



Kathleen Connochie and Duncan MacIntyre set off on their historic Ben Nevis race

Kathleen Connochie

– a star in a golden era

Words: Hugh Dan MacLennan

In 1895, when William Swan, a Fort William barber, set off on the first recorded timed ascent and descent of Britain's highest mountain, he could not have envisaged the modern-day Ben Nevis race, which now has a field of 600 runners accepting a challenge that is not for the unfit or faint-hearted.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of races were organised on an ad hoc basis. However, it was not until 1951 that the Ben Nevis Race Association (BNRA) was founded with the intention of formalising arrangements for an annual race. Since that first field of 21 runners, the race has grown beyond all recognition and it has been run every year since with the exception of 1980 when the elements prevailed and, with competitors on the start line, the race was cancelled in the interests of safety.

The 1950s saw the emergence of four local people in particular who established themselves as legends in their own

lifetime, with their own very special place in the history of the race and Lochaber – Eddie Campbell, Brian Kearney, Jimmy Conn and Kathleen Connochie (now MacPherson). They were to follow on in the best of traditions as laid down before them by runners such as C.P. Wilson, Daniel Mulholland and Duncan MacIntyre.

The decade after the race became established in 1951 was its golden era. Local runners excelled – Brian Kearney,

Eddie Campbell and Tommy Kearney in particular, as well as Duncan "the Butcher" MacIntyre, the 1943 record-breaker.

Just four years after the race was set on a sound organisational footing by the BNRA, the event had become one of the country's outstanding marathon events and sporting challenges. An 11-strong committee looked after the event, which, affiliated to the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA), attracted more than 2,000 spectators. Twenty-seven runners started the race and just one failed to finish. But there was much more to Saturday, 3 September, 1955 than that.

It all started simply enough, according to Kathleen Connochie. No stranger to the race given her father's involvement as a medical adviser, and having the remarkable Duncan MacIntyre as a family friend, it was perhaps inevitable that she would take part in what was to be a ground-breaking run that would see her appear not only in the Guinness Book of Records, but also – much to her mother's



Duncan and Kathleen trained in secret around the Fort William area

horror – in the *News of the World!*

"We were all sitting in the house one evening just about three weeks before the race itself and talk was as ever about the arrangements," recalled Kathleen. "For no apparent reason, Duncan said to me: 'Do you think you could run the Ben race yourself?' I said 'I don't see why not!' Duncan said he'd train me and it started from there."

This was 1955, however, and the idea of a woman running in a man's race was not universally welcomed. For the next three weeks, Kathleen and Duncan trained in secret on the peat track at the back of Fort William, in the forests between Torlundy and Leanachan, and up and down the Ben itself.

As race day approached, Kathleen, who had swum Loch Linnhe in the first of a series of resurrected races in 1952 when aged 13, soon became the focus of attention. Kathleen soon assumed super-star status among her school-mates who were, she said, very supportive. "I didn't want people to know that I was running, so a lot of our training was done in secret. But in a place like Fort William, that can only go on for so long."

Within hours of the start of the race, word came through that the SAAA were forbidding Kathleen to run. Duncan MacIntyre was furious and withdrew from the race. A local outcry was in the offing. However, the race committee reconsidered and allowed Kathleen to compete, but only if she set off two minutes after the men and was accompanied throughout by a male runner. Duncan quickly agreed to join her.

The day itself was dry with a light wind. There was mist, but no snow on the summit. The one runner who failed to finish, G. Calder, managed to lose his way in the mist after half-way and did not reach the summit. He was roundly "ticked off" for not reporting to the nearest official. His predicament, however, failed to divert attention from the two highlights of the day – Eddie Campbell's fine win in one hour, 50 minutes and five seconds and Kathleen Connochie's dramatic three hours and two minutes, establishing a women's record.

Kathleen's run was unforgettable in many respects. She will never forget the surge of adrenaline as she approached the field. "I felt really fresh and we had had a great time coming down the hill. At one stage, Duncan disappeared to

go and wash himself having fallen in a bog. I know there was consternation in the field when it was announced that we had been separated. Then we passed the SAAA official on the way down and that gave Duncan and I a lot of pleasure. But really I had to feel sorry for Eddie on the day. There he was, the only man breaking two hours and no-one was interested. I still have the wash-bag I was given as a prize. It's a treasured possession."

