shield with pattern marked in 'tin' and hundreds of holes drilled for insertion of dottal wire



Dottals inserted and decoration complete



Wire and crepe paper combine to make the dottal. Repeat 1000's of times!

## Arch Construction

The Procession Day before 1924 was a both a weekday and a holiday. The day before and the day after however, were working days. Even with a Monday procession, the Sunday would be a day of rest and for a Friday procession the following Saturday morning was for work in many industries. Arch erection started in the evening before the Procession Day and arch builders worked throughout the night, using miners lamps and a fire for light and heat. A report of 1877 describes scaffolding being constructed from wooden barrels and planks, the hammering together of this creating a familiar Procession eve din. The High Street arch of 1881 borrowed scaffolding from the Bathgate Chemical Works and gave thanks to a Mr Baxter for this. Some streets had entertainment from a fiddle player. A whisky or two would be taken throughout the build and most arch locations were close to a pub (one report suggests that this was the key reason for deciding on an arch location!). Once their arch was complete, the builders would walk around the streets to view the constructions of their rival arch builders. The townsfolk would no doubt join them after being woken by the town drummer at 4 am! Once the Procession was over, the arches were dismantled fairly quickly (they would be back to work the next day). It was a common lament and request that the arches be left up for longer so that Bathgate Bairns and visitors could admire them. Some builders did take this on board and left them up till the evening of Procession Day.

## Some of The Builders

There are a range of recurring names that span decades of arch building including Sherriff, Bald, Glen and Anthony, amongst many more. Beyond the names there is no detail provided about these arch builders in the newspaper reports. Surely however, many of them had reputations within the town as notable and skilled arch builders. A few however are given some autobiographical detail, either associated with notable arches, within their obituaries or in later reminiscences. Four examples are provided below.

James Spiers, listed as both Captain and Major Spiers (due to time in the Royal Scots) was the chief architect and builder of a notable compound arch at the junction of Hopetoun, Jarvey and Mid Streets in 1892. J Spiers and his brother A Spiers are named as builders of the Mid Street Gothic style arch in 1878 and 1879, the Hopetoun Street arches of 1892, 1893, 1907, 1908, and 1909. He is also listed as a builder of the arch in Whitburn Road in 1889. His obituary in the 'West Lothian Courier' 25<sup>th</sup> April 1913, records that his father moved to Bathgate from Airdrie and established a joinery and construction business which his sons James and Alexander took over. The company was involved in the construction of Bathgate's churches, Corn Exchange,

Working Mens' Institute and several private dwellings. A few reports mention their professional skills, perhaps viewed as an unfair advantage. It is also possible they were contracted to help by different Street committees. The obituary of James Spiers in 1913 records that

*'He together with his brother had also the distinction of erecting the most magnificent arch that has ever been witnessed in the town to the memory of John Newland. It was built on a most gorgeous style, and exquisitely busked and decorated. It bridged the streets Hopetoun Street, Jarvey Street and Mid Street and was the wonder of all visitors on the Procession Day during which it was erected.'*

This would have been the 1892 arch, erected 21 years previously. His arch building career started in 1877 and his last seems to be in 1909.

William Kerr was named as the designer of the 1908 and 1909 North Bridge Street five span arches. He emigrated to Australia in 1923 but was a great Bathgate Procession enthusiast. He returned from Australia 4 times and in 1953, he delivered the Oration at the Bathgate Procession which he considered the greatest day of his life. In 1924 the Pageant was introduced to the Procession Day in which Walter, the High Steward and the Princess Royal receive from their loyal Freemen, the key of Bathgate Castle. The 'West Lothian Courier' reports that

*'This key, it is worth noting is made partly from silver ore garnered from Bathgate Silver Mine and was made under the supervision of Mr William Kerr a Bathgate lad now in Australia.'*

Henry Easton Carruthers was born in Mid Street in 1889. He is later recorded living with his father Thomas, mother and siblings at Easton Rows. Later he is still in Easton Rows with his own wife and family. He is listed in the small arch construction in Cochrane Street in 1899 and Bridgend 1902. He is listed with the builders of the Easton Rows Triple Span arches of 1904, 1905, 1906 and 1909. On his death in 1951, his wife places an acknowledgment of thanks in the 'West Lothian Courier' of the 15th of June. She gives thanks to the Marjoribanks Street arch builders so he must have been involved in that streets arches of 1949, 1950 and maybe the 1951, the one before his death.

William Black, nick-named 'Geegam' was interviewed in the 'West Lothian Courier' in 1965. This was in an article highlighting the lack of an arch since 1963 and the failure of the Town Council to attract arch builders via a tender process. William described arch building with his father at aged 12 and being involved with the High Street arch in later years. He was born in Cochrane Street in 1888 and lived there with his mother, father and brother George until 1911. In 1900, three small arches were built in Cochrane Street with 'G Black' listed as an arch builder on one

and 'W Black' as a builder of another. William would have been 12 years old in 1900. This is repeated again in 1901. He appears again as an arch builder for the High Street Triple span arch in 1914 and 1915. He is recorded in 1920, 1923, 1924 1925, 1927 and 1933. He is last recorded as an arch builder in 1935. He was undoubtedly involved in more but reports after 1930 don't list the builders. In 1965 William was living in Balbardie Avenue. Unfortunately, he was in poor health otherwise he would have helped with building an arch. The Courier reports his death in 1973. As well as highlighting the death of perhaps the last of the traditional arch builders the report records that he was a goalkeeper for Hearts (1916-1921) and was a *really tough nut!*

The lists of arch builders are almost all exclusively male, grouped under the collective title of 'Messrs'. However, a few women are acknowledged, the first time in 1878 where 'lady friends' of Mr J Anderson assisted with the decoration of the High Street arch. A similarly anonymous 'young lady' assisted with the decorations of the Academy Street arch in 1880. At last, in 1883 the Cochrane Street arch builders include Mrs Easton (senior), Mrs Easton (junior), Mrs Lister, Mrs Galloway, Miss Tennant and Miss Gavin. In 1886, Mary Wardlaw is listed along with presumably her brother Archibald, as a builder of the South Bridge Street boys arch. In both 1886 and 1888, Mrs Annie McGeedie is named. She helped in the decoration of the Main Street arch by making decorative dolls. After Annie, it is not until 1930 that Mrs Palmer is listed with the Hill Street Triple span arch builders. A Courier article of 1965 discusses the dying art of arch building and acknowledges the long overdue and unsung contribution of the women of Bathgate, adding another female name to the short list.

*Womenfolk, it must not be forgotten, played a sterling role in the make-up of the arch. Long wintry evenings, recalls Mrs Brown, of Andrew Avenue, Boghall, were spent making rosettes and such-like decorations from the basic dottle "crepe paper shaped into a tiny bud with a short tail of thin wire". The overall attractiveness and awe-inspiring appearance of the many Bathgate arches could probably be attributed to the creativeness and appreciation of colour of the women and to their nimble fingers.*

To be fair the men did some of this work as well but women are under-represented in the lists.

There are surely more arch builders with stories to tell and a topic for further research.

## Spruce Collection and Care

The secret to the Bathgate arch builders success was their careful treatment of the spruce. It was stored under hessian sacks and kept wet so that the sap did not dry out. The spruce therefore, was fresh and bright on the arch but could be collected a week or two in advance. A few locations for spruce collection are described in reports including Wallhouse at Torphichen, Cathlaw and Busilaw in the Bathgate Hills and from plantations at Dechmont. Arch builders gave thanks to carters who transported the spruce. Securing supplies with the necessary permission could be a challenge and maybe was the cause of some arches not being constructed in a particular year. In peak years, there must have been considerable amounts of spruce collected. A small forest would be required as one reporter wrote. There are a few notices in the press warning arch builders (especially boys) not to destroy plantations or to collect without permission. A lack of spruce in 1908 did not deter the builders of the Mid Street, Hopetoun Street junction arch. They made foliage from green paper which did a credible job of imitating the real thing.

