

**ITEMS OF INTEREST REGARDING  
COALBURN SCHOOL  
BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER  
THE SECOND WORLD WAR.**



**From October 1938  
Until  
April 1946.**

## October 1938

The issue of gas masks is now practically complete. Over 2000 have been allocated by the local ARP committee. It is to be hoped that they won't be required, although some boys will have ideas connecting gas masks with Hallowe'en.

Mr James Miller was followed as Headmaster of Coalburn by Mr. Frank Wills, this on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1938, Mr Wills had previously held a similar position at Bellfield School.

With the prospect of war imminent, Mr Wills took a survey of classrooms for the evacuation scheme and found that (1) at 8sq. ft. per pupil 586 can be accommodated in the Inf, Jun. & Sen. rooms. At 10sq. ft. per pupil 469 can be housed. In the Adv. Div. rooms 117 at 10sq. ft. and 97 at 12sq. ft. per pupil can be provided for. (A note has been appended that; owing to max. of 50 per Jnr. class and 40 per Adv. Div. classes, these figures were not sent).

June another item recorded is that Mr. Wills had been summoned to a meeting of headmasters at Lanarkshire House in Glasgow to discuss the problems which will follow the forthcoming raising of the school leaving age to 15. (This possibly require an additional member of the teaching staff.) At the reopening of the school on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1939 several changes were in place. Classes were to be known as follows; Infant 1 and 2 and Primary 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Although evacuees arrived as expected, most of them had fad returned within a few months back to their own districts. The children were billeted throughout Coalburn and depending on where they were, some of them transferred to Bellfield School, which naturally resulted in the rolls at both schools being increased substantially.

8 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1939	On 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sept. Britain went to war with Germany.. On 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 25 Evacuees arrived, <sup>from John St. School, Glasgow,</sup> were fed, served with 48 hours' rations, and sent to their billets. Several mothers, with pre-school-age children, were among the Evacuees. The School, by order of the Education Committee, has been closed all week. I have written to Lanarkshire House, asking to be relieved of the Headmastership of the Continuation Classes during the period of the war. As I am <sup>&amp; Assistant Reception Officer</sup> Deputy Divisional Warden for this district, I have not the time to act efficiently in the Evening School.
15 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1939	School reopened on Monday, 11 <sup>th</sup> Sept.. Evacuee Children have swelled the roll from 331 to 364. Attendance - Sec. 98.5%

From the logbook when war was declared.

With the possibility of attack by the enemy a "Trial Scatter" was held on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1939. Ten strikes of the school gong was the warning. Arrangements had been made for the accommodation of those pupils, who could not get home in five minutes, in houses adjoining the school. The police very kindly co-operated by holding up traffic to enable the children to reach their temporary billets in safety.

## **December 1939**

*On 15<sup>th</sup> inst, the secondary department of Coalburn School held its annual party. Owing to the black-out the function could not be held in school, but the neighbouring Masonic Hall was chartered. Guests invited included, Mr Angus McLaren, County Councillor; District Councillor Richard McLean, Mr and Mrs Thomas Johnstone, and Mrs Wills. When tea was served, plates were emptied with gratifying rapidity and, after a short interval, dancing was commenced. A long programme drawn up by Mr Scott was gone through and a most enjoyable evening concluded at 10pm. Charles Hogg, Ross Gillies and William Cosgrove entertained the company with mouth organ selections, and Kate Baxter enlivened the proceedings with a recitation. The purveying was in the able hands of Mr Wm. McGregor, Abbeygreen Co-operative. A well known and long-trying friend of the school, Mr John Arneil, kindly provided the tables for the event.*

This report was from the **Hamilton Advertiser**.

With hostilities still proceeding the school teachers were still at their posts, however by January and February due to severe snowstorms there were several disruptions to their working day, on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1940 for example the school opened at 10.30am and closed at 2.45pm to enable the teachers to come and go by train as the buses were not running. Three days later a fresh fall of snow resulted in only Mr Wills and Miss Barr being present as by now the trains were stuck and with only 91 out of 331 pupils present, the school closed at 10am without the registers being marked.

The travel arrangements and school opening times were still to suit the train times, however by the 16<sup>th</sup> of February the pupils were in from 9.30am until 3.35pm

By June it was noted that on the week that school closed for the summer holidays that some of the older boys, following government recommendations, were helping the farmers at strawberry and hay harvests.