Content with having established her record-breaking mark, Kathleen never again ran the race, although both she and her family continued to support the occasion, with her son Andrew running in it.

"I had done what I set out to do and I didn't really see any point in doing it again. It was for other people to pick up the challenge and we got a lot out of it as a family over the years. I suppose in many ways I did it for Duncan. It was fun and we have all enjoyed every minute of it."

Kathleen Connochie's dramatic contribution to the 1955 Ben Race was probably the single most important factor in the explosion of interest that was to follow. The media exposure she attracted



Newspaper coverage of the 1955 event described it as the "World's Toughest Race"

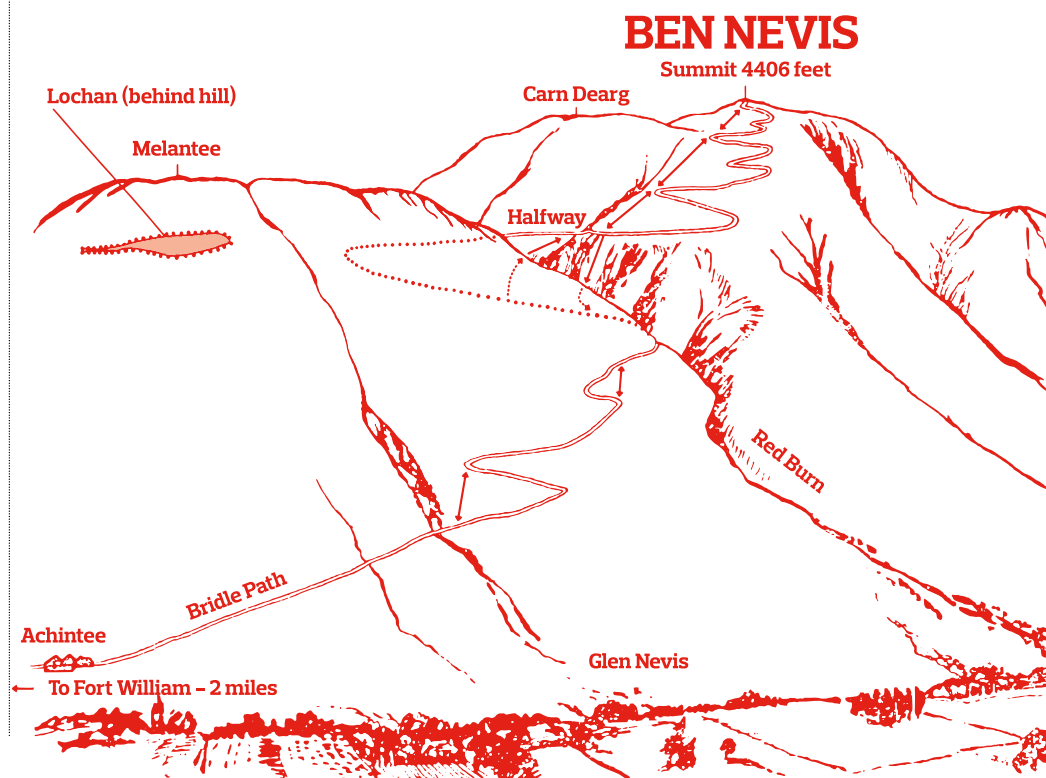


was almost certainly responsible for the fact that double the number of runners completed the course on 1 September, 1956.

Kathleen remains one of Lochaber's best-known and popular athletes. She still presents the Connochie Plaque, in honour of her family's contribution to the race, to runners achieving the phenomenal feat of completing 21 races.

She was there in September this year when local GP Finlay Wild won his eighth successive race, more than five minutes ahead of his nearest challenger among the 489 finishers. He is unbeaten since 2010.

For further information, visit www.bennevisrace.co.uk



Words: Dr Colin McIlroy

From Edinburgh to Italy, by way of Africa and the US, her colourful journey through life helped to shape the prolific novelist and poet's work



THE INTERNATIONAL STYLE OF

Muriel Spark

In her enchanting 1992 autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, Muriel Spark outlines an early sense of destiny, of an almost Calvinistic predestination imbued by the teacher who inspired her most famous character. Says Spark: "Miss Kay predicted my future as a writer in the most emphatic terms. I felt I hardly had much choice in the matter". And Miss Kay, model for Jean Brodie, was not alone in recognising the literary style of the young Muriel.