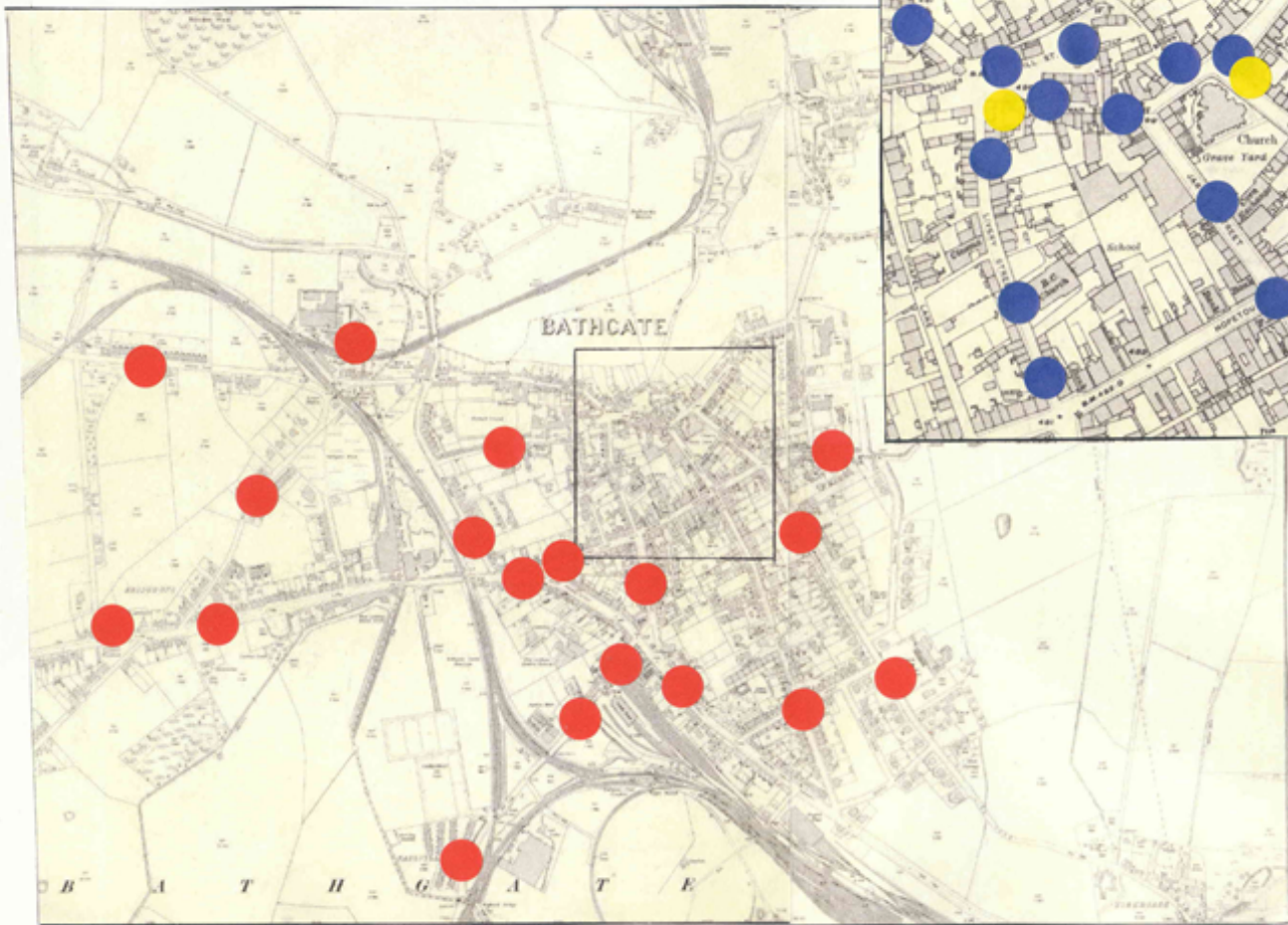
In the modern era, the Forestry Commission has routinely provided locations for gathering Norway Spruce, but this species is planted less frequently in favour of Sitka spruce. This has meant trips farther afield to the Borders or Fife to gather suitable spruce.

## Arch Locations

The map on page 21 shows the locations where arches were located over the years. Locations are not always precise but some are based on photographs and descriptions within the reports. The Glenmavis Tavern and Green Tree pubs are marked to help with orientation in and around the largely vanished 'Auld Toon'. A site such as Woodhead Cottages was only used once for an arch whereas Hill Street was used at least 65 times. Table 2 lists recorded arch locations, the number of years an arch was recorded as being erected at the location and the first and last recorded year. The real numbers in some cases will be higher but location detail is not recorded in some years.

# Map of Arch Locations

Plotted on 1917 Edition OS Map



- Arches Auld Toon
- Arches Wider Toon
- Pubs Green Tree and Glenmavis Tavern

**Table 2 Arch Locations Some Statistics**

<b>Arch Location</b>	<b>No. Years Erected</b>	<b>First Year Erected</b>	<b>Last Year Erected</b>
Hill Street	66	1859	1962
High Street	56	1871	1971
Cochrane Street	53	1860	1969
Whitburn Road	30	1862	1908
North Bridge Street	30	1877	1967
Livery Street	27	1859	1932
Main Street	23	1859	1971
Hopetoun Street	21	1858	1955
Bridgend	21	1871	1928
Marjoribanks Street	20	1888	1955
George Street	20	2002	2025 ongoing
Drumcross Road	19	1876	1920
Gideon Street	18	1871	1924
Academy Street	18	1864	1914
South Bridge Street	16	1871	1908
Mid Street	13	1876	1927
Engine Street	11	1876	1925
Bathgate Academy	10	1852	1876
Waverley Street	6	1935	2000
Brown Square	5	1900	1908
Easton Rows	5	1904	1909
Market Street	5	1872	1930
Jarvey Street	4	1896	1919
Mill Road	4	1891	1933
The Muir	4	1876	1900
Paulville	2	1902	1904
Bathgate Foundry	2	1860	1861
Community Centre	2	199?	199?
Woodhead Cottages	1	1902	1902
Bailies Court	1	1906	1906
Bennie Museum	1	1994	1994

## Mishaps and Accidents

There were remarkably few mishaps recorded over the decades. Bad weather was the cause of partial or complete collapses and on occasion preventing arches being built.

In 1874 a strong gust of wind blew over the Hill Street arch. However, the builders 'set to' and had the arch re-erected in time for the Procession to pass underneath. In 1866 no arches were constructed due to the atrocious weather in the night before the Procession with building attempts abandoned. One injury is recorded, a child's broken arm when the High Street arch collapsed in 1881. The Courier reports

*About midday the finest of the many arches was blown down, and a child got one of its arms broken by the falling erection.*

There was a run of bad weather at this time, in 1882 the Whitburn Road arch was damaged by wind and in 1883 strong winds also prevented the Whitburn Road arch being erected.

Two more recent close calls were in 1949 and 1961.

