

*The Jim Hamilton*  
**Heritage Society of Coalburn**  
**Newsletter 55**



**Summer 2019**

**Photograph by David Halls**



## Chairman's Remarks

First of all I say that it is with regret that I have to record the fact that I am looking for someone to take over the role of producing the Newsletters once again. Bill Rough has intimated to me that he wishes to cease the task and indeed that he no longer wishes to take part in anything pertaining to the society. I shall make no further comment except to say that I appreciated the fact that he was prepared to produce the Newsletters for several years and I would like to express my thanks to him for so doing. If any of the members would like to consider producing further Newsletters please let me know.

The Gala Day will soon be upon us and already plans have commenced as to what will be on display in the Leisure Centre. Over many years Jim Hamilton and John Zawadzski were active with their cameras and as a result, in the archive there are many photographs which have never been seen in public. There is a wide selection of images from both Coalburn and Lesmahagow and as we usually have many visitors from the latter I thought it would be appropriate to include "Gow" scenes.

The production of the 2020 calendars has commenced as we get exiles on the day, many of whom purchase our calendar and we have been in printing in readiness for 6th July. The theme this year is modern day views of the village which were taken by David Halls to whom and for which we are extremely grateful.

31st May 2019.

## Coalburn related deaths:

Mary Brown (Black)

Agnes Cowan (Johnstone)

Mary Gray (Strang)

John Aitken

Rose Campbell (Hickie)

Catherine Buchanan (Meikle)

Billy Cook

Ian Strang

Jack Logan

May Smiley (Scott)

Esther Serrells (Nisbet)



# From the Chronicles (19) JIMMY FORSYTH

Ma faither wurked on the steam driven trams at Govan and then went sooth to be manager for the steam trams in Dudley. At that time trams were either pulled by horses or steam driven. However, when the steam trams were replaced by electric trams, we returned to Scotland and he got a job as a colliery engine keeper at the Bellfield pits. We moved from England to live in what was known as Bellfield Terrace at Coalburn but the name was changed later to Railway Terrace to avoid confusion wi' Bellfield Raws"

The hooses at Railway Terrace were quite new then and despite them havin' ootside dry closets and havin' to cairry in and cairry oot the water, we had something rare for the abodes o' the wurkers at the turn of the century ...electric licht. This was provided by an engine at the nearby Bellfield Nummer Faur pit.

Efter some years at Railway Terrace, we moved to stay at Plantation Cottage which was actually built for ma faither and we were the furst tenants. I hae nae doot that the hoose got its name frae the plantation..we called it a planting...which ran alongside oor boundry wa' The bricks actually came fae an early pit at Dempster's Mine. He was tellt tae take awa' as money as he wanted frae the auld buildings and they were brought tae the site by horse drawn cairts o' Charlie Gordon Wilson, the local contractor, I min ma faither paid us ladies 2d for cleaning the bricks fae lime.

Plantation Cottage, under our modern system of street numbering, is now 161 Bellfield Road, Coalburn.

Ma furst Job was at the brickwurks at Coalburn, the bricks were hand made wi' the boys preparing them on tables and cairryin' them through to put them on the hot floor to dry. Then they went into the kilns. I was both a hot job and a stoury job...no very healthy at aw' I was paid 1/10d per day for toiling frae 7 in the morning till 5 in the efternoon.

I left the brickwork tae go tae the coal wurkings at Poniel, on the road doon tae wee Coalburn farm where there was both a pit and a mine. I was sort of handyman with some check-weighing responsibility. I had a spell as a winding engineman and I was at Poniel till I was in my twenties.

In fact I was in various pits and mines aboot Coalburn for over forty years. I thocht I would try a change o' job and went tae wurk at a factory at Lesmahagow. I was only there for twa years but these twa years did me oot o' a pit pension. Forty years o' toiling in the coalmines and nae pension for a' these years



# Billy Dempster looks back.

*From the Hamilton Advertiser 1960*

1. A letter was submitted to Lanarkshire Council regarding a telephone kiosk at Old Bellfield, Coalburn. The sales superintendent of the P O. Telephone Department replied that while the need for kiosks in rural areas was fully appreciated, the Post Office incurred a loss of £3,000,000 a year on kiosks-those in rural areas contributing largely to this deficit. The community at Old Bellfield was about 700 yards from the nearest kiosk situated at the junction of Bellfield Road and Beechmount Avenue and in the circumstances the Superintendent regretted that the provision of a kiosk at Old Bellfield could not be recommended.