## **June 1940**

*On Friday last the prize-giving took place in Coalburn School, the pupils and staff assembled in the hall. The Headmaster, Mr F. Wills, M.A., reviewed the session, drawing special attention to the fact that a former pupil, Miss Barbara Mitchell, won the dux award in Larkhall Academy, and that Robert Hamilton, a pupil in the qualifying class, had gained a free place in Hamilton Academy. Mrs James Hamilton presented the prizes, for which she was given a hearty vote of thanks.*

*The winners were as follows; Secondary II, (Upperward Prizes) Mary Angus, Jane Booth; I Margaret Meikle and Chares Hogg. Primary V Millar Brownlie, Robert Hamilton; IV Marion Clark, Tom McLean, Laurie Weir; III Jean McGowan, Mary Smith, Gavin Scott, Annie Hyslop. II Geo. McGowan, Ann Frame, Annie Frame; I Agnes Meikle and Elizabeth Lang (equal), Mary Smith and Agnes Calder. Infant II Alex. Turner and Dan Smart (equal), Helen Ross. I Janette Carmichael, Alex McLean, Catherine Overend.*

*After the presentation of prizes Dr Lindsay gave an inspiring address in which grave and gay were mixed in the proper proportion. "God Save the King" was sung and Dr Lindsay's benediction brought a very pleasant occasion to a close.*

**Hamilton Advertiser.**

With the summer break over, the pupils reconvened on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1940 it would appear that several of the evacuees had failed to return from Glasgow.

In September, Mr Wills asked to have all the windows in the lower part of the building wire-meshed and a complete blackout of the school, failing that, blackout of all rooms used by the Secondary Department.

The advent of potato lifting in October decimated the numbers of the senior pupils in attendance, at one stage only 70% being present.

Wire mesh was eventually fitted on in November in the downstairs area. That month also brought an outbreak of Measles in the Infant classes, with Miss (Nurse) Fowlie being in attendance.

By January, all those pupils, whose parents wished them to be inoculated against Diphtheria, were treated, over 30 being under school age. In total over 200 children were treated.

Following the Clydebank Blitz in March 1941 there was a large number of evacuees added to the roll. By the April the number stood at over 100. On arrival they received a meal of soup and bread before going to their new "homes". By the beginning of May the school roll stood at 521.

Maybe with an eye to the future several boys over the age of 12 were not at school as they were at the potato planting which lasted most of the month of May.

At the end of the term no prizes were given except for the Upperward Prize which was won by Margaret Meikle, she received a book entitled "Tales of the Borders". The school closed for the summer and the logbook shows that; *"The latter part of the session, owing to the influx of about 150 evacuee schoolchildren has been rather a trying time, but we are glad to do what we can."*

Due to the number of Roman Catholic children on the roll a Roman Catholic teacher was added to the staff. A Miss O'Neill arrived for that purpose and her duties were to take the children for religious instruction in the morning period devoted to that purpose, and to assist generally in the upper school, more especially in the Junior Secondary Department. At that time it was also recorded that there was great difficulty in getting sufficient paraffin for the Science Classes.

By October the potato harvest was being ingathered so the boys were busy uplifting the fruits of their labour five months earlier. Around that period a new ailment appeared in the records, that of Scabies.

By the end of November the number of evacuees was gradually diminishing, down to 64 from 95 at the start of the session. With rationing being a feature of the time, on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1941 children in the upper classes were measured and weighed, with a view to applying for extra clothing coupons. These were received in December and distributed to those qualified to get them.

January 1942 came with another snowstorm and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> only one attendance was marked (usually a morning and an afternoon attendance was marked on the board on the wall of each classroom). On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, as the buses were not running the teachers had to come by train or walk part of the way from Lesmahagow.

## May 1942

*A party of children from Coalburn and Bellfield Schools gave an entertainment in aid of the Red Cross in the Masonic Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> ult. The Troupe consisted of May Campbell, Peterina Cosgrove, Margaret Bole, Agnes Hillan, Betty Aitken, Margaret Smith, Kathleen Mochrie, Jean Menzies and Margaret Campbell, the latter giving selections on the accordion. There was a large audience of young people, and a fair sprinkling of adults, who thoroughly enjoyed a very creditable performance. The youngsters produced the entertainment without any tuition from their elders, and the result spoke for itself. Songs, dances and plays occupied fully an hour. A box of sweets, kindly presented by Mrs Naismith, Welfare Institute, proved a great attraction for a prize draw. Altogether £3-5shillings was taken and the proceeds handed over to Mrs Meek, Ardenlea, secretary of the local branch of the Red Cross. Mr F. Wills, M.A., presided over the performances in his usual breezy style.*

