

# The power of three...

by Gordon  
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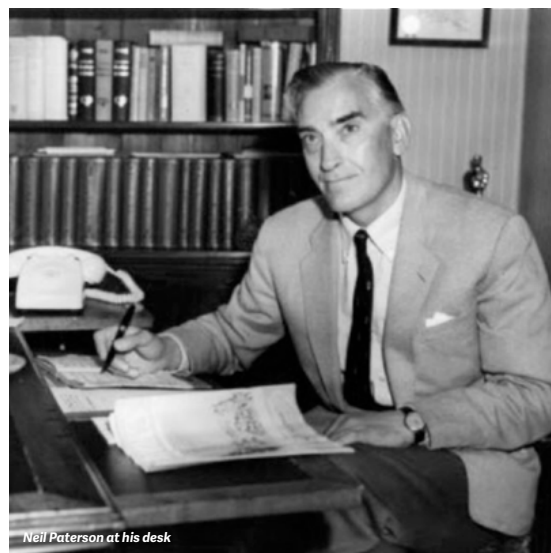


Neil Paterson in action  
for Dundee United

THIS MONTH'S apparently eclectic column is inspired by a recent manifestation of the *Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon* – sometimes also known as the frequency or recency illusion – in communications between *iScot Towers* in Helensburgh and our Dundee satellite, aka 'my hoose!' When, for the third time in as many months, a potential story being discussed led to me saying, "But surely everybody knows that already?", and Ken replying, "Well I didnae!", I concluded that the 'power of three' was trying to tell me something. And so, dear reader, we have three superficially unrelated tales to tell this month...

#### And the winner is...

Footballers are always big news, even when they're not actually playing – witness the stooshies caused by certain players breaking their Covid-19 protocols recently. Many people regard them, unfairly in my humble opinion, as overpaid prima donnas who spend too much time acting and trying to con referees instead of getting on with the game. There are even high-profile examples of players who have indeed gone on to become successful actors – Eric Cantona, for example, has now appeared in around 30 films while Vinnie Jones is now up around the 75-film mark! Scottish football players don't really feature on any list of successful actors – anybody remember Graeme Souness's woefully self-conscious cameo performance as



Neil Paterson at his desk

himself in *Boys from the Blackstuff*? But Scottish football can actually boast an Oscar winner – probably the only footballer in the world to win one – in Neil Paterson, former captain of Dundee United.

Neil was born in Greenock on Hogmanay 1915 but was brought up in Banff where his father was a solicitor. Initially he intended to follow his father into the legal profession but, after graduating from the University of Edinburgh, he realised that what he actually wanted to do was play football. After spells with Buckie Thistle and Leith Athletic, he joined Dundee United in 1936 and, despite electing to play as an amateur, was quickly named team captain – the first amateur captain of a professional football club! During the 1936/37 season he played 26 times, scoring 10 goals, including a hat-trick against Forfar Athletic in a 5-0 victory. As an amateur player he was automatically released at the end of the season, though he did play one more game in the following season when United were short of players for a game against St Bernard's. His brief but successful senior football career was then over at the age of only 21, and he turned his attention to building a career in sports journalism with the DC Thomson organisation in Dundee.