2. An appeal for help has been made by Scots villagers because they have a "olcano" outside their back door. The village that lives under of cloud of smoke is Coalburn, in the heart of Lanarkshire countryside, where 100 yards of an old coal bing is burning a few yards from people's homes. Flames spurt from it at night. The smoke never and angry villagers are complaining about sulphur fumes. When the bing began to smoulder on Guy Fawkes' Night the National Coal Board sent a bulldozer to try to stop it; two days later they pulled out and the village was left if fog. A county sanitary inspector said, "The Coal Board say is not their pigeon. The bing was there over 40 years ago, before the Coal Board was formed. The landowner, Capt. R W.J. Cunningham won't accept responsibility either as the ground does not belong to him either. A Coal Board spokesman said, "We have no legal responsibility. We are not prepared to discuss matter further."

3. "The Westoun" is almost completed and should be officially opened very soon. Quite a few are already making it a rendezvous. Linoleum and lights are the two "missing articles."

**Footnote. South Lanarkshire Council have recently been promoting the "Men's Shed" project locally which is in fact similar to what "The Westoun" was.**

## COALBURN'S BURNING BING.

These verses I pen are all quite true,  
If you can spare me a minute, I'll tell them to you.

It all started off, quite harmless enough, On a piece of wasted land,  
A flame, it flickered through the rough, And by the wind, was fanned.  
Downwards too it made its path, It's tongue, to the earth did cling,  
And so was born, the hated wrath, Of Coalburn's burning bing.

The air grew thick with dreaded smoke, The flames flew on in haste,  
With the sickening air, we all did choke, Even our food, it began to taste,  
Health became important now, Officials, their hands did wring,  
But all their talk still had to bow, To Coalburn's burning bing.

When the flames lit up the sky, Their colours were vivid and bright,  
Darting about, they were ever so spry, On many a cold, cold night,  
Still we were sure that help would come, Many a phone would ring,  
But officialdom still kept mum, On Coalburn's burning bing.

STV even visited us, In the person of Henry Hay  
On "Here and Now", it caused quite a fuss, When he asked what we had to say,  
Garden Street was in the news, Its occupants held back not a thing,  
When they were asked to air their views, About Coalburn's burning bing.

Nobody claimed to own the ground, Which was causing all the trouble,  
Too bad it hadn't been gold we'd found, Amongst the dirt and rubble,  
At last we saw some progress, When the Coal Board, a tractor did bring,  
To try and douse the horrid mess, That was Coalburn's burning bing.

The ground is now black because of the heat, Which appears to have cooled down at last,  
It has kept us all talking, this unwanted threat, We now hope it's a thing of the past,  
But we remember the fear it instilled in our hearts, Of the perils which flames often bring,  
We all pray in the village, it never restarts, Our infamous burning bing.

The minute you gave me may have stretched quite a bit,  
The story I've told, I trust you enjoyed it.

Peter McLeish January 1961.

# From the Chronicles (56)...**JIMMY SMITH**

Perhaps it was because there was not many events in our life in the country that I remember vividly the co-op store burning to the ground. My main memory is of one of the window dressings that had been composed of tiers of three round cheeses on top of each other. I can still remember standing and gazing at the waterfalls of molten cheese running down to the ground outside because of the intense heat from the fire.

The wee shop before one got to the co-op store was occupied by Mrs. McQueen, she had previously been Mrs. Cullen, attired in a Victorian dress, she sold sweets, biscuits etc. She also offered “Askit Powders” for sale.

Mr. and Mrs. McQueen at the door leading into their shop





She claimed to have known the Glasgow chemist who had made the first Askit Powders. He had formulated the powder which at the beginning had no name. It proved to be efficient and popular with women. A housewife asked what the powder was called, in case she should send some of her children for some. The chemist's reply was "I haven't put a name to it yet but tell anyone you send just to ask it. According to Mrs. McQueen the name stuck.

We had a number of worthies who came into Coalburn plying their trade. What a character was Gibbie Liddell, the travelling ironmonger from Lesmahagow. I can remember when he came by in a horse drawn lorry (later he had a motor van) with tiers of shelves and drawers containing every conceivable piece of ironmongery. He was so small in stature that he had a portable ladder to reach the upper shelves.

He wore, in summer or winter. A leather coat, boots with leggings and a Balaclava. Paraffin oil, candles, firelighters—all were available in his van: he also sold sweets and before counting them out and putting them in a poke he would clean his hands on an oily cloth.

Gibbie was going round Coalburn in the evenings before there were street lights and in the winter, he carried a storm lantern to show him and his customers, his wares.

Greenlaw, a fruiterer from Lanark, was another vanman who visited Coalburn every week. He would shout out, even in the dead of winter, "Strawberries fresh strawberries" when asked for these delicacies he was never stuck for an answer "I've just selt the lot, but I have a grand lot of Kerr's Pinks for sale.