In 1949, a letter from a Bathgate Bairn records two incidents

*Sir, I am writing this after witnessing the collapse of the side bough on the Hill Arch, Bathgate. It may have been a good joke to a few spectators, but most of the large crowd there seemed to realise the effect this untimely incident had on these inexperienced boys. It was tragic to see the change on a 19 year-old boys face, who, a few seconds before had proudly placed the wreath on John Newlands' Home as the youngest arch-builder. I wish the people to know it was not the builders who were at fault—I blame inferior material supplied to do the job. Had the Arch Conveners known better this could have been avoided by the supply and choice of decent boughs. I have just heard that the High Street Arch has also collapsed. Being a woman, I won't try to give the reason or advice, but after weeks spent on these arches and decorations I hope that next year trustworthy foundations will be used and so give us old Bathgate Bairns back all our own procession memories. This incident won't stop the gallant arch-builders next year and for many years to some. I am, etc., "BATHGATE BAIRN." Bathgate. 4/6/49.*

In 1961, arch builders were encouraged to build an arch at Hill Street. An open topped double decker was part of the Procession and struggled to pass under the centre span and threatened to do damage to the arch. The Courier reports the incident as follows:

*At the foot of the Hill, a traditional Bathgate arch had been built by a group of Bathgate arch builders coaxed from retirement by the Committee. This was a token revival of perhaps the most*

*prominent feature of Bathgate procession and was much appreciated by everybody. It was a beautiful arch and proof indeed that the old skill is still not lost.*

### *A Hitch*

*The procession moved then off again but not without incident. There came the one big hitch of the day. S.O.L.'s open top double decked bus, halfway along the line, fouled the spans of the arch and stopped. The driver saw the danger and came to a halt before any damage was done. A venerable and vigilant arch builder, seeing the threat to hours of patient and loving work, rushed forward apparently with the idea of stopping the bus with his shoulder alone. The police had to intervene and remove him before the bus could be passed safely through the arch.*

## Arches in other Towns

Given the close ties of family, work and community between Bathgate and neighbouring towns and villages, it is not surprising that Armadale, Whitburn, Blackridge, Blackburn and Torphichen also erected arches as their Gala days started and developed in the late 1800's. One documented example of arch builders helping out, is the construction of an arch in Boghall (arguably still Bathgate) for its first Gala day in 1962. A spruce arch was built at the main entrance to Boghall Primary school and the Boghall arch builders were grateful to the number of 'old hands' at the arch building who came out from Bathgate to assist.

As well as arch builders travelling to neighbouring towns to assist, actual arches from Bathgate were re-erected in neighbouring towns in the following weeks. The Courier notes in 1930 that *Bathgate, down through the years, has been famous for triple span arches of spruce on Procession Day. They have ever drawn great admiration from visitors and on many occasions the arches that served on Newland Day were, a week or two later doing service at other towns where children's days were held.*

One specific documented example of this is reported by the Courier in 1951

*A meeting of the Whitburn Children's Gala Day Committee was held on Wednesday evening when it was decided to arrange a meeting with the Merchants Association to discuss a number of matters pertaining to the Gala. It was also agreed that the arch erected at Hill Street, Bathgate for last Saturday's Procession be re-erected at Manse Road Whitburn for the Whitburn Gala Day.*

Was it just the arch frame? Were the decorations supplied as well? Was the spruce still fresh or did Whitburn supply their own? No detail is given about this.

## Competitive Arch Building

Unofficial competition and rivalry became formal with the donation of the Livingstone Cup in 1905 by Mr William Livingstone, the owner of hosiery factories in Bathgate. As well as the trophy, medals were presented to the winning builders. The trophy is now in the Bennie Museum as are examples of medals.



The introduction of a formal competition was not fully supported. An unnamed Bathgate council official thought it caused unnecessary tensions and that some streets would struggle to win because of the narrowness or steepness of these streets would limit creativity. The first winners were North Bridge Street, who won every year until 1909, after which they never erected another arch. As well as the trophy, a cash prize was provided for first, second and third prizes. Cash was also provided to all arch builders to help with production. There are reports that some builders did not view this amount as enough and this could be one of the reasons that the North Bridge Street arch was not built after 1909. In some years the reports provide the names of the judges, their scores and critiques of each arch. In other years it is only the prize winning arches that are scored. As the number of arches declined the presentation of the cup ceased. It was even offered to the winners of a derby match between Bathgate Thistle and Armadale Thistle in 1954, the match played to raise funds for the Bathgate Procession and Armadale Gala Day. It was re-purposed as a Procession House decoration prize.

Table 3 details the Livingstone Cup prize winners.

<b>Year</b>	<b>First Place Cup Winners</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1905	North Bridge Street	Whitburn Road	Cochrane Street
1906	North Bridge Street	Drumcross Road	Cochrane Street
1907	North Bridge Street (28 points)	Cochrane Street (24 points)	Hill Street (23 points)
1908	North Bridge Street	Cochrane Street	High Street
1909	North Bridge Street (20 points)	Cochrane Street (15 points)	High Street (11 points)
1910	High Street	Hill Street	Cochrane Street
1911	Cochrane Street	High Street	Whitburn Road, Marjoribanks Street (Shared)
1912	No arches coal strike		
1913	High Street (17 points)	Marjoribanks Street (15 points)	Cochrane Street (14 points)
1914	Marjoribanks Street	High Street	Cochrane Street
1915	Gideon Street	High Street	Hill Street
1916	No arches		
1917	No Procession		
1918	No Procession		
1919	Drumcross Road		
1920	High Street		
1921	No Procession		
1922	No Procession		
1923	Bridgend	High Street	Gideon Street
1924	High Street	Bridgend	
1925	High Street	Livery Street	Hill Street
1926	No Procession		
1927	High Street	Mid Street	Hill Street
1928	Bridgend	Market Street	Hill Street
1929	High Street	Hill Street	Cochrane Street
1930	High Street	Hill Street	Cochrane Street
1931	High Street		
1932	Hill Street	High Street	Livery Street
1933	High Street	Hill Street	Mill Road
1934	Hill Street	Mill Road	
1935	High Street	Waverley Street	Hill Street
1936	Hill Street (only arch)		

1937	No arches		
1938			
1939			
1950	High Street	Marjoribanks Street	Hill Street
1951			
1952			
1953	High Street	Waverley Street	Majoribanks Street

Table 3 Livingstone Cup Winners

A group of judges scored the arches each year, the panel usually containing an experienced but retired arch builder. The following scores for 1925 give an idea of how the judges were assessing the arches.

Street	Floral	Arch Building	Architecture	Total
High Street	20	20	19	59
Livery Street	14	19	18	50
Hill Street	16	17	17	50
Engine Street	15	17	16	48
Mid Street	12	18	18	48

Table 4 1925 Scores

Street	Number of Wins
High Street	15
North Bridge Street	5
Hill Street	3
Bridgend	2
Drumcross, Gideon, Cochrane and Marjoribanks	1 each

Table 5 Livingstone Cup Winners Summary

## Political Impacts

Both local and national politics impacted on the Procession and on arch building in turn.

As the years progressed, the costs associated with the of building of arches became a source of tension. Both the Town Council and the Procession Committee contributed funding to each arch committee. This helped supplement the money donated from within the street and community. Complaints were made that this supplement was not enough. The clearest example of this was documented in 1908 and 1909 in relation to the North Bridge Street five span arches. After 1909 no arch was built here again, despite the street being the winner of the Livingstone Cup since competition was introduced in 1905.