The 1930 Gillespie's High School Magazine contained an unprecedented five poems from Muriel, as did *The Door of Youth*, a collection of the finest poetry from across Edinburgh's schools. And these are just some of the items included in the Edinburgh section of our forthcoming exhibition *The International Style of Muriel Spark*, as we take visitors on a journey through the locations Spark called home. From Edinburgh to Southern Rhodesia, to London, New York, Rome, and finally Tuscany, there was one common denominator: she wrote.

These early foundations for literary success were built upon when Spark left school. Also on display is the certificate from the evening classes that Spark attended in Commercial Correspondence and Précis Writing at Heriot-Watt College in the evenings of 1934-35. This certificate represents a pivotal moment in the development of Spark's fictional aesthetic. Speaking of these classes, she notes, "I love economical prose, and would always try to find the briefest way to express a meaning". It was an approach which would become one of the hallmarks of her writing style.

In 1936 Muriel began working at the up-market department store William Small's, at 106 Princes Street. Here her love of fashion was to flourish, and she "made as many [purchases] as I could afford, for I always cared for charming clothes". In addition to access to cutting-edge fashion, Muriel spent the time honing her writer's instincts, noting "I am sure that my faculties of character-observation were somewhat sharpened by the experience of Small's".

Spark left Edinburgh for Southern Rhodesia in August 1937 to marry Sydney



Muriel, age 10, riding her bike

● A lifelong interest in spying, espionage, surveillance, eavesdropping, and blackmail permeated her fiction ●

Oswald Spark. Her son Robin was born there, but her marriage did not last, and she returned to Britain in 1944. Nevertheless, on the ship to Africa, Spark wrote the first of a trail of evocatively lyrical poems that trace her voyage, and punctuate her travels within Africa. Titles such as *Three Thoughts in Africa* and *The Victoria Falls*, and locations including Madeira, Capetown, and "Victoria Falls. N. Rhodesia", tell of a reflective yet restless

quest for experience.

But perhaps the most delightfully insightful gaze into her time in Africa is contained in the correspondence from decades later between Spark and Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing. They lived close to each other in Southern Rhodesia, but didn't meet until many years later. "How did you get there?" Lessing asks,

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Left: Muriel Spark in 1965

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"how and why were you there. You must see it is a fairly improbable combination, Muriel Spark and Southern Rhodesia." For her part, Spark, with typical economy, reveals "I had secretarial jobs. I preferred Bulawayo to Salisbury [...] I won a poetry competition [...] I was really very young and rather dumb. I would have loved to meet you". In addition to the Lessing correspondence, the Africa section of the exhibition will tell of how highly regarded she was as a poet – and as a stenographer – during her years in Africa. No documentary evidence has yet been found to support her assertion that she was "rather dumb", nor is it likely to be.

Having returned to Britain in 1944, Spark worked for the Foreign Office in black propaganda. A lifelong interest in spying, espionage, surveillance, eavesdropping, and blackmail subsequently permeated her fiction.

She fought to establish herself as a writer in post-war London. Read the original letters detailing her volcanic fall-out with Dr Marie Stopes while Spark was editor of *The Poetry Review*. She accused Stopes of being "outrageously

impudent [...] My private affairs are no concern of yours and your malicious interest in them seems to me to be most unwholesome [...] your statements are libellous".

When she began her study of the poet John Masefield, Spark arranged to visit, saying "I could be recognised by my green coat, small stature, and (as I am told) bewildered air". In spite of any alleged bewilderment, her visit to Masefield was crucial, described by Spark as "one of the happiest days of my life". Unlike many of the male writers and poets Spark had encountered, Masefield spoke to her as an equal, as a fellow writer: "All experience is good for an artist," he told her. This was borne out with her victory in the *Observer* short story competition in 1951 with *The Seraph and the Zambesi*. She continued to write poetry, but this was the beginning of a shift towards the prose fiction for which she would gain renown.

Her ceaseless work-rate never flagged, and despite a breakdown brought on by malnutrition and the appetite suppressant Dexedrine, she earned the praise of T.S. Eliot and the support of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. Her magnificent run of early novels from *The*

Comforters in 1957, culminating in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in 1961, gained her an international reputation, and in 1962 she began to spend much of her time in New York City.

