

**The JIM HAMILTON  
HERITAGE SOCIETY  
of COALBURN**  
Established 2004

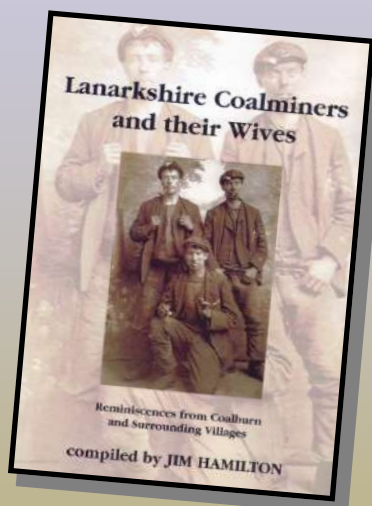
# NEWS LETTER

SPRING 2005

ISSUE **2**

## Reminiscences from Coalburn and surrounding villages

I have always thought that a tribute should be paid to the thousands of coalminers who laboured in the pits in and around Coalburn for so little reward. At the same time appropriate acknowledgement should be put on record of the contribution of

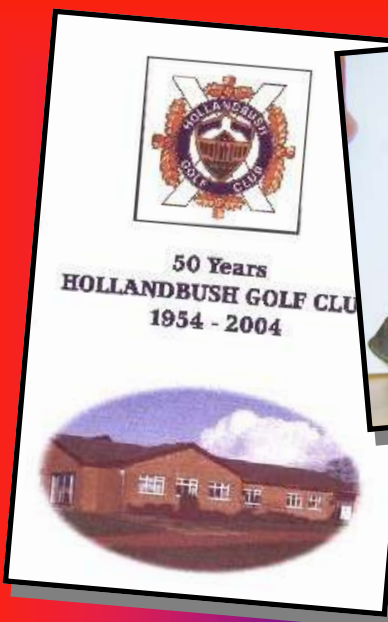


their mothers, wives and daughters, the unseen heroines who toiled to provide as much comfort as possible in the homes for their families amid primitive conditions.

This book primarily consists of personal recollections of life in the coalmining communities using Coalburn as the centre with other peripheral mining villages