## From the Chronicles (56)...MARY LANG

When I was age to attend school, my twin sister, Margaret and I walked from Shoulderrigg to Waterside school. There was a ruling, much resented by the parents of the children at Shoulderrigg and Auchenbegg by the Lesmahagow School Board that the children had to attend Waterside school instead of Coalburn, which was much nearer. It was a long walk for 5 year olds, in summer we often went on our bare feet to save our boots.

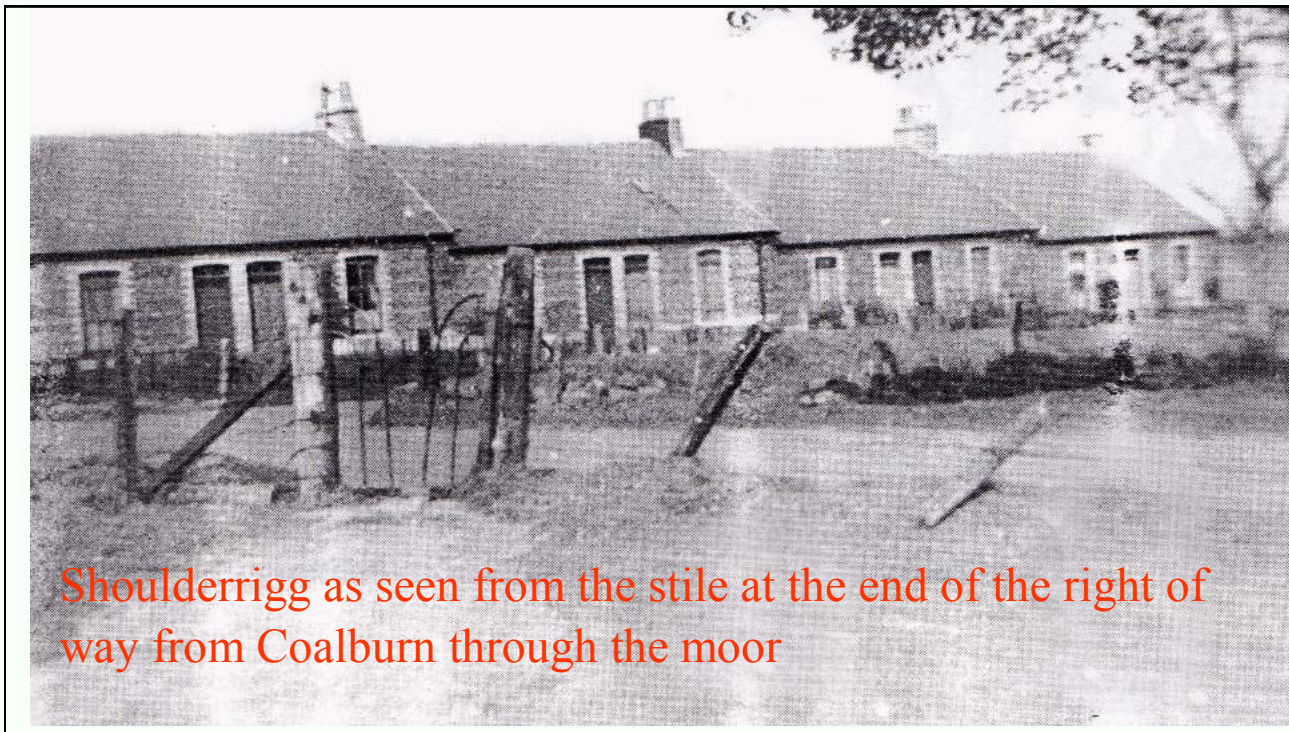
Waterside had two classrooms with two teachers, Miss Campbell lived in the schoolhouse and Jean Harvie was the other teacher. She lived at Auchenbegg and went on her bicycle to school, later she had a motor cycle.

The parents at Shoulderrigg and Auchenbegg rebelled against the order of the Lesmahagow School Board refusing admission of their children to Coalburn School which was about a mile nearer their homes. In fairness to the board, what they were endeavouring to do was maintain a high level as possible the numbers of boys and girls attending Waterside school in order to keep it open.

Another problem was that there was overcrowding at Coalburn school because of the increase in families coming to live in the village due to better work prospects from the developing pits.

*Note from Coalburn school records*

*School re-opened Monday 30 August 1920 the "ban" upon Shoulderrigg and Auchenbegg children attending this school having been removed, the numbers have gone up considerably. Roll 380 children.*



Shoulderrigg as seen from the stile at the end of the right of way from Coalburn through the moor

