

The Other Side of The Story

In a recent article I read, the story of Glasgow's tobacco lords. We read of Lord William Cunningham and his glorious home, we read of The Speirs, The Glassfords and The Buchanans all rich beyond any mans dreams. Dressed in their scarlet cloaks, gold topped canes and tri-covered hats they must have been a sight to see. We must not forget their wives in their silk dresses with servants to wait on them hand and foot.

Historically these men added to the wealth, importance and stature of Scotland and Glasgow. These men were products of the age, the new industrial age. One must wonder from wence came their fortunes. What price was paid so they might have silks, furs and gold topped canes . That is the other side of the story.

In 1579 an act of the Scottish Parliament was made "for punishment stang and idle beggers". This allowed land owners, factory owners to take the children of beggers into "unpaid service" a polite and politically correct term for slavery. For boys unpaid service was until age 24, in the case of girls 18 was the age. One must remember work could start at the ripe ole age of "4". Children were taken from the streets and pressed into work. The word *kidnap* comes from the term kid-nappers used to describe gangs that stole children and sold them.

To overcome a labour shortage factory owners found other ways to obtain workers. One solution was to buy children from orphanages and work houses.

The children were known as "pauper apprentices". Contracts would be signed that virtually made the children property of the factory owner. The key was being "property" A man named George Courtland would take children from workhouses, sell them for the

price of five pounds with the contract stating that if the child survived one year of work he would be paid another five pounds per head.

In the 1790's about 1/3 of the labor force were children called "Pauper Apprentices". At one mill Birch Robinson and Co., of 310 workers, 210 were pauper apprentices.

The children were locked in factories for 16 hours a day. If you were late for work you were beaten. If it was thought you might run away, you were chained to your work station. If a child was wounded or crippled at work they were set out on the street without aid to survive if they could on their own. Should you fall asleep on the job you were beaten and received no food for two days.

It is a dark tale but one that is a true part of history.