— Late **Jim Hamilton**

**Copies available from  
The Jim Hamilton Heritage**



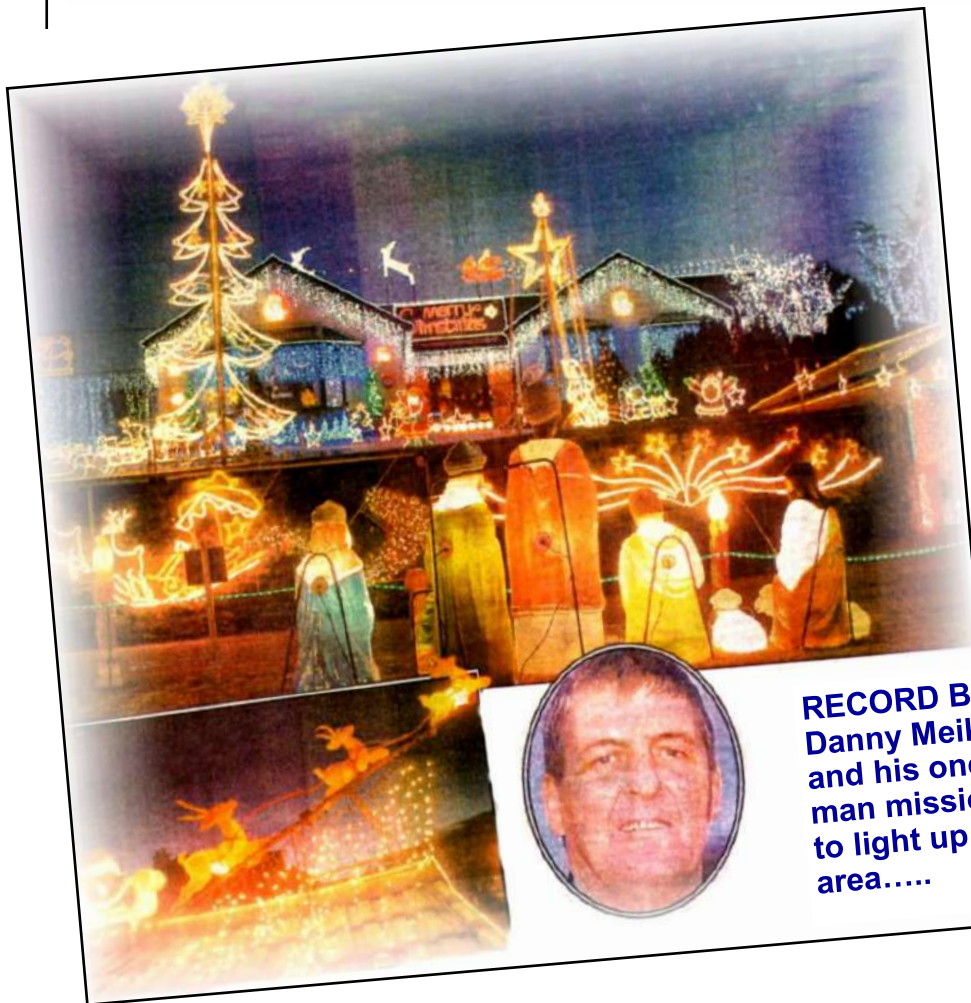
Items on view at our  
recent heritage



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## ***They saw a bright star.... it led them to Coalburn***

One man's Christmas ho-ho-home starring a 45ft Santa, 1.2m light bulbs and a whopping £4,000 bill



**RECORD BID:**  
Danny Meikle  
and his one-  
man mission  
to light up the  
area.....

### **Christmas 2004**

DANNY MEIKLE'S 45 foot Santa, flying reindeer and cartoon characters could be seen two miles away.

The display is his pride and joy and was possibly the biggest private Christmas light show in Britain.

The dazzling display took more than a month to set up with hundreds of festive toys, a Santa's grotto, waterfalls, musical trees and a manger that plays a song telling the real story of Christmas.

Retired builder Danny Meikle (57) and his wife Anne had thrown open their home to visitors in the run-up to Christmas. Such was its fame that Danny was

featured on the 'Richard and Judy' tv show and on GMTV.

Over the years he has suffered countless electric shocks, burnt out the cable in the main road and plunged the street into darkness—but he has no regrets. Mr Meikle travels to the US and France every year to spend thousands of pounds on lights.

Mr Meikle, who is also Coalburn's local councillor said: *"I started putting on small displays about ten years ago to entertain my grandchildren when they were very young. Then the neighbours started coming to see it and I added more and more lights every year. It just snowballed from there and now I am convinced this is the biggest domestic display in Europe"*.

*"I have 1.2million lights now, but I think that is as far as I can go. I've got nowhere else on the house to put any more! We have made an application to the Guinness Book of Records and are waiting to hear from them. But I would challenge anybody on the Continent to beat this. This is just a small, country village but we had people coming from all over the place to see the display already. My wife thinks I'm mad but she does her best to play along with it. I don't think she'll be too happy at the £4,000 electricity bill though "*.

A spokesman for the Guinness Book of Records confirmed that Mr Meikle had registered a claim.



*The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

### **Wednesday 1 December Meeting**

Chairman Peter McLeish introduced Paul Archibald from Lanark Library who gave a fascinating slide show and talk of the Archie McLean glass slides of Coalburn past. Over 300 of these glass slides are stored at Lanark Library.

*The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

### **Wednesday 9 February Meeting**

Chairman Peter McLeish announced that the heritage group had received a cheque donation from the Coalburn Miners' Welfare Charitable Trust for £788.13 for the purchase of display boards.

It was agreed that the Society will also meet on the third Wednesday of each month to discuss Society business and assist with the archives. The first Wednesday of each month would remain reserved for guest speakers and topics of special interest. Meetings to be held 7pm—9pm.

An invitation had been received to visit Kirkconnel Heritage Society's archive and members agreed for a visit to be arranged.

Copies of the first newsletter had been well received. Additional copies were now needed to meet the extra demand.

Items of interest brought in by members included an old miner's boot (c/o John Munro) and a new booklet commemorating Hollandbush Golf Club's 50th Anniversary (c/o Jim Hamilton).

Gilbert Dobbie advised that the school was arranging walks on local rights of way with the intention that classes undertake these walks throughout the school year. He also advised that anyone interested in participating would be welcome.

Heritage Support Worker John Zawadzki suggested the Society could have Honorary Members and that Mrs Maureen Hamilton could be invited to accept the first appointment. This was agreed.

*The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

### **Wednesday 2 March Meeting**

This was a well attended meeting featuring a slide show of photographs of Coalburn Pipe Band and a half hour video of the speeches and presentation made to Pipe Major Donald Williams at the recent social evening in his honour at the Miners Welfare Club. Guests at the meeting included Margaret Findlay, David and Grace McCall, Muriel Shaw, Donald Williams, Jim Young and Bruce Shaw. Bruce brought along a number of artefacts relating to Coalburn Pipe Band which were put on display. These included photographs, minute books, a sporran and a pipe band uniform c1955 (see front cover of newsletter).