Finances were also an issue in 1956. In May the 'West Lothian Courier' reported

*To add to the committee's difficulties this year there has been the arch controversy. A few weeks ago, it was announced that there would be no arches this year because the committee had refused to increase the payment to the arch-builders from £20 to £30. Publicity was given to this and public feeling was aroused to some extent. Apparently, the Hill Street arch-builders were the leaders in the bid to get increased payment but now the committee have learned officially that there will be an arch in Hill Street, built by the Green Tree Social Club and not by the usual builders. There will also be one in Cochrane Street.*

National politics and events heavily impacted in the 1900s with strikes and times of depression preventing the Procession going ahead at all or in reduced circumstances. In 1912 no arches were erected as no prize money was available from the committee. The Coal Strike limited the funds that the committee could raise and those that were raised were spent on entertaining the children. This year also saw the Procession moved to July when the economic situation had improved slightly.

## 1920 to 1972 The Classic Years

The number of arches declined sharply after 1920. The decades of experience however, ensured that the quality of build remained exemplary as the photographs from this period demonstrate. One reason for the introduction of the Livingstone Cup was to encourage the erection of arches which was starting to become challenging due to the costs involved. There must have been experienced arch builders who lost their lives in the Great War and perhaps some streets lost their arch building captain. Another reason and a big factor in the decline in number, was the concreting and taring of roads and pavements. This is first mentioned in 1899 in relation to the lack of arches in Whitburn Road, Engine Street, Hopetoun Street,

*the three principal streets of the town, were lacking in this respect. The authorities objecting to the opening up of the streets in certain parts of the town is no doubt the chief barrier.*

In the 1920s this was increasingly a problem. This period saw a general decline in the number of arches with a few years where there only 1, 2 or 3 arches. As well as the physical difficulty of breaking and digging through this material, with presumably, a repair afterwards, there was the difficulty of getting the necessary permission from the Town Council. Officials were co-operative but officialdom can be frustrating and slow. Services were also being introduced underground and the 1908 five span arch had difficulty digging around a water pipe. Societal issues also impacted. In 1921, 1922 and 1926 depression and general strikes meant that the Procession could not go ahead. As the 1930's dawned arch numbers increased to 4 in 1930 and 1931 before tailing off again. The Procession of 1937 was the first time since the 1850's that no

arches at all were erected or attempted. One arch was erected in 1938 and 1939 at High Street and Hill Street respectively.

Post World War Two, both the Procession and arch building were resurrected in 1949. From that year until 1955, three or four arches were erected each year. 1955 was also notable for the Queens visit to West Lothian. For the first time the rival arch builders of Bathgate came together and erected a three span arch in Hopetoun Street for her drive through Bathgate. Of course, Bathgate has Princess Marjory rather than the traditional Gala Day queen but the real one did drive under a Bathgate arch!

Two arches were built in 1956 but the close of the 1950's were not positive for either the Procession or arch building. In 1957 and 1960 there was no Procession due to a lack of committee members and in 1958 and 1959 no arches were erected. The 'West Lothian Courier' stated the following

*In the art of decorative arch-building Bathgate had many imitators but no equals. Nothing like them could be seen anywhere else in Britain. They were indeed poems in greenery and coloured decoration, perfect symmetrically and architecturally. It was indeed a craft born of generations of experience and each arch was a perfect creation. The pity is that this craft is not now practised and is in danger of being lost.*

An arch did return at Hill Street in 1961, 1962 and 1963. No arches were erected in 1964 or 1965 despite the efforts of both the Town Council and the Procession committee to encourage arch builders. In 1966 and 1967 an arch was erected in North Bridge Street, notable for its different construction, not a triple span gothic arch but a Compound arch consisting of two arches crossed in a style not seen for decades.

In 1968 two arches are erected. A photograph of the Cochrane Street arch is in the 'West Lothian Courier' but the location of the second arch is not even mentioned! An arch is again erected in Cochrane Street in 1969. There is no newspaper mention of an arch in 1970 but there is a lone arch reported in Main Street in 1971. After this arch erection ceases. In addition to the increasing difficulties experienced since the 1920's, the late 1960's and early 1970's was also the time when the streets of Bathgate's 'Auld Toon' were finally obliterated from the landscape. High Street was demolished (apart from a few houses in the top of High Street). Hill Street which held the site of Newland's house was demolished and finally cleared in 1959 and the site covered by the road extension of Waverley Street to Torphichen Street in 1972. Most of Main Street and the top of Cochrane Street were also removed. As well as traditional arch locations

the few remnant builders would have been moved out to other areas of the town. Bathgate Town Council was also disbanded in 1975 and the town came under the management of Lothian Regional Council. This all must have seemed like the terminal blow to arch building.

## Modern era 1973- 2025 Survival and Revival

However, there was still energy, determination and skill left to save the arch building craft. Despite severe setbacks the traditional skills hung on, arch building barely surviving the 1980's and 1990's, with a strong come back in the 2000's.

The efforts began in the 1970's. An advert was placed in the Courier in March 1974

### *Bathgate Procession 1974*

*The above will be held on Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> June, and the Town Council has agreed in principle to finance the construction and erection of a Street Arch in the Town for this date. In this connection all interested and experienced arch builders are asked to contact the undersigned at an early date.*

Unfortunately, the advert was not successful and no arch was built.

In 1977 serious attempts were made to erect an arch on the new section of Waverley Street, close to the Green Tree pub and close to the site of Hill Street. This was also the Queens jubilee year and this was another reason to make the effort. A group of arch builders were secured but permission was not given by the authorities, no longer Bathgate Town Council but Lothian Regional Council. However, the regional officials did offer a site on Livery Street which was declined or maybe not offered in time. The 'West Lothian Courier' reports do not reach a definitive conclusion. Perhaps the difficulties of communication with a bigger and more distant council was the root cause.

A few years passed and in 1983, which was the year of the 150<sup>th</sup> Procession, requests to erect an arch at the same site were approved and a three span arch was successfully erected.

The re-opening of the rail link between Bathgate and Edinburgh in 1986 also resulted in the erection of a small but effective three span arch close to the new station. Although it was not for the Procession it kept the traditional skills alive.

In the 1990's Bathgate Community Centre erected a triple span arch in front of the building on two occasions. The Bennie Museum also erected a large single span arch in 1993.

In the Millennium year a triple span arch was again erected at the Green Tree site. The arch building tradition had suffered some serious setbacks but had not died out completely. Small

arches were also built as part of house decorations, so dotal production and busking skills remained within the community.

In 2004 the tradition began again in George Street with a three span gothic arch erected annually. A cooperative District Council helped with the creation of permanent holes in the street. The Covid years and health and safety concerns prevented construction for a few years but an arch has successfully been built in 2024 and 2025, with an arch planned for 2026.

Arch building has been a feature of Bathgate Procession since 1852. Over that 174 year period at least 636 arches have been recorded, an impressive number. The true number is of course even higher with some arches either not recorded or not described in reports. Despite setbacks throughout the years when no arches were erected the tradition has survived the massive changes that 175 years of history have wrought. Furthermore, the arch building and busking skills have survived along with the determination to continue to erect an arch each year. In 2024 the Procession Committee invested in new solid oak uprights and metal arch frames which will last for another 50 years at least. Undoubtedly there will be setbacks in the future but the tradition is in good hands. History demonstrates that the arch building tradition has been one of variety with different arch types and numerous decorative styles as well as locations. If a future arch is a Triple-Span-Norman arch, decorated with glass ornaments, animals and wooden fretwork then there is no harm in that! One way or another, Bathgate Bairns will ensure that arches are a feature of the Processions of the future.