*On Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> ult. A second concert was given by children attending Coalburn School in the Masonic Hall – Mr Wills again presiding. There was a large turnout of juveniles from one year upwards. As in the previous week, song, play and dance followed in charming succession. The artists were; Betty Smiley, Annie Strang, Bella McGaffney, Margaret Marshall, Helen Maitland, Margaret Campbell (accordion) and James Bradford (mouth organ). May Clelland gave several clever exhibitions of dancing and May Campbell, Margaret Bole and Agnes Hillan provided short, snappy plays. Thanks are due to Messrs Dan Clelland and R. Ferguson who acted as door-keepers, and Mr Wm. Clelland who supplied pipe music to most of the dances. Mrs Allison and Mrs Cook merit praise for their services in the dressing room. Another box of sweets supplied by a friend, was raffled and added substantially to the total of £3 14s 6d. Which sum was handed over to Mrs Meek, secretary of the Red Cross society.*

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May was a busy month, the Gala Queen and her Maids of Honour were chosen by the Secondary Classes and Primary while the Pages and Trainbearers by Primaries 3 & 4.

Also that month, in connection with Warship Week, a Cinema Van came to the school, and a few pictures were shown outside the playground. A collection raised £1 19s 8d.

Scholars gave a concert in aid of Warship Week and £21 was raised. During the year many of the children were involved in fund raising, a good number by their own volition.

## July

*Douglas Hogg, of South Cumberhead, an ex-Waterside School pupil, annexed the dux prize at Coalburn School this year. "Dougie" is descendant of James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd. The Lesmahagow Higher Grade dux award went to a Coalburn boy, Giffen Rae, who also gained a bursary for Hamilton Academy. Congratulations!*

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In October due to the cold weather the Headmaster contacted the educating authorities to ask that the heating be put on pointing out that the school is 800 feet above sea level and at times very cold snaps occur in October. The request was agreed to. That same week those pupils born on or after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1929 who were possibly 5' 3" or 7st. 12lbs. were measured in the school, and weighed at the station. This is for the issue of extra clothing



coupons for rapidly growing children. As a result of this activity coupons were requested for 14 children.

The week of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1943 was Wings for Victory Week, and Miss Barr's Infant Classes gave an entertainment in the Institute, and there was also a Go-as-you-please competition for schoolchildren, the War Savings Association money collected was £85-9-3d, over £10 above target. To celebrate this a half holiday was granted on the Friday.



**In addition to the above methods of fund raising, pupils were also busy making blankets for servicemen throughout the war.**

## **June 1943**

*Coalburn Pupils have figured prominently in the Lesmahagow Higher Grade prize lists for several years past, and the session just closing has produced an Upper Ward winner in Betty Thomson, Midfield Road, while the Cairncross special was won by Margaret Carruthers of Lintfieldbank*

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The 1943-44 session opened two weeks earlier than usual as it was likely that absenteeism would take place in October due to potato harvesting. In September it was proposed to have a feeding centre at the school for pupils to have dinner served at the school. Later that month the Master of Works visited the school to examine the rooms in the Hostel with a view to converting two of them into a temporary Science room. The report was not favourable as only 12 pupils could be accommodated in the space available.

It would appear that the move to commence two weeks earlier than normal was a wise move as it was recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> October that only 12 out of a class of 68 were present due to the potato lifting.

## **October 1943**

*The local School Children's Concert is to be held on November 5<sup>th</sup>, when the plaque awarded by the Commissioners of the Admiralty for the Warships Week effort will be on exhibition.*

## **Hamilton Advertiser**

From 15<sup>th</sup> December 1943 until 21st February 1944, Headmaster, Mr. Frank Wills was off work due to illness and Mr Robert Scott acted in his absence and “*discharged his duties with great efficiency*”.

### **April 1944**

*The School Children of Bellfield and Coalburn Schools recently took a collection on behalf of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow, gathering in all £15-14shillings, which is the largest amount collected in this district for this cause. Thanks are due to the young collectors and to those who so generously gave.*

*Robert Robertson, Aldersyde, Dalquhandy, who is not yet seven years old, has been collecting “ship’s ha’pennies” to help the Red Cross. Thanks to his zeal, and the encouragement of his parents and friends, he has been able to hand over 10 shillings in “ship’s ha’pennies” for the third time, making a splendid contribution of 30 shillings to the fund. Well done, Robert.*

**Hamilton Advertiser.**

Yet another fund raising effort took place in May 1944 when a figure of £123-3-3d was collected, a record for the school. No note of another half day.