Renting a suite at the Beaux-Arts Hotel in Manhattan, and writing in the offices of the *New Yorker* magazine, Spark embraced the glamour of the New York publishing and party scene. You can read

● In addition to glamorous parties, the Eternal City seemed to cast a long shadow over Spark's literary style ●

first-hand the praise she received from her publisher Blanche Knopf, the writers John Updike, Greene and Waugh, alongside plaudits from former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

And her address book, with details of writers such as W. H. Auden and James Baldwin, alongside high-end stores such as Elizabeth Arden, and Bergdorf Goodman, illustrate the confluence of her life and literary styles. Her famous hoarding tendencies mean you can see the cheques she wrote for PanAm flights, and numerous extravagant generosityes. Such wonderful pieces of ephemera, alongside the telegram she received while waiting to sail home on the SS *Queen Mary*, illuminate a lifestyle as far removed from her London bedsit existence as it's possible to imagine.

From 1965 to 1966 Spark increasingly divided her time between New York and Rome, before settling in the Italian capital in the summer of '66. The Rome years represent Spark at the height of her glamour and fully established in her international literary reputation, balancing a lifestyle of revelry with a consistent output of the highest order.

The archive reveals invites from presidents, royals, and dignitaries, and personal correspondence with prime ministers, writers, and artists. All of which is perhaps best summarised by

"Where there is no vision the people perish."

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TO EVERYBODY

The Artist has canvas,
 The Dreamer has dreams,
 A book is the Scholar's possession.
 A viol, and organ,
 A fiddle, or harp,
 Are the things which delight a Musician.
 The Scribe he has offices
 Filled full with pens
 And sits and writes all the day through,
 But I put zeal and zest
 In the things I love best,
 'Tis a verse which I give up to you.

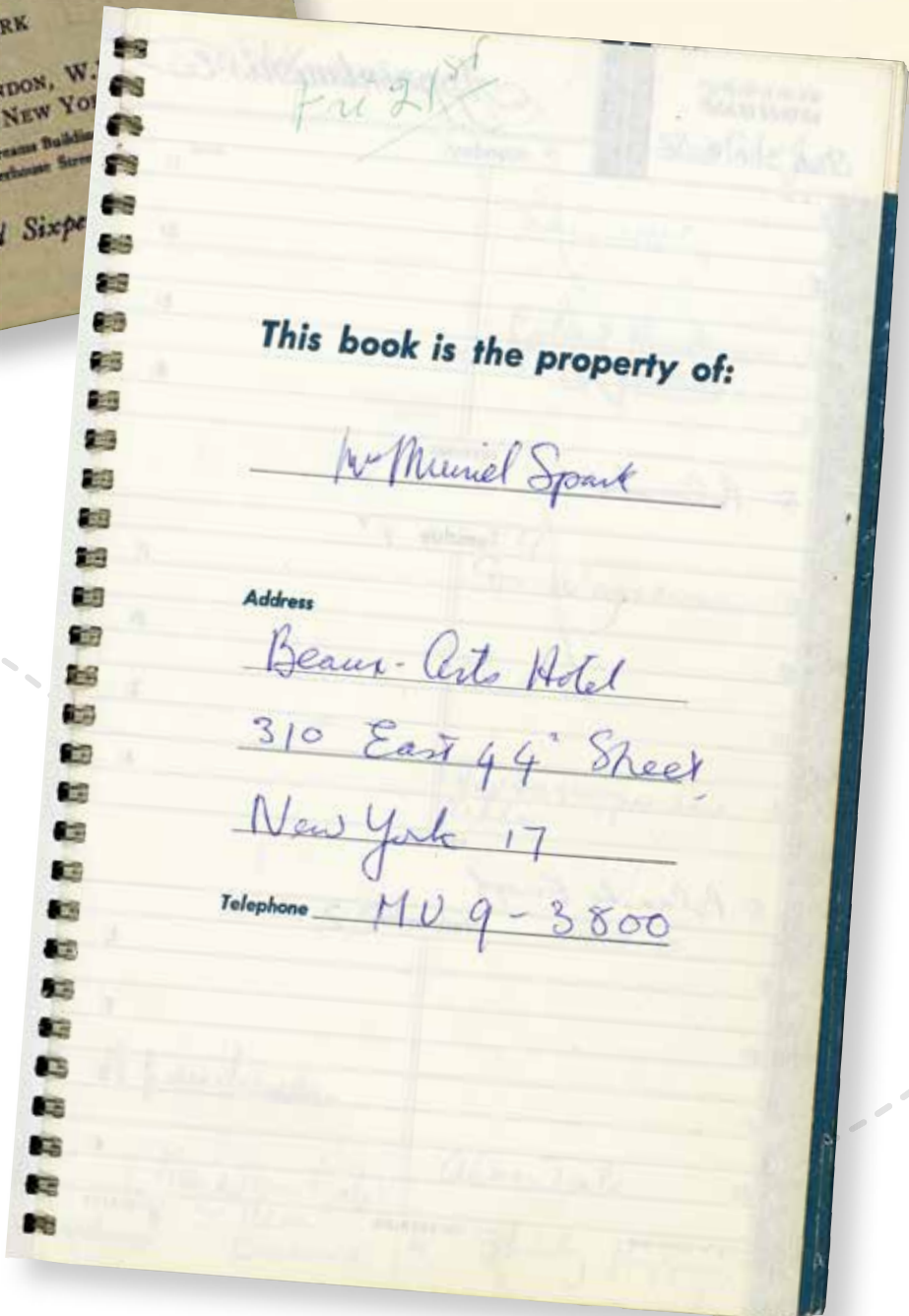
MURIEL CAMBERG [12]
 James Gillespie's High School
 for Girls.