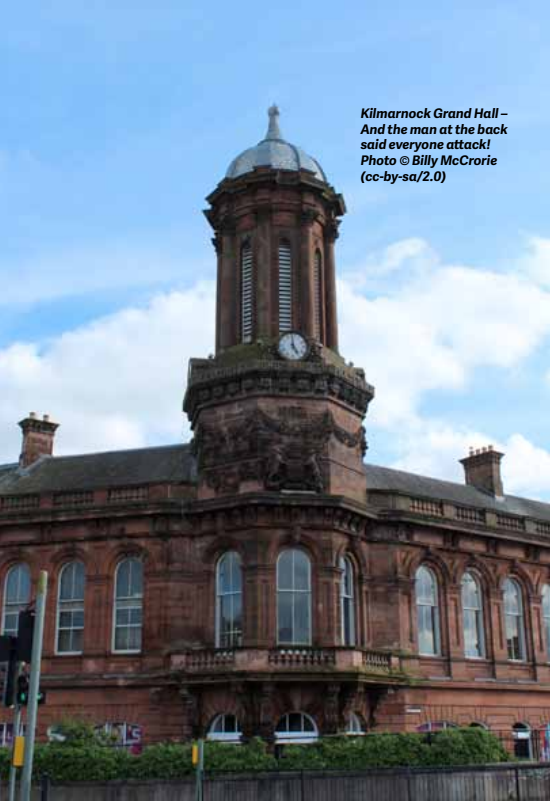
As with most young men of his generation, Neil's fledgling career was interrupted by the Second World War. He joined the navy, rising to the rank of Lieutenant, and survived a direct hit on *HMS Vanessa* in 1941. After the war he embarked on a freelance writing career, winning awards for some novels and short stories. One such story, *Scotch Settlement*, was adapted for the 1953 film *The Kidnappers* which became the eighth most popular UK film the following year. But that was only a warm-up for what was to come. Neil increasingly turned his attention to writing screenplays and, in 1959, he hit the jackpot when his adaptation of John Braine's *Room at the Top* won him the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Not that he picked an easy year – the all-time epic film *Ben Hur* won a record breaking 11 Oscars but was denied an expected 12th when Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis announced Neil Paterson's *Room at the Top* screenplay as the winner, securing his, and Dundee United's, place in cinematic history. In true unassuming style however, Neil didn't attend the ceremony and, according to family legend, didn't even mention the Oscar win at the breakfast table the following day!

Neil lived out his later years in Crieff, where he died in 1995 at the age of 79. He maintained that his proudest achievement in life was captaining Dundee United, and he apparently used his famous Oscar statuette as a doorstop! Last year, his family gifted a scrapbook of Neil's early life and football career to Dundee United where it is now on permanent display at Tannadice Park. So, there we are, the story of Neil Paterson, the talented Scottish footballer who won an Oscar and captained the World-Famous Dundee United FC, but surely you all knew that, right?



A fine  
doorstop!

Neil didn't attend  
the ceremony  
and, according  
to family legend,  
didn't even  
mention the  
Oscar win at  
the breakfast  
table the  
following  
day!

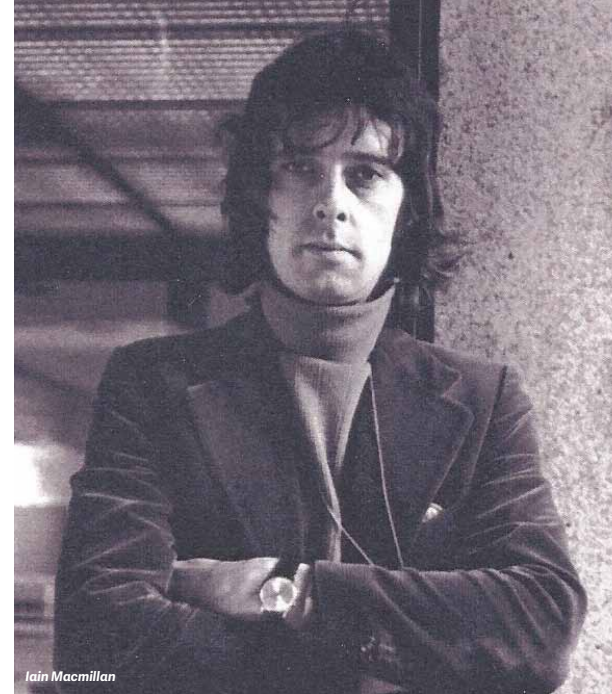


**Kilmarnock Grand Hall – And the man at the back said everyone attack!**  
Photo © Billy McCrorie (cc-by-sa/2.0)

### From Abbey Road to Visocchi's in the Ferry...

Not only were The Beatles the greatest band of all time, they also had some right good album covers! From the moody monochromatic simplicity of Robert Freeman's *With the Beatles* to the busy kaleidoscopic madness of Peter Blake's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the band experimented with imagery almost as much as music. Freeman pulled off his iconic half-shadow image in a Bournemouth hotel corridor in less than 30 minutes, for which he was paid £75. Four years later, Blake would take considerably longer to assemble the 57 photographs and associated artwork in his design, leading to a total cost in excess of £3000! That extravagance was countered the following year when *The Beatles*, more commonly known as the *White Album*, was released in a plain white sleeve with *The Beatles* embossed, also in white, slightly squint in the lower right quadrant on the front. Music aficionados of the time must've been wondering what was to come next, and they only had a year to wait to find out... (OK, there was the cartoon cover of *Yellow Submarine* in between, but nobody would count that!)