***The arches tae were a' worth seein then, an I sometimes think even made a better show than they dae noo-a-days; but I'll no draw comparisons; they're beautiful every year an' worthy tribute in a noble an' lofty cause***

Adam Shortwright (an auld Bathgate Bairn) Interviewed for West Lothian Courier 20/4/1906

## Some Notable Arches- Images and Photographs

Of the 635 recorded arches, around 100 have been photographed (or painted in one early example). Photographers produced postcards of the arches before World War One and many survive. In 1913 the 'West Lothian Courier' reports that

*the seven arches were pictured by photographers who quickly turned the images into postcards for sale, selling out quickly. Furthermore, cinematographers filmed the Procession and the arches, the resulting film shown in Greens Pavillion cinema that weekend.*

The following section focuses on some notable arches and their images. I have included a few early descriptions without photographs. I have also included the newspaper description as written. Photographs from authors collection, Bennie Museum and Kirkroads collection. Thank

you to Rachael Hossack for access to Kirkroads photo collection and for collaborating in identifying locations and dates of the arches depicted.

## Academy Street and Mid Street Cross 1884 and 1886

### Arch Description 1884

*A notable redeeming feature was the fine new arch erected at the junction of Academy Street and Mid Street. This arch, the first of its kind, was what might be called a compound arch, formed of two triple arches in the old Gothic style, on the opposite side of the street, coupled or held together by a brace of gable arches in the same style. The effect was thoroughly handsome and conveyed the idea of a genuine triumphal arch which might be entered on any of the four sides. The limbs of the arch were tastefully busked and bore the following inscription: - "In memory of John Newlands born April 17, 1737."*

The builders of this noble erection were Messrs A Arthur, J Arthur, J Rennie, R Shields, T Walker, R Allan, P Allan, W Wright, J Shields and W Shields.

### Arch Description 1886

*Four sided it occupied a position in the centre of the road at the crossing of Academy and Mid Streets and was Gothic in style, with crowns pendant from the centre of each of the four larger arches and small trees covered with roses at each of the corners. Two mottoes cut out in coloured letters were arranged round the evergreens - "Still we flourish" and "In memory of John Newlands born 17th April 1737"*

The builders were William Shields, Robert Shields, John Shields, James Allan, Peter Allan, David Lees, Thomas Stevenson, Thomas Johnstone, James Binnie, John Swan, Walter Swan and John Morrison

## High Street 1886

Some arches are difficult to picture from the written description. The High Street arch of 1886 is described as follows.

### Arch Description

*At the foot of the High Street was erected an arch of rather unique design. Over the four upright columns was suspended a line of streamers stretched from roof to roof and from it hung ropes of evergreens that met the upright posts and completed the arches, which were decorated with three immense piles of curled and dyed shavings that lent a pretty appearance to the whole.*

The builders were Robert Muir, Alexander Muir, Malcolm Taylor, Hugh Lafferty, Robert Marshall, David Marshall and David Hair.

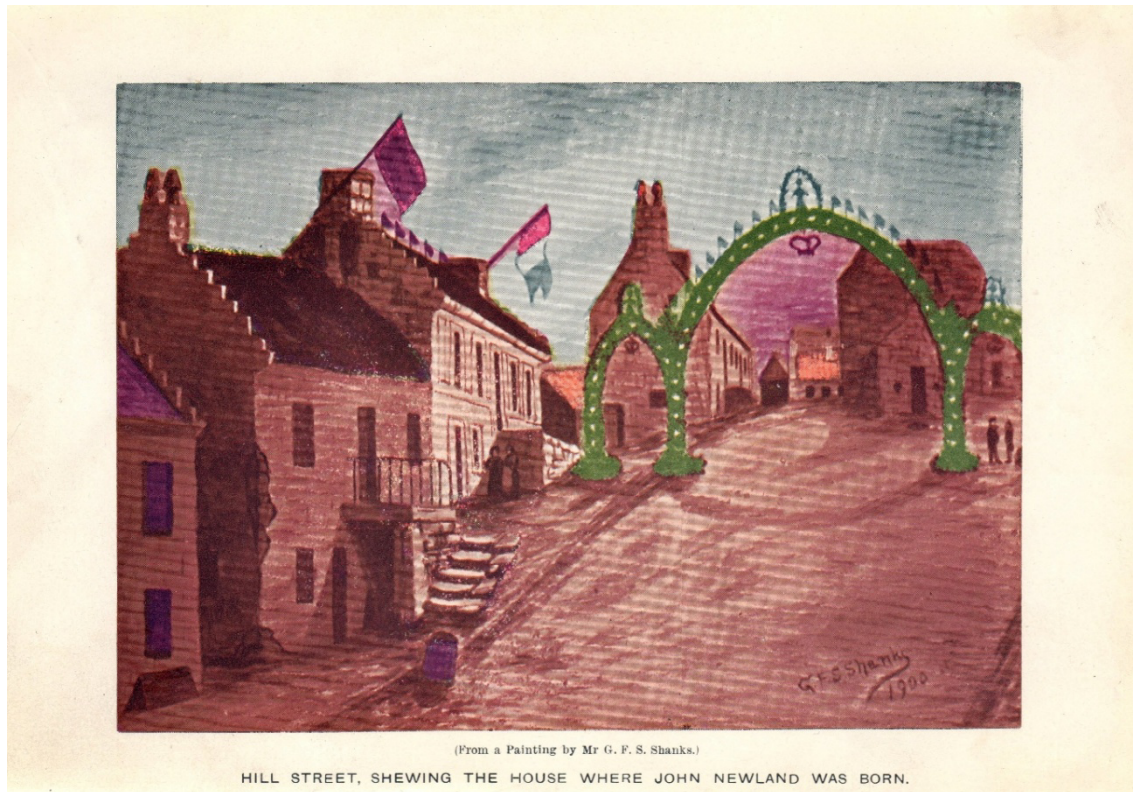
## The Earliest Image Hill Street 1887

The painting by G.F.S Shanks is dated 1900. However, a black and white sketch of the painting is featured in the West Lothian Courier of 1900 and the caption clearly states that it depicted the Hill Street arch as it looked in 1887. The description of the arch in 1887 does fits the image.

## Arch Description

*Opposite the birth-place of John Newlands, in Hill Street, a large arch but rather slim looking arch was built. It was ornamented with paper festoons, trees, crowns and dolls. A row of flags decorated the roof of the house where Newlands was born.*

The decorators here were – T Brown, H Kerr, A Russell, Strathern, Fleming, Tait and Harper.



## The Highest Arch Hopetoun Street Arch 1890

### Arch Description

*The evergreens for this arch, by the kindness of Mr Thomson, were got, from Wallhouse. The arch was a triple span. A large crown, with a glass ball inside, hung from the centre of the middle span. The smaller spans were surmounted by two hearts entwined and pierced by an arrow. Underneath these small spans crowns were suspended. This, it is stated, is the **highest** arch yet erected in Bathgate, being 36 feet from the ground to the top.*

This arch was erected by Messrs Thomas Shanks, James Miller, R. Marshall, D. Marshall, R Sheriff, C. Henderson, F Carruthers, D. M'Alpine and R Nelson.

## 1892 The Earliest Photograph Hopetoun Street Mid Street Jarvey Street Cross

Candidate for the earliest arch photograph 1892.

### Arch Description

*An arch, the like of which has not seen in Bathgate before, was that erected in Hopetoun Street. The arches were complete circles in themselves but looking from the several streets intersecting*

*the same they became Gothic in design. This, of course, explains itself when the beholder looked at the side arches. The erection was the subject of the most favourable comment by all who saw it and reflected great credit on those engaged in its erection. This arch had the following wording upon it " Education completes what Nature well begins," "Good men are a public good." "Learning refines and elevates the mind, "Blythe may we a' be; ill may we ne'er see."*

The builders were the Messrs Spiers (who were the moving spirits in the matter), John Pollock, Robert Davidson, A. Greig, A. Galloway, W. Stewart, M. Taylor, W. Wilson, J. Nathaniel, James Fleming, R. Marshall, R Henry, J. Masterton, H. Gowans, P. Finnie, R Johnston, James Brown and John Brown.