*The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

### **Wednesday 16 March Meeting**

Members were told of the trip to Kirkconnel on Tuesday 15th March by members Peter McLeish, Betty Bell, John Munro, Billy Struthers and John Young. One Stop Shop's Diane Taylor and John Zawadzki also went along. It was a most informative visit. Photos of the visit were shown to members.



# Coalburn and the Caledonian Railway

**I**N 1847 an Act of Parliament was passed authorising the Caledonian Railway Company to build a new line between Motherwell and Bankend.

For whatever reason, the company did not proceed with this task. It was to be another four years before work commenced when, by a later Act of 24<sup>th</sup> July 1851, work was re-authorised and the construction of the line began. It was to be done independently, but curiously it was backed by the aforementioned Caledonian Railway Company.

The line took its route from the original Motherwell Station, north of the present one, to Ferniegair, which at that time was a terminus for trains travelling from the south. This meant that passengers had to make their way to Hamilton Station (now Hamilton West) for onward transportation by train to Glasgow.

Between Motherwell and Ferniegair there were to be two important junctions

The first, at Haughhead, was an extension of the Hamilton Branch Line and this part is still in operation as part of the "Hamilton Circle".

The second junction was Ross Junction nearby to the Ross Yards which were used almost exclusively for the coal traffic



**1961: Caledonian box signals at Coalburn. The crossing gates are almost miniatures owing to the narrowness of the road.**

travelling from the many collieries adjoining the Coalburn Line.

Ferniegair station was operational until 1917. From there travelling south past Allanton Colliery there was another junction at Merryton where the line went via the original station for Larkhall, later to become, in 1906, Larkhall East.

From there the line went to Ayr Road (Dalserf Station), onwards through Netherburn to Tillietudlem and Auchenheath then to Brocketsbrae which opened in June 1866. This was the station for Lesmahagow. Its name was changed to Lesmahagow in 1869 only to revert to its original name when the new station was built at Lesmahagow in

1905.

Continuing towards Coalburn the Alton Heights Junction was encountered. Here too there was a short lived station in 1893. At this point the Mid Lanark Line and the Lesmahagow-Muirkirk met, allowing trains to run between Lesmahagow and Douglas (Happendon). This also meant that many men from the Lanark district could travel to the pits around Coalburn.

by **Peter McLEISH**

*Chairman*

*Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

In 1896 the principal collieries were, Bellfield, Poniel, Westtown (note the spelling), Dalquhandy and Bankend. All were owned by companies based in the Parish of Lesmahagow.

The halt at Auchlochan was first used in 1907 to allow the workers to disembark there rather than the station in Coalburn which would have meant a walk of a couple of miles to the colliery and this continued until October 1965.

Although the Coalburn Branch Line was opened in 1856 for the carriage of minerals it was to a number of years before passengers were carried from Coalburn.

In July 1888 a Public Meeting was held in Bellfield School with Mr Robert Gemmell as Chairman. It was called in an effort to convince the rail company of the need for a passenger station in the village. This finally came about on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1891.

Although this was a terminus for passengers there were no facilities whereby the steam trains of the day could shunt the coaches. This was done about a mile further on towards Bankend Colliery where there was a loop which enabled the changeover to be done. At Bankend there was a platform for the miners to use. Beyond Bankend there was an extension known as the Galawhistle Line going

towards Spireslack and then on to Muirkirk.

The Glasgow and South Western Railway had intended to use this route but never did it and the line only went as far as the mines near Glenbuck.

In the heyday of the pits many men came to the area to work by way of the trains. In 1918 for example Auchenbegg Colliery had 259 underground workers with another 23 on the surface. Bellfield could boast a greater number of employees at that time. Before too long, however, both had closed and

put on "Specials" for trips to Ayr and the like or for big sporting events, the number of passengers gradually declined until there were only about five trains a day between Coalburn and Glasgow.

The coal trains were still fully occupied and continued to be so for some time. On 4<sup>th</sup> October 1965 the last passenger service left the village following Dr Beeching's rationalisation of Britain's rail network.

By the late 1960's only Auchlochan No 9 Colliery was still producing

reasonable amounts of coal, however by July 1968 it too had closed bringing to an end along tradition of mining in the area.

So for almost 100 years steam and latterly diesel engines had chugged their way up and down the lines surrounding this community.

A number of stations have

reopened, but, alas, Coalburn won't be one of them.

**Photo: Last passenger train at Coalburn Station, October 1965. The late Billy Cook on platform.**



the Auchlochan Collieries were by now the biggest employer.

At this time the passenger trains were popular as the main means of travel as the bus companies were finding their feet.

