

The Galoshins

When I was a child in the Vale of Leven in the early to mid 1950s, at Hallowe'en we used to "go out in the galoshins" or guisers (in fancy dress and complete with turnip lanterns), around neighbouring houses, doing a party piece in return for nuts, apples and sometimes a few coppers. While the guisers are well known, the term galoshins (or goloshans) is not, as the custom was specific to certain parishes, and in earlier times took place at the end of the year.



Apparently, around new year, a play, which was similar to English mummers' plays, was put on by young lads. Its form varied in detail from place to place but in the Vale of Leven at the beginning of this century the characters included Doctor Brown, who was "*the best old doctor in the town, I can mend a broken leg or put a plaster on your head*"; Bob Slasher, with his sword and pistol; and "*wee Johnny Funny, I'm the man that takes the money, All copper, no brass, Bad money won't pass*".

In ***The Old Vale and Its Memories*** a report of such a play is given:

"Only once did I hear a troupe of Goloshans in the Vale go through their entertainment. It was a pretty crude performance, the artistes being backward and cowed,

doubtless due to their alleged efforts not being too welcome in houses which they had previously visited. Had the Goloshans selected a season other than round about the close of the year, they might have evoked more enthusiasm. The truth is that the Vale housewives tried to have their homes spotlessly clean-especially at that period-and they simply were not going to allow a when laudies wi' glaury feet to come in and make a mess of their kitchens.”

Of course, New Year was the big Scottish family festival. (Up to the 1960s, Christmas Day was a working day, with shops and factories open.) Everything had to be clean for Ne'erday, as it was known. We had a neighbour in Burnbrae who used to strip down to his underwear on Hogmanay and wash his clothes in the kitchen sink, so that he would be clean when the new year arrived.

In earlier days the Bonhill band had paraded round the town at new year and the ***Epilogue to the Old Vale and its Memories*** informs us that “as soon as they were dressed, bairns started to peel oranges because on Ne'erday porridge was not made...in the Vale Ne'erday was the happiest day of the whole year; everybody wished everybody “A Guid New Year an' mony o' them”, and it was the only day in the 365 on which one could take the liberty of calling at a friend's house before or shortly after midday and then a glass of wine, currant bun* and seed cake were offered, while the younger folk... had a glass of ginger wine“.

* *Robert Louis Stevenson described Scotch bun as a dense black substance, inimical to life.*