## Jarvey Street 1896

The photograph shows the triple span Saxon arch of Jarvey Street in 1896. Arch builders were not reported in this year and only four large arches were erected. This photograph is notable as it shows a second arch, the juvenile or boys arch over the pavement which can be seen through the central span of the Saxon arch. The arch is another example showing a motto on the central span.

## Arch Description

*The display of arches in the town was not equal to that of former years, the number of arches spanning the full width of the street being only four. These were situated Jarvey Street, where the mottoes were "In memory of John Newlands, 1896," and "Education our Motto;"*

*The work of the juvenile decorators was much in evidence, boys having made footpath arches in Mid Street, Marjoribanks Street, High Street (two), Jarvey Street, North Bridge Street (two), Bridgend (three), Hopetoun Street and Whitburn Road.*



## High Street 1903

This early photograph is not a typical High Street arch as it shows an arch at the top of the old High Street and the majority of the later arches are at the foot of the High Street at the Glenmavis Tavern.

## Arch Description

*Triple Saxon arch, surmounted with Thistles and having suspended crowns, together with festoon work.*

The builders were; T. Watson, R Spalding, J. Adie, G. Lundells and J. Russell



## North Bridge Street 1905

The winner of the first Livingstone cup in 1905. The arch builders and supporters pose under the arch with the trophy.

### Arch Description

*Triple Saxon arch, each span surmounted by thistles, very well done, garlands of fir and flag and floral decorations.*

The builders were; R. Russell, J. Walker, John Russell, John Russell, R. Bald and D Gibb



## Hopetoun Street 1908

An arch in this style was also constructed in 1909. Another arch built by James Spiers.

### Arch Description

*A very neat four post arch over hanging the footpath. The design is Scottish Baronial in character and the whole erection is made up of paper resembling the busking as evergreens were difficult to get this year. A number of baskets of artificial flowers enhances the general effect.*

The builders were; Mr Spiers, A B White and a number of the workmen.



## 1908 and 1909 South Bridge Street and North Bridge Street Junction Five Span Arch

A five span arch was constructed at this location in 1908 and 1909. This impressive scale of this arch resulted in detailed newspaper reports.

### Arch Description

*Large five span arch, almost perfect for a Gothic design. One of the finest arches that have been erected for years. The busking itself is distinctly creditable, while the embellishments are most elaborate, yet tasteful in every way. On the top of the arches are large hearts, representing "Faith Hope and Charity", while Prince of Wales feathers and thistles, flags, crowns, hearts etc are all*

neatly arranged. Fir curtains are suspended, with the Bathgate coat-of-arms hanging in a prominent place. The utmost credit is due to the following builders on having so successfully carried through such a big undertaking.

The total breadth of the arch was sixty-nine feet and its height twenty eight feet. The designs on the top of the three largest spans were each four feet high. The groundwork of the arch and "curtains" were of spruce fir, while the ornaments were entirely composed of paper roses. The total number of these used being almost fifteen thousand. The three top designs alone aggregate at least 4,500 such roses. The shield suspended from the centre arch bears the Bathgate coat of arms on both sides being the handiwork of Mr Kerr, who deserves much credit for the taste he has displayed. The unanimous verdict of the district is that this is the finest arch that has appeared at the procession.

## INTERESTING PARTICULARS ABOUT THE PRIZE ARCH.

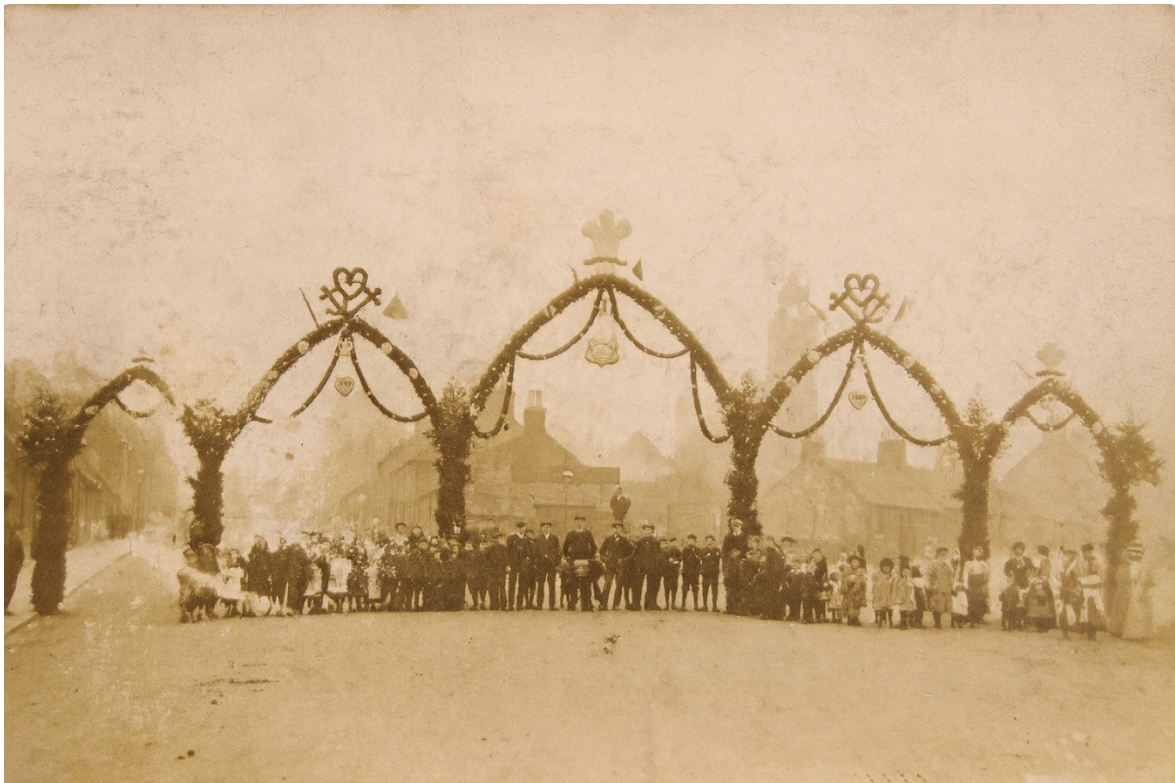
The North Bridge arch which has won the 1st prize and Livingstone Cup four years in succession, was a very worthy winner this being the first five-span arch that has been erected for the Procession. Like the other arches, it was built by several young enterprising men following different trades in the town. Apart from the making of the ornaments, the time occupied for the erection of the arch was about 26 hours, the work being started on Thursday morning, and was not completed until Friday morning. Not a little difficulty was experienced in digging the holes in which to place the supports, as they came upon the water main, and the Burgh Surveyor had to be asked to guide them in this work. In another place the diggers were faced with a large flat stone, which one of the builders dubbed an ancient "tomb".

The total expense of erecting the arch was about £9 of which £6 of was obtained by collection. It is felt that the prize-money given for the best arch is wholly inadequate there only being £1 along with the cup (which is offered each year) for the best prize. If the builders get the same support from the public that they received this year the large arch will be erected next year.

The arch was built by the following Robert Bald (captain) W Kerr (designer) Archibald Bald, Martin Bald, David Tennant, Fordyce Stewart, James Russell, George Russell, Peter Laing, and John MacDonald.



