

The Jim Hamilton

Heritage Society of Coalburn

Newsletter **73** Winter 2023-24





Chairperson's Remarks

Winter 2023-24

There is quite a bit of news to report in this (belated) winter newsletter. We have some very good news - notably, funding has now been obtained by Dr Catherine Mills at the University of Stirling for her Mining Landscape Heritage Project. Dr Mills will be coming to our meeting on March 21st to tell us more about the Project.

But there is sad news too and we are very sorry to report the passing of long time Heritage Society member Betty Nicol (Elizabeth Banks).

Betty Nicol died quite suddenly, at home in Coalburn, on January 3rd

Betty had been a stalwart member of the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society and took on the role of membership secretary with exemplary efficiency as well as contributing beautifully made knitted items for sale at the Gala Day, together with her home made marmalade. We had missed her at meetings over the last three years as her health deteriorated, however Betty continued as membership secretary up until the current season.

I last spoke with her around the time of our AGM in September when she let me know that it was now time for another person to take on this task. It was characteristic of Betty that she requested that we didn't mention her by name when reporting on the change as she didn't like seeing her name in print. It seems that Betty wasn't so keen on photographs either as we don't seem to have a single picture, and that might well be exactly what Betty preferred.

On a personal note, Betty had been quietly supportive since I took on role of working on this newsletter and we liaised on the mailing throughout the pandemic and beyond. It's hard to believe that she's not there at the end of the phone now, with her lovely quiet voice.

Helen Brownlie

In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths

Wendy Barrie

Elizabeth Nicol (Banks)

Jean Clark (Broadfoot)

Janette Hutchison (Buchanan)

Jim McMahon

Charlie Grey

Tom Bryson



Jim Hamilton Heritage Society News

Heritage Society Meetings *There's been quite a varied programme over the course of recent meetings....*

On 8th November '23 we welcomed John Young of Stonehouse Heritage as guest speaker. John had visited us before, but not for quite some time - about 10 years, to be exact. It's tribute to the clarity and enthusiasm inherent in his approach that those of us who were around then recalled his presentations and suggested inviting John back. They were not wrong! John's interest in all aspects of local heritage is infectious and his knowledge is encyclopaedic. We hope John will agree to visit Coalburn again in the not too distant future.

On 23rd November '23 - development worker Amanda Davis met with us to consider the recently published Community Action Plan. There is considerable potential for an enhanced profile for local heritage in the light of the priorities identified in this plan. There was quite a bit of food for thought and so a short briefing paper was drawn up following the meeting (enclosed with this newsletter for those of you who don't already have it). To be continued



On 6th December '23 - following his talk on the Inns' Brig vicinity in October, Donald Williams gave a presentation on the Braehead area of Coalburn, from the Inns Brig to Tinto View Terrace. This was most interesting and attracted further comment and input from members. Donald has put in a good deal of effort to date, both in researching the past (with a view to establishing a heritage-themed walk) and putting together excellent presentations with his findings - much appreciated by all.



*Our final gathering for 2023 was the Christmas Meal,
Sunday 10th December at Poppy's.*

Excellent food and great company.

*Thank you Carol Ann and many thanks to Coalburn
Miners' Welfare Charitable Foundation for covering
the cost of a most enjoyable evening.*

Our first meeting of '24 was on February 8th, when we continued to browse a presentation on 'Coalburn Then and Now' We had made a start on this last September and the idea was to quickly refresh on the slides seen previously - to make sure I'd got the additional information straight - and proceed onwards through the village. Well, this time there was even more interesting information contributed and we didn't get as far as covering all of the slides from last time. The feature on Muirburn in this newsletter has just some of the information gleaned at this meeting.

Or next meeting will be February 22nd and when we'll show Jim Hamilton's video of Coalburn Gala 1961 (we think) - complete with sound.

A programme of meetings for the rest of this season is on the back cover.

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***Bruce McCowan and Stockbriggs Curling Pond*** Bruce McCowan in Canada is the descendent of a family from Auchenbeg. Bruce got in touch in the autumn of 2022 as he kindly wished to offer us with a copy of his book on curling 'The Hog Score in the Great Rink of Time' - this book is set locally and available to borrow from the Heritage Centre. Stemming from his work on the book, there are moves afoot to look into the age of the former curling pond at Stockbriggs and whether or not it was artificially constructed. Donald Williams has been playing a part in co-ordinating this initiative, which now involves the Scottish Curling Trust and Archaeology Scotland, as well as those with local knowledge.

***Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework*** As it happens, the person at Archaeology Scotland who is involved in the Stockbriggs Curling Pond initiative had already been in touch to let us know about the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework (quite a mouthful - CVARF). A new initiative for this part of the world, but part and parcel of moves by Archaeology Scotland to develop regional frameworks throughout the country. They are keen to come to meet with us "to have a chat with members of the society about the project, the archaeology and heritage that's important in the area, what projects you might have on the go that would be good to promote and highlight as part of the framework, and about how your group can contribute to the framework": to be arranged.

*continued at back.....*

# *200 Years At* **Muirburn Farm**

We know that Muirburn Farm is at least 200 years old as it is listed in 1821, when a basic Census was carried out in the parish. The heads of the family are listed as John Shearer and Esther Laidley and there are also four girls, a boy, and an older man in the Shearer household. This Census is a bit frustrating as it doesn't provide family relationships: Esther is likely John's wife (women appear to be listed by their maiden names in this Census) and the young ones their children.

## **Coalburn Area - 1821 Census**

Muirburn is listed in the 'Auchlochan Quarter' and the Shearer family are one of 27 households living there in 1821.

Other neighbourhoods listed include the 'Stockbriggs Quarter', which takes in Bankend, Cumberhead and Auchenbeg and is also sparsely populated, with just 22 occupied dwellings.

Coalburn comes under the 'Folkerton Quarter', which covers quite a wide area. However there appear to be a combined total of fewer than 30 dwellings in the specific vicinity of Bellfield, Braehead, Coalburn and Westoun at this time.

Forty years later - around 1861 - and Muirburn is described as "a farmsteading, one storey, slated in good repair", owned by a Mr Brown.

Moving ahead 20 years to 1881, the Census shows two brothers running the farm: 69 year old William Barr and his older brother Andrew. William is married to Susan, who at 48 is considerably younger than him, and he has five sons, aged from 21 years to 2. All were born locally, except for Mrs Barr, who is from 'Mearns, Renfrew' - likely the area we now know as Newton Means. A farm servant lives with the Barr family, 17 year old Marion Frame from Douglas, and the Barrs are also employing three men and two girls to work on the farm, which has 340 acres of which 150 are arable.

Moving on to living memory, local knowledge reported by Heritage Society members is that the land was sold to Cunningham Estates in the 1960s. Bob Linton had been the farmer, he left about 1961. Other farmers we recall include Jimmy Black and then Jimmy Bell, who was the last person to actually farm the land at Muirburn. The farm was mainly livestock - sheep and cows with crops such as turnip grown to help feed them. At one point the farm was occupied by shepherds.



Muirburn Farm in 1895

*Then & Now ...* the land is no longer farmed  
and Muirburn has been divided into five flatted dwellings.



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Muirburn Cottages



The picture above shows cottages at Muirburn Place

Built around 1900 for white collar coal mining staff such as pit manager and cashier, they originally had flat roofs. When the coal industry was nationalised after WWII they were owned by the Coal Board.

Jim Hamilton reminiscences on residents and their families ...

I went about Muirburn about thirty years ago visiting Willie Muir. The other families living there then were Mr. and Mrs. Alex Waddell, Willie McCormack with his wife and family, and Tammy Johnstone and his wife, Jessie Barr.

Tammy was the colliery engineer at Auchlochan for very many years and after retiral, went to Kilmarnock to live. He is now deceased and his widow lives in Hamilton.

Their daughter, Isa, well-known in the locality as the local health nurse, married the Rev. Walter Gibb and they are at Longformacus, near Duns. Isa's brother Jim, an insurance agent in the locality prior to call-up in the 1939-45 War, works with a timber firm in British Columbia in Canada.

Coalburn Chronicle 1, 1973

Some of us recall Mr Alex Waddell, he was a manager of pit engineers. Other people we remember living at Muirburn Place include the Bryce family, Davy 'Digger' Craig - a pit head foreman - and William Mitchell.

Scottish Mining Landscape Project

Great news ... further to the item in our last newsletter, in the New Year we heard from Dr Catherine Mills of Stirling University's '*Landscape Legacies of Coal*' initiative to say that she has been successful in securing funding for her new Project via the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is proposed that Coalburn's mining heritage will feature in a "virtual museum" of mining landscapes with a related walking route. This Project looks to be an excellent 'fit' for the extensive work that Donald Williams has undertaken to date in preparation for a heritage themed walk - or walks - in and around Coalburn. Dr Mills has expressed the hope that this initiative will bring people into the village to walk the routes and share the community's knowledge and heritage.