In September 1969 The Beatles released their last-recorded album, simply titled *Abbey Road* and named after the recording studios at 3 Abbey Road, London, which had been their home-from-home since their first audition there in 1962. The distinction "last-recorded" is made because the album *Let It Be* was released a year later, in 1970, even though it had been recorded prior to *Abbey Road* – the *Let It Be* sessions are widely recognised as the time when The Beatles began to implode, hence their reluctance to get the album finished and ready for release. *Abbey Road* is many critics' choice as the finest Beatles' album and its cover photograph is viewed by many as the most famous Beatles' image ever. Well, this iconic image was taken by another unassuming Scot, Iain Macmillan, from Carnoustie.



Iain Macmillan

Iain Macmillan was born in Carnoustie in 1938 and, after attending Dundee High School, had a brief spell as a trainee manager in the jute industry. After moving to London to study photography in 1958, his photographic career took off during the early 1960s with commissions from major newspapers and also gallery work. One project, *The Book of London*, brought him into contact with Yoko Ono, who would later introduce Iain to John Lennon who then invited him to take the cover photo for *Abbey Road*. Paul McCartney is credited with having the outline idea for the shot, and Iain then planned how best to achieve it. It wasn't rocket science – he decided he could get the desired image by climbing a 10-foot stepladder in the middle of the road! Enlisting the help of a solitary policeman, the *Abbey Road* traffic was stopped just long enough for the four Beatles to walk over the zebra crossing and back three times while Iain clicked his camera once per crossing – six shots and less than 15 minutes from start to finish! McCartney selected image number five as the best because they're all in step and, et voilà, one iconic album cover was born! Iain also photographed one of the street signs, which was then used as the back-cover image. His fee? £500 all in – bargain! Seven weeks later the album was released, and The Beatles ceased to exist...

Iain, still only in his very early 30s, continued to work with John and Yoko for another few years. He even lived with them for a while when they invited him out to New York to work on various projects, one of the most famous being the cover design for their classic 1971 single *Happy Xmas (War Is Over)*. Through these connections Iain also worked with many other artists, including the Rolling Stones and Kenny Rogers, before returning to the UK in the mid-70s to teach photography part-time at a college in Stoke-on-Trent. He later moved back to Carnoustie after the death of his mother, living quietly and modestly, though he would return to *Abbey Road* in 1993 to recreate his famous image, this time featuring only Paul McCartney and his Old English Sheepdog, for the cover of the *Paul Is Live* album. Iain's own canine affections were reserved for his faithful collie dog, Mac, who would accompany

him on his regular taxi excursions to his favourite restaurant, Visocchi's in Broughty Ferry, where he would sit quietly at his usual table enjoying his Italian meal, or just a coffee, before returning to Carnoustie. He died in 2006 aged 67, and his work continues to be exhibited worldwide. At a retrospective of his work in Dundee in 2010, Yoko Ono provided a lovely quote – "I am so glad that Iain is getting some recognition. He was an incredible photographer." So, there's another one – Iain Macmillan, the brilliant Scottish photographer who created one of the most iconic of The Beatles' album covers, *Abbey Road*. But, again, surely you all knew that already, right?

### Are you ready Steve...

First, that unmistakably frenetic drumbeat intro, then the famous spoken lines checking that the other members of the band are ready too, and finally the screamed "Alright fellas, let's go!" before the driving guitar and pulsating bass line kicks in – it's 1973, and it's, it's the *Ballroom Blitz*! Sweet's lead singer, Brian Connolly was one of the most recognisable figures of the glam rock era, with his carefully coiffured mane of sleek blonde hair and platform shoes. But, what's the Scottish connection in this little trip down rock and roll memory lane? Well, actually, there's two...