The 1908 Arch, the towns first 5 span arch



The 1909 Arch the final arch and prize winner for North Bridge Street

## Whitburn Road 1906

Notable for a revolving crown on top powered by electricity. It was also to be lit by electric light and the photograph shows a large light bulb hanging from the central arch.

### Arch Description

*Fine triple Norman Arch. On top of the centre span is a crown and lion rampant. The crown revolves and this will prove a novelty. On each of the small spans is set a small crown, while at the joining of the spans are placed beautiful painted shields. The arch is adorned with flags, thistles and rosettes. In the evening it will be lighted up electric light and sure to prove a great attraction*

The builders were; George Syme, Robert Walker, Robert Cain, Elliott Currie, S Heddon, James Walker, David Syme, A. Muldoon and John Walker



## Livery Street Arch 1911

An arch at the far end of Livery Street, which is unrecognisable when compared to the modern day street.

### Arch Description

*Three span arch; centre arch surmounted by design "Faith Hope, and Charity," side arches surmounted by Prince of Wales feathers.*

The builders were; Michael Doran, James Grier, Thos Binnie, Peter Glen, Andrew Fleming, John Fleming, Alec Beattie, William McBride and Patrick Glen



## Cochrane Street Arch 1911

Cochrane Street is perhaps the first location of the street arch. The style of arch in the photograph was first erected in 1907 and continued to 1913. 1911 was the first and only year that Cochrane Street won the Livingstone cup although they came in second and third on numerous occasions.

### Arch Description

*The "Old Town" is again the scene of some splendid arches, and thus this part of the town maintains its well-earned reputation for loyalty. The Cochrane Street arch each is one of the prettiest each year and on this occasion it equals, if it does not surpass, former specimens. It contains some excellent material for decoration, including new fretwork designs, with streamers roses, hearts etc. On the cross bar underneath the centre span are the words "Newland 's Anniversary and "Welcome Back Again"*

The builders were Andrew Glen, W Anthony, T. Vassie, W. Vassie, A Glen, Neil Yates and R. Anthony



## Drumcross Road 1919

Located at what some folk might call High Hopetoun Street; the reports are clear that it is the Drumcross Road Arch. This example was erected on the first Procession after World War One. Many Bathgate men lost their lives, surely a few arch builders amongst them and another reason for the decline in numbers in the 1920's onwards. This arch won the Livingstone Cup.

### Arch Description

*The successful arch showed great skill on the part of those responsible for its erection, each of the three spans being fittingly surmounted by a dove with olive leaf with the motto below each "Peace 1919".*

The builders were; Thomas Harris, John Harris, Alex Fernie, James Fernie, Thomas Smith, and George Paterson



## Hill Street 1930

Hill Street was a long standing arch site as it was the location of a house that John Newland had lived in. This house fell into ruin in 1899 and was demolished and replaced with the one on the right hand side of the photograph. This is one of the few arches with a female builder recorded.

### Arch Description

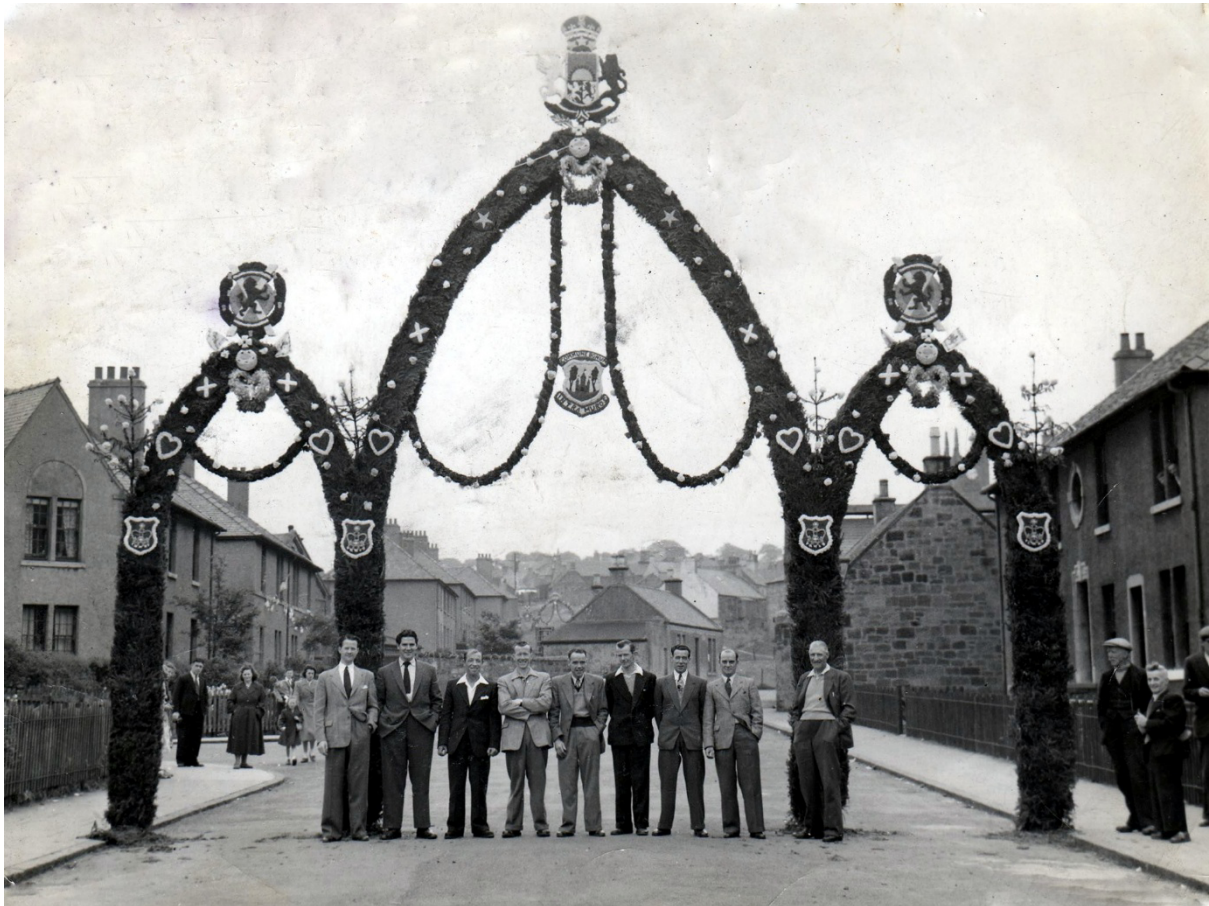
*The head pieces were of an original design with The Scottish and The St. Andrews Cross accentuated and also showing the Scottish Lion. It showed a fine appearance and was most favourably commented upon.*

The builders were; H. Erskine, J. Pitcairn, P. McKechnie, H McKechnie, W. Strathearn and Mrs Palmer



## Waverley Street Arch 1953

The year of the Queen's Coronation resulted in five street arches Waverley Street, High Street, Hill Street, Marjoribanks Street and Cochrane Street. The Coronation took place a few days before the Procession and so perhaps the arches celebrated both events. A few of the arches had crowns. This photograph shows the builders under the arch but unfortunately reports do not record the names of the builders at this time. The photograph is notable as it also shows the Hill Street arch in background, through the Central arch.