### **July**

*A Coalburn Pupil has won the dux prize at Lesmahagow Higher Grade School. The winner, Miss Betty Bradford, deserves credit for a splendid achievement.*

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Coalburn Flower Show has been staged in the school on a number of occasions and this was so on Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1944, and due to this the school closed early on the Friday afternoon to allow the erection of the staging for the show.

Potato lifting was again causing disruption. In September a lady called from the Ministry of Labour arrived at the school to interview all of the pupils who were due to leave school on October 1<sup>st</sup> and all of them were absent. It would seem that the ringing of the school bell was banned at some time during hostilities as Mr Wills wrote to Lanarkshire House in November suggesting that this ban be lifted.

The school was closed for two days on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 1945 following the unconditional surrender of Germany.

With the buses on strike, some teachers had to travel by train and this meant that the school had to close earlier than usual in the second last week of June in order that they could catch the 3 o’clock train.

### **July 1945**

*The Coalburn School dux prize for the year was won by George McGowan, Bellfield Road.*

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The school was due to be reopened on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> August, but as the Japanese had also surrendered, an additional two days holidays were granted.

**PEACE!**

### **War-time memories of Guy Scott, a pupil when war broke out.**

*There is no doubt that boys and girls were deprived of much enjoyment in terms of sport, outings etc., owing to the restrictions which prevailed during the war years. I clearly remember being issued with a gas mask contained in a cardboard box which we carried to school each day during the early months. To protect the box from damage, I later acquired a carrier-bag for the gas mask, made from a material called "rexine". All the windows in the school had a sort of honey-combed hessian stuck on to them, this was to reduce the tendency of the glass to splinter causing possible lacerations, should any bombs dropped, and cause an explosion nearby.*

*While the boys got woodwork, the girls took Domestic Science on a Tuesday and Cookery on a Thursday. Their tutor was again a visiting teacher called Miss Lindsay, who was proficient in imparting instruction and very popular with the girls. I clearly remember how we, laddies would curry favour with the girls on Thursdays hoping to persuade them to let us sample the tasty scones or tarts they had baked that day. When our luck was in, how well these tit-bits tasted.*

*His teachers at the time were;*

*Infants 1 Miss Martha Barr Infants 2 Miss Isa Gilchrist  
Primary 1 Miss Jessie Purdie Primary 2 Miss Agnes Thornton  
Primary 3 Miss Mamie Craig Primary 4 Miss Mary Harvie  
Primary 5 Miss Marion Jeffrey  
Secondary 1 Mr Robert Scott 2 Mr Frank Wills.*

### **Memories of Betty Bryson**

*I don't know how many evacuees came to Coalburn after the Clydebank raids, but I do know that school roll was over 500. The only difference they made in the school was that some of the children were Roman Catholic and there was a teacher of that faith appointed to the school. In the morning the Catholic children assembled in the gym hall for prayers, whilst the others had religious practice in the classrooms. Every Friday the priest from St John's in Blackwood visited the school and held a service with the evacuees. Miss Craig taught Primary 5 and she played piano. The piano was usually in the corridor. She played when the pupils were entering the school in the morning and the afternoon. Infants and girls lined up at the front of the school, the boys at the back. We went into the cloakroom and removed our outer clothing and again lined up. Miss Craig would be playing a march of some sort of a kind on the piano and we marched along the corridor, the older pupils continuing upstairs, marching strictly in time to the music. Teachers were stationed along the corridor and Miss Harvie was at the foot of the stairs, Miss Jeffrey at the middle landing and Mr Scott at the top. It was more than your life was worth to be out of step.*

### **War-time School Dinners by Douglas Lockhart**

*Dinners were provided at a cost of one shilling and eightpence (8d) per week. The meals were made in Lanark and carried from there in sealed aluminium containers. Dinner tickets were issued at the beginning of the week and if you lost them you starved. The meals were not very good. The potatoes were "Pom", the equivalent of "Smash" and were always a sticky mess. Because of the distance carried, the meals suffered and beef stew was favourite because it travelled well. Pudding consisted of milk, jelly or custard, or spotty dick and custard, semolina, sago and occasionally tapioca. Soup was always some kind of vegetable or lentil broth. There was no choice of menu. It was either soup and main course or main course and pudding. The meals were served in the gym.*

*School dinners were introduced on 12<sup>th</sup> September and over 250 children participated and as a result five attendants had to be employed. Within two weeks the number of those being fed rose to almost 300 and another two dinner attendants were taken on to meet the demand.*

### **April 1946**

*As in London, the Victory celebrations of this upland village were continued into the following week.*



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