The band had formed in 1968 when Connolly, drummer Mick Tucker and bassist Steve Priest invited guitarist Andy Scott to complete their line-up. After a few false starts, they were introduced to the prolific writers of the early 70s, Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman – in 1973 and 1974 alone 'Chinnichap' were responsible for 19 Top-40 singles in the UK, including five number ones, from artists such as Suzi Quatro, Mud, Smokie, and Sweet. Despite the bubblegum pop nature of their first few hit records,

*The Abbey Road traffic was stopped just long enough for the four Beatles to walk over the zebra crossing and back three times while Iain clicked his camera once per crossing*

*Sweet in their glam rock heyday!*



Beatles album covers even made it onto postage stamps!



they were actually a hard rock band at heart, only adopting their glam rock personas as a way of standing out from the crowd and, wherever Sweet played live there was usually mayhem. In various interviews Andy Scott has recalled that their scariest moment was actually in Glasgow, when he and Brian fell off the stage and were being 'body surfed' through the crowd when he saw a couple of pairs of scissors coming out of handbags, with their precious locks being the target for the



Beatles, Sweet and Dundee United – the power of 3!  
Photo © Gordon Craigie



Mark McManus and Brian Connolly

Upon leaving school, Brian joined the Merchant Navy after his colour blindness prevented him from realising his real ambition to join the Royal Navy. It was while going through the navy application process that Brian discovered he had been adopted and that his birth name was actually Connolly, which he would revert to soon afterwards. But, once again, poor health would intervene and he was discharged from the Merchant Navy after only a year when he collapsed with a stomach ulcer. He was then briefly a student at Harrow Technical College but was clearly much more interested in his fledgling music career and was soon thrown out due to his poor attendance record. That music career was starting to accelerate as he built his reputation playing with various local bands before joining the semi-professional Wainright's Gentlemen as a replacement for singer Ian Gillan, who would later front Deep Purple. When Brian and drummer Mick Tucker then decided to leave Wainright's Gentlemen in 1967 and form their own band, The Sweetshop, they recruited bassist Steve Priest and guitarist Frank Torpey to complete the line-up. The following year, 1968, they shortened their name to The Sweet – later it would be shortened again to simply Sweet! – and, after Andy Scott had replaced Torpey in 1970, success quickly followed with their first hit single, *Funny Funny*, in 1971.



Brian Connolly memorial plaque  
Photo © Russell Trebor (cc-by-sa/2.0)

young female souvenir hunters! More memorably, in January 1973 the band played at Kilmarnock's Grand Hall and were forced to leave the stage, fortunately unharmed, as bottles and other missiles were flying – but, on the upside, this incident provided the inspiration for... *Ballroom Blitz*!

But that's not the only Scottish connection. Lead singer Brian Connolly was born in 1945 in Govanhill, Glasgow, but didn't have the best of starts in life. He was apparently abandoned by his single mother when he was very young, after contracting meningitis, but was fostered and eventually adopted by Jim and Helen McManus to be raised in Blantyre. It was his older stepbrother, Mark, who taught him to play guitar and, when the family moved to London in 1957, young Brian started to take part in talent contests and perform regularly around local venues. Hang on a minute, Mark McManus? Aye, the very same, Taggart himself!

*They weren't successful because they were Scottish, but they were successful and Scottish*

Fame and fortune beckoned as the band notched up hit after hit during the 70s, like *Blockbuster*, *Hellraiser*, *Fox on the Run*, *Action*, and many more. Ironically, one of their most famous songs, *Love is Like Oxygen* – which featured in the 1978 Joan Collins' film *The Stud* – was also the last record to feature Brian as the lead singer. He left the band later that year citing "musical differences" but, yet again, ill health was also a factor, reportedly due to alcohol issues. Brian Connolly died aged just 51 in 1997 after suffering multiple heart attacks. His legacy is the string of singles and albums by Sweet featuring his vocal talents. *Ballroom Blitz* will always be the song most widely associated with Sweet and with Brian Connolly. It's featured in major films such as *Wayne's World* and *Daddy Day Care*, TV shows like *Life on Mars* and numerous commercials and video games. And both the song and the singer were 'Made in Scotland'. But, surely you all knew that, right?

Neil Paterson, Iain Macmillan and Brian Connolly were hugely talented men in their respective fields. They weren't successful *because* they were Scottish, but they were successful *and* Scottish – more evidence, as if it was needed, that our country and its people are big enough, smart enough and rich enough! And maybe the real magic of the 'power of three' is that I've managed to sneak in a column featuring three of my lifelong passions – Dundee United, The Beatles and Sweet. Good effort Gordon!