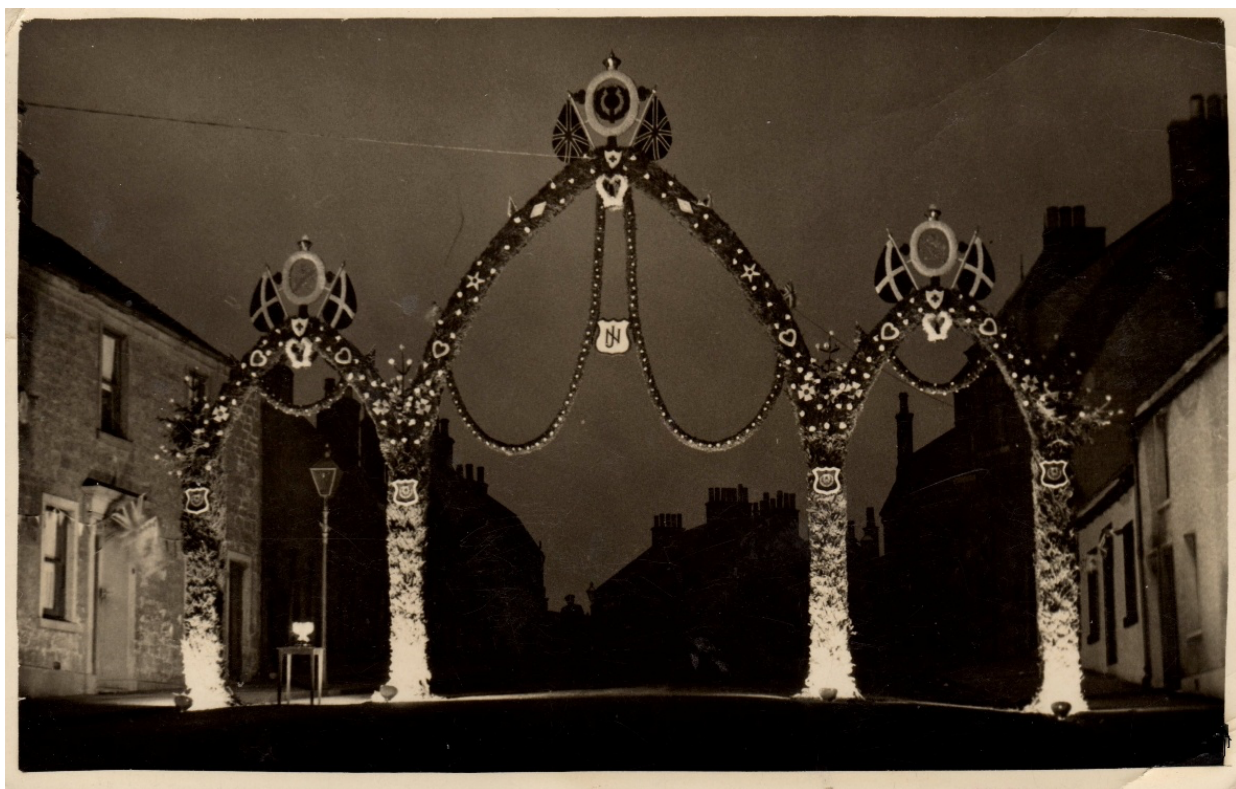


## High Street Arch 1953

The High Street arch of 1953 and 1954 was floodlit. Attempts at lighting arches had been made in the 1890s using Chinese lanterns and using electric light in 1906 and 1907. The builders were not recorded in reports. The Livingstone Cup can be seen on a table under the left side arch, reflecting the light. This was the last year the cup was presented for a street arch.

## Arch Description

*Great credit is due the arch-builders for their work in High Street, the Hill and Cochrane Street. One newcomer to the town said that he had never seen anything like the arches before and he was amazed at their size and the perfection of detailed decoration. They are indeed a credit to the men who give their time in preparing the paper flowers and greenery which cover the huge frames. An added attraction at the High Street arch this year was floodlighting, and it made a pretty picture on the evening of Procession Day*



## Hopetoun Street Arch for Queens Visit 1955

Not an arch for the Procession but for the Queens drive through Bathgate a few weeks later on her visit to West Lothian

*Arch to be erected In Hopetoun Street*

*Provost J. J. Shanks met the Bathgate Procession Committee arch builders in the Masonic Lesser Hall on Tuesday evening, when Mr Peter Small, president of the Procession Committee, presided. 'The arch builders agreed to unite forces to erect an arch on the occasion of the visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Bathgate on Saturday, July 2. Mr Small extended a welcome to the provost and said that it had been mooted by the Town Council that the Procession Committee and the arch builders might like to take part in preparing for the Royal visit. He assured the provost that the Procession Committee 'was behind the Council in every way and would do all they could to assist on that occasion. The Provost thanked Mr Small for the assurance from the committee and went on to say that many people in Bathgate had thought that the erection of an arch would be a nice idea for the Queen's visit and the Town Council were of the opinion that if an arch were erected it would be a decorative and original thing which other towns in the county did not have. The provost assured the arch builders that the Council would bear the expense of erecting the arch, although they must not run away with the Idea that they were on an unlimited expense account. He further assured them that they could count on the co-operation of the Burgh Surveyor, Mr Spalding, in connection with preparations for the building of the arch. The provost went on to ask the arch builders what they thought would be the most suitable site for the arch. and said that Her Majesty would come from Whitburn and travel by way of Whitburn Road, George Place, George Street, Hopetoun Street, High Hopetoun Street and Marjoribanks Street to the Public Park where she was to be introduced to the Provost and Magistrates. After some discussion it was decided that High Hopetoun Street would prove the most suitable site and the arch builders of High St. and The Hill are to combine forces for this occasion only. Mr James Taylor, the Procession arch convener, was appointed convener of the group who will erect the arch for the Royal visit.*

## Arch Description

*This was presented by the magnificent arch erected in High Hopetoun Street. A century of Bathgate Processions has built up a great tradition for arch building in Bathgate and this effort, in which all the arch-builders of the town co-operated, was perhaps their greatest triumph. It was of three-span Gothic design and magnificently decorated with the Union Jack, the Thistle, the Flag of St Andrew, the Crown and many other emblems. Next to the Queen and the Duke themselves it was the main talking point of the day in Bathgate.*



## 1966 North Bridge Street Compound Arch

No arches were erected in either 1964 and 1965 and it was feared that the tradition had come to an end. An arch had been erected at the traditional site in Hill Street in 1961 and 1962 but 'Newlands' House was knocked down around this time making the site unattractive for an arch. However, 1966 saw the return of an arch. A compound arch style not seen for decades on a site that had not had an arch for decades. Who were the builders? Why this site? Why this style? No detail is recorded on any of this. The arch was erected here again in 1967 but never again.

### Arch Description

*A sight to gladden the hearts of all true 'Bathgate Bairns' the procession passing under the decorative arch on North Bridge Street*



## 1971 Main Street Arch

The last arch erected in the classic period and for a time it will have seemed like it was the last one, full stop. Little detail is reported about this arch. Two views are shown. The view looking uphill shows that the old High Street has been demolished and Hill Crescent still to be built. Looking downhill each of the other buildings shown have since been demolished for various reasons.

Arch Builders were Eric Johnston and friends of the Star Inn





## 1983 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Arch

The first street arch erected since 1971 despite the determined efforts of the Procession Committee to get both the necessary permissions and a willing group of arch builders. The arch was built by members of The Green Tree Social Club



## 2016 George Street Arch

George Street has been the location of an arch throughout the 2000's. The pedestrianised street is better suited to an arch than other locations busy with traffic. Permanent foundation holes have been dug in the street. Arch building has been led by Ian Keith. Decoration and dotal production led by Carol Johnston. Local companies Link, C-urb and Saltire Scaffolding have assisted with safely manoeuvring and lifting the arch into place.