Catherine Mills will be at our meeting on the afternoon of March 21st to tell us more. Meanwhile you can read her blog about the project here: <http://tinyurl.com/3snrdr3w>.

The Project will be formally launched at the National Mining Museum, Newtongrange, on April 24th. This event is free to attend but you need to book so that they know how many to cater for (there is a rumour of home baking ...). The main event starts at 1.30 and you can book it here: <http://tinyurl.com/mv5xea9j>. There is also the opportunity to arrive earlier for a landscape walk. These are scheduled for 11 and 11.30 am - see <http://tinyurl.com/mryp52zj>.



Wendy Barrie

In her younger days, Wendy Barrie was involved in various organisations in Coalburn, including the Sunday School. She left Coalburn for Ayrshire on her marriage, many years ago now, and visited from time to time. Those of us who knew Wendy - even if it was long ago - remember her with affection and her kindness to new pupils at Lesmahagow High School meant so much to Marion McBain, who arrived there from a very small primary, that she named one of her daughters after Wendy.



Back Row: Margaret Naismith; Charlotte Scanlon; Ann Twaddle; Grace Lott; Wendy Barrie; Mollie Brownlie; Isabella Robertson; Jenny Strang; Margaret Findlay
Front row: Alice Lott; Jan Lockens; Mary Morrison; unknown; Elizabeth Paterson.



Sunday School Trip, circa 1963

Helen Brownlie and Janis Steele next to Wendy Barrie
Jim and Tom Findlay 2nd and 3rd from left in front.

Jim Hamilton Heritage Society News

Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) Some time ago we registered to receive the e-newsletter of the Scottish Council on Archives. This has led us to hear of various initiatives.

The SCA are developing an on-line portal called '*Your Scottish Archives*'. This provides a space for any organisation in Scotland who have an archival collection to share information about their collection and a catalogue or list. The portal is cost-free to archive holders and interested researchers. The Project Manager has been in touch to say that they would be interested in including Coalburn's archival collections and we have registered to participate. Although input will be slow and maybe not so steady, the on-line 'space' is there for us, as and when we are able progress the task.

More recently, we were contacted by the SCA in connection with '*Community Archives Heritage Group*' (CAHG) Scotland. This started in 2020 and aims to develop events, training and activities for groups involved in archives and heritage. We were asked to complete a questionnaire about our aims and priorities and invited to attend their 'Celebrating Community Archives' event, held at Kelvin Hall on February 15th.

Lesmahagow Courier You may recall that we were looking to thank the person who sent a package with copies of the 'Lesmahagow Courier' (Newsletter 70, Spring 2023), which arrived simply stating 'from J Nelson'. Courtesy of Billy Clelland (in Australia) we now know that this is Jim Nelson, formerly of Carlisle, piper and nephew of Archie Templeton, Pipe Major of the Vale of Nethan Pipe Band and Lesmahagow BB Pipe Band. Billy was also able to tell us that "The Courier was short lived, produced and edited by Jim Macintyre who was the band drum tutor." We were then able to contact Mr Nelson, who told us "I corresponded with Billy Clelland for many years as we both played in the Lesmahagow BB band way back in the late 40's early 50's, Billy played the drum and I was a piper. I believe my uncle J A Templeton who was the Pipe Major of the band was also a colleague of Jim Hamilton."

Copies of The Courier are available to consult at the Heritage Centre.

FRONT COVER: Auchlochan Brickworks, circa 1920.
The man on the right is John Imrie.
Photograph from Jim Hamilton's Collection

The Jim Hamilton

Heritage Society of Coalburn

www.coalburnheritage.org.uk



Spring Meetings

Coalburn's Heritage

Thursday 7th March

Coalburn Miners' Welfare Upper Hall, 7 for 7.15 pm

Dr Catherine Mills, Landscape Legacies of Coal

Thursday 21st March

Coalburn Miners' Welfare Lounge, 2pm

'Dear Grandchildren...' my life in Coalburn and other memories
from my lap...top by Ann Thomas (Scanlon)

Thursday 4th April

Coalburn Miners' Welfare Upper Hall, 7 for 7.15 pm

AGM

Wednesday 17th April

Coalburn Bowling Club, 7 for 7.15 pm