WOMAN OF WORDS

Clockwise from left: *The Poetry Review* which was edited by Spark, a poem written in 1930 while at school, and a notebook from Muriel's time at the Beaux-Arts Hotel, New York

Miriam Margolyes, who starred in the BBC's 1975 adaptation of Spark's 1963 novel *The Girls of Slender Means*. Having attended a party at Spark's apartment, she writes: "For me it was a particularly special occasion, infinitely glamorous, socially devastating, for I have never met all in one go such a number of distinguished people. I felt honoured and privileged".

One such distinguished person was Mrs Pat Nixon, First Lady and wife of U.S. President Richard, who extended an invitation to meet at the Grand Hotel in Rome. By the time of the president's resignation following the Watergate scandal, Spark had already completed her 1974 novel *The Abbess of Crewe*, and you can only marvel at the wonderfully reductive comic distillation of the fall of the leader of the free world being



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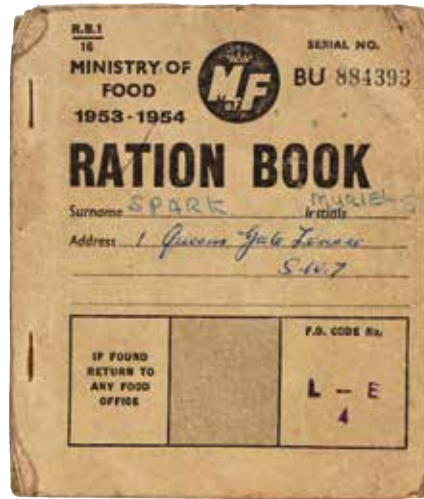
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imaginatively transfigured to a convent in Crewe.

In addition to glamorous parties and glittering correspondence, the Eternal City seemed to cast a long shadow over Spark's literary style. This was not a departure, but rather an evolution brought on via the influence of the French *Nouveau Roman* writers such as Nathalie Sarraute and Alain Robbe-Grillet, especially evident in *The Driver's Seat*, *Not to Disturb*, and *The Hothouse by the East River*. Spark's literary style was to leave the interiority of her characters blank, leaving readers – and even the narrator – to surmise their motivations: "Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?" asks the narrator in *The Driver's Seat*.

Across these three novels, and as with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, time is either non-linear or present tense, placing reader and the protagonist in "the eternal now", in a purgatorial stand-off between past and future. It's as though the Eternal City itself has infiltrated Spark's writing consciousness. The results are her most disturbing and unique works; books which both embody her writing style across her career, while also defining its furthest and most experimental stylistic limits.

Notions of eternity even populate her correspondence during this period. Patricia Highsmith, famous for writing *The Talented Mister Ripley*, asks whether Spider – the cat she gave to Spark – is now in need of a home. Spark's reply, that "Spider [is] safe with me forever", dashes Highsmith's hopes. Even in a telegram, the weight of time, finality, and eternity coalesce in the single word "forever".