As the bus companies improved their timetables, at one time there was a 20 minute service between Coalburn and Glasgow, the rail company could not match that and despite being able to



## Heritage members visit acclaimed Kirkconnel Heritage Centre



**SPECIAL THANKS** to Jacky and Derek for their talk and hospitality. It was a most informative day out and one the group hope to repeat in the near future. **Pho-**

**Left to right Provost Mushtaq Ahmad, Councillor Danny Meikle and George Greenshields.**

**N**ominated by his local councillor, George Greenshields is pictured at Hamilton Town Hall with his framed certificate. He also received an engraved decanter.

George has served the community through his work with Coalburn Miners Welfare Charity Society for the past 25 years. His motivation and drive are also responsible for Coalburn being selected for the first phase of the One-Stop-Shop community development initiative launched nationally in 2000. Through his tireless work and co-ordination, £800,000 has been raised to make this excellent community facility a reality.

*Photo: Hamilton Advertiser  
2nd December 2004*

**South Lanarkshire  
Community Service  
Award presented to  
George Greenshields**

## Coalburn Homing Club



**Coalburn Miners Welfare Club  
December 2004** Photo: Lanark Gazette



## Coalburn Homing Club celebrates its centenary in 2005

All club members racing pigeons in 2005 will receive a commemorative trophy (*pictured above*).

# Night of celebration marks 25 years of pipe band leadership

**C**OALBURN PIPE BAND held an evening of celebration to commemorate twenty five years of leadership by Pipe Major Donald Williams.

Family, friends, supporters and band members, past and present, all joined in the festivities.

The evening began with a speech from Niven

Shaw who stressed the dedication and loyalty shown by Donald. This was followed by a delivery from vice-president of the band, Rab Lawson, who presented flowers to Donald's wife, Mary, and his mother, Annie.

Sandy Bell from the House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band spoke of the pipe major's involvement with the band and his allegiance to Coalburn.

Bruce Shaw, president of Coalburn Pipe Band, proposed a message of thanks to Donald for all his hard work over the years and presented Donald with a silver-mounted chanter and kilter.

Donald thanked everyone for their support and kind wishes with special thanks to Niven, Muriel, Grace and Davie. Entertainment was provided by the Cairnhill Ceilidh Band.

A guest appearance was made by members of the Champion of Champions winning band in 1984 who performed some selections. Donald's son, Colin, played a tune that was written especially to mark Donald's achievements in the 2004 season, the aptly-named *Pipe Major Donald Williams*.

Donald joined the band as a 10-year-old learner in 1963 and was influenced by Pipe Major Jim Findlay who led the band at that time.

In 1984 Donald took the band from Grade 4 to Grade 3 after they were crowned Champion of Champions. They have since become one of the top bands in their grade.

He took the band abroad in 1987 when they competed in Belgium for the first time, winning first prize in the Grade 3 as well as the higher level of Grade 2.

The early 1990s was an extremely successful period for the band. In 1993 they won first prize in every major competition except the World Championships.

The band won a prize at every contest they entered in 1994, including their first ever prize at the World Championships which led them to second place in the Champion of

Champions table.

Donald has led the band to many prizes throughout the years—too many to mention. However, 2004 was a great achievement in itself and saw him lead the band to first prize at Cowal Games, third prize in the European Championships, and first prize in every minor contest.

*Hamilton Advertiser, 10 February 2005*



**Pipe Major Donald Williams enjoyed an evening of celebration in recognition of his 25 years' leadership of Coalburn Pipe Band. Donald is pictured, third left, with, left to right, Niven Shaw, Bruce Shaw and Sandy Bell.**

**Photo JZ**

**Coalburn Homing Club  
Centenary Year**





*Left Archive photo of Coalburn Silver Band circa 1904*

*Below Archive photo of first Coalburn Gala Queen, Grace Wilson, 1937.*

Members of the heritage group are currently preparing a photographic exhibition for public viewing during Coalburn Gala Week 2005.

*The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn*

*Final meetings of session 2004/2005*

**Wed 4 May 2005**

Coalburn Silver Band—Archive Slide Show

**Wed 18 May 2005**

Annual General Meeting

*First meeting of session 2005/2006*

**Wed 7 September 2005**

Meetings held at **Coalburn One Stop Shop**  
7pm—9pm ALL WELCOME

## **Heritage display & stand at Lesmahagow Farmers Show—Saturday 28 May 2005**

Brocketsbrae Showfield

*Field courtesy of Auchlochan Trust*

The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn have been invited by the Lesmahagow Farmers Society to have a promotional stand at this year's Show. The Society will have a photographic display at the Show from 11am - 3pm.

*The Jim  
Hamilton  
Heritage  
Society of  
Coalburn*

*A  
unique  
display  
Years  
1937  
to  
2004*

*Photo-*

# **EXHIBITION**

*Grace 1st Gala Queen Coalburn 1937*

# **COALBURN G A L A S**

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