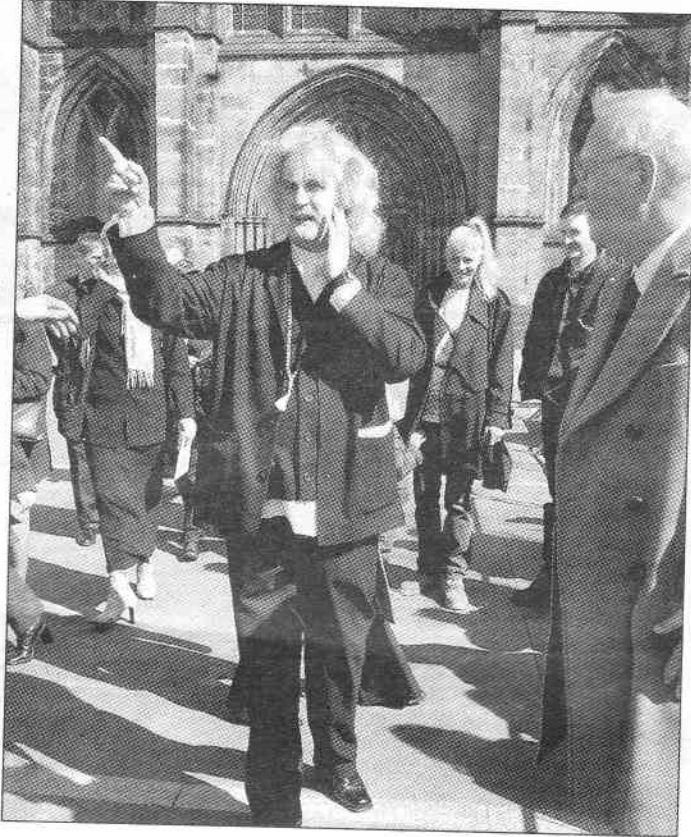




Sandy Strang



SAYING GOODBYE IN STYLE: Slim Jim Baxter's funeral



LAUGHTER: Billy Connolly at Jimmy Logan's final farewell

FUNERALS should be joyous celebrations of life.

"Sausages are the boys", declaimed Billy Connolly from the pulpit, borrowing the Logan catchphrase, as the glinting spring sun cut through the Gothic pillars of Glasgow Cathedral. Gales of laughter.

How utterly appropriate that the career of Jimmy Logan, mirth-maker, his coffin theatrically draped in a Saltire, was being celebrated in merriment.

Emphatic

How life-affirmingly apt that the joy was being accentuated amid the sadness of the departing of one who for 65 years of dignified courage, resilience and thespian ability had been such a life-exalting, Road-to-Damascus inspiration to so many aspiring talents.

Ronald Bryden, the theatre critic, used to say that the trick was to make your life into a world art so that your death completed it perfectly. Not many of us are going to manage that, but living powerfully in a style does seem to make even dying stylish.

Tom Fleming spoke for us all: "Well done, Jimmy, we salute you and we will miss you."

Slim Jim also shuffled off this mortal coil in fitting style. The Baxter valediction was a marvelously emphatic statement of Scottish celebration. Tears there surely were – bosom buddy Alex Willoughby inconsolably distraught – but there was also much laughter, joy and thanksgiving for the life of unequivocally the greatest footballing talent Scotland has ever produced, which had given so much

pleasure to so many of us. "The man whose feet were made of gold, even if the rest of him was made of clay, the man who lived on his own terms – but the biggest risks he took were to himself – the man who never forgot his roots and who even laughed in a Fife accent," said Willie McIlvanney. A characteristically trenchant, rivetingly honest, wholly and wholesomely Scottish eulogy. A rousingly apposite send-off.

Further back, the funerals of John P Mackintosh at Gifford and Hugh McDiarmid at Langholm were similarly great social statements. Life-enhancing leave-takings where everyone seemed to turn their loss

into pride. So much more than mere cocktail parties for the geriatric set, as Ralph Richardson once dubbed memorial services.

But old-style religious funerals, with lusty singing of The Lord's My Shepherd and The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended accompanied by a comfortingly recognisable reading from The Bible and a short clerical address, seem fast disappearing.

No more Sibelius and Elgar. Instead the pre-service secular organ rounds to some of departed Davie's favourite ballads or The Beatles' melancholy Yesterday. We're then subjected to a series of home-spun tributes, schmaltzy, egotistical

eulogies, punctuated by quotations of numbing banality owing more to Cartland, Strong and Francis Gay than to the King James Bible. Diana-fest stuff, crass beyond satire.

Another modernist affront is the cult of mourning as a pageant.

That post-Hillsborough mawkish circus where thousands who cannot all possibly be even remotely friends or relatives of the deceased clutch each other, sob direct their bemused toddlers towards some shrine to deposit their wee posies of flowers.

Ended

Vicious emotional bandwagging it is, unseemly, invalid, essentially dishonest.

Scots know how to make a grand exit

By George, census is Big Brother bother

IT'S census sensitivity time. Is one alone in having qualms about Sunday's exercise?

Take the upbeat "we're all counting on you" PR spiel about it being vital to enable the Government and Scottish Executive to plan ahead.

Are they not geared to doing that on their own, without any pretence of collusion with the punters? Don't they accord with Churchill's

definition of political ability as the capacity to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next week, month and year - and the ability to later explain why it didn't?

There's a further rub. Aren't we being pryed-on enough as is, with half a million CCTV spy cameras in daily use? Did you know that on average you're likely to appear onscreen, unwittingly, 500 times

every week? How much control do you reckon you have over phone-tapping and e-mail scanning?

Meanwhile, begrudgingly, I'll plough through the 20 pages in the full knowledge that doing one's civic duty means surrendering more of the few vestiges of personal privacy remaining. Orwell old son, you weren't wrong. Big Brother's growing ever bigger.

entially dishonest.

That marvellous lady of letters Naomi Mitchison once asserted that in Scottish culture nothing beats a good-going funeral.

We've experienced a fine few splendid, life-affirming ones of late.

Let's preserve our distinctive Scottish heritage here. "Smashin' in't it", as Jimmy Logan himself was oft wont to say. Grand lives, grandly ended.