Spark's ration book from 1953

Our exploration of *The International Style of Muriel Spark* concludes in Tuscany where she spent the last 30 years of her life with Penelope Jardine, her closest friend. The original handwritten manuscripts on display in the Tuscany section of the exhibition include *Curriculum Vitae*, alongside the handwritten offer from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis – then an editor at Doubleday – for world-wide rights to the book. Muriel politely declined.

Spark wrote "To me, a famous writer's house is irresistible; I find sheer magic in the rooms".

Ironically, this was Penelope's house, but Muriel was at home here, and the stability allowed her to continue writing until shortly before her death, aged 88, in Florence in 2006.

 **The International Style of Muriel Spark runs from 8 Dec 2017 to 13 May 2018 at George IV Bridge, Edinburgh**

ONE HUNDRED YEARS – A CELEBRATION

A year-long programme of events and activities is being planned for 2018 to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Muriel Spark.

Organised jointly by the Library and Creative Scotland, *Muriel Spark 100* promises to be a fitting tribute to one of Scotland's most important novelists.

Creative Scotland is offering grants of up to £1,500 to help artists and groups develop new work inspired by Spark's writing as part of the centenary year.

Events already planned as part of the programme include the publication of new editions of all 22 of her novels; an international academic conference exploring different aspects of her writing; a walking tour of the places that inspired her in Edinburgh and a series of BBC radio programmes in which leading Scottish writers reflect on her achievements.

Muriel Spark 100 Chair and Creative Scotland Head of Literature, Publishing and Languages, Jenny Niven, said: "The centenary of Dame Muriel Spark's birth is both a landmark moment and an unparalleled opportunity to permanently influence the way in which this leading figure of Scotland's cultural history features in the public imagination."

More information is available at www.murielspark100.com

MURIEL SPARK
100

THE PRIME OF SCOTTISH WRITING

Lost Glasgow:

The Changing Face of Charing Cross

Words: Fergus Mason

Glasgow's Charing Cross, it has to be said, is not a pretty place. A major motorway interchange, it is cut in two by more than 10 lanes of traffic. Earlier this year plans were unveiled to cover a stretch of the M8 motorway at the Cross – to 'heal the wound' opened up when the road was constructed in the 1960s. For much of its history, however, Charing Cross was a bustling crossroads between the city centre and Glasgow's fashionable West End – a fact preserved in the Library's vast Moving Image and Map collections.

Today Charing Cross is defined by the motorway which bisects it – but for more than a century it sat at the edge of the city. In the early 19th century the modern Cross began to take shape – at the convergence of 'Saughyhall Street', Sandyford Road and the road 'from Woodside to Glasgow'. By the 1930s it sat at the heart of a metropolis of over a million people – an interchange criss-crossed by tramcars in the shadow of John James Burnet's iconic Charing Cross Mansions. At the heart of the Cross during this period was the Grand Hotel. Constructed in the 1880s, the Grand famously played host to thousands of Glaswegian wedding receptions – including my own aunt's on St Patrick's Day in 1961.

During the first half of the 20th century Charing Cross changed little. In the post-war period, however, planners forged ahead with proposals for an inner city ring road to ease congestion. Construction of the north and west flanks of the ring road began in the late 1960s – and Charing Cross was in the firing line. Despite the best efforts of campaigners,



Charing Cross from 25 inch Ordnance Survey [1958]

the Grand Hotel was demolished in 1969 to make way for the Kingston Bridge approach. The Cross was hollowed out – and when construction completed in 1970 the Charing Cross and St George's Mansions were left facing one another across a chasm.

The Kingston Bridge opened in June 1970. Four years later the *Economist* reported that Glasgow was 'almost the only city [in the UK] to put its motorway plans into effect unaltered; and it has few regrets'. Congestion and pollution, it claimed, had all been dramatically reduced. But its assessment was optimistic. Amid widespread popular protest, plans for the east and south flanks of the inner ring road were abandoned in 1980. At

the opening of the bridge in June 1970 protestors carried banners reading 'This Scar Will Never Heal'. Ultimately, as planners continue to mull over proposals to 'heal the wound' some 50 years later,

their concern has proved justified.

Footage of Charing Cross in its heyday can be accessed through the Library's Moving Image Archive – now housed at Kelvin Hall, a short walk from Charing Cross. If you have any questions, please visit our website or contact us at movingimage@nls.uk. The

National Library's Maps website

has more than 180,000 digitised maps and a range of interactive features. For access to tens of thousands of digital newspaper articles, please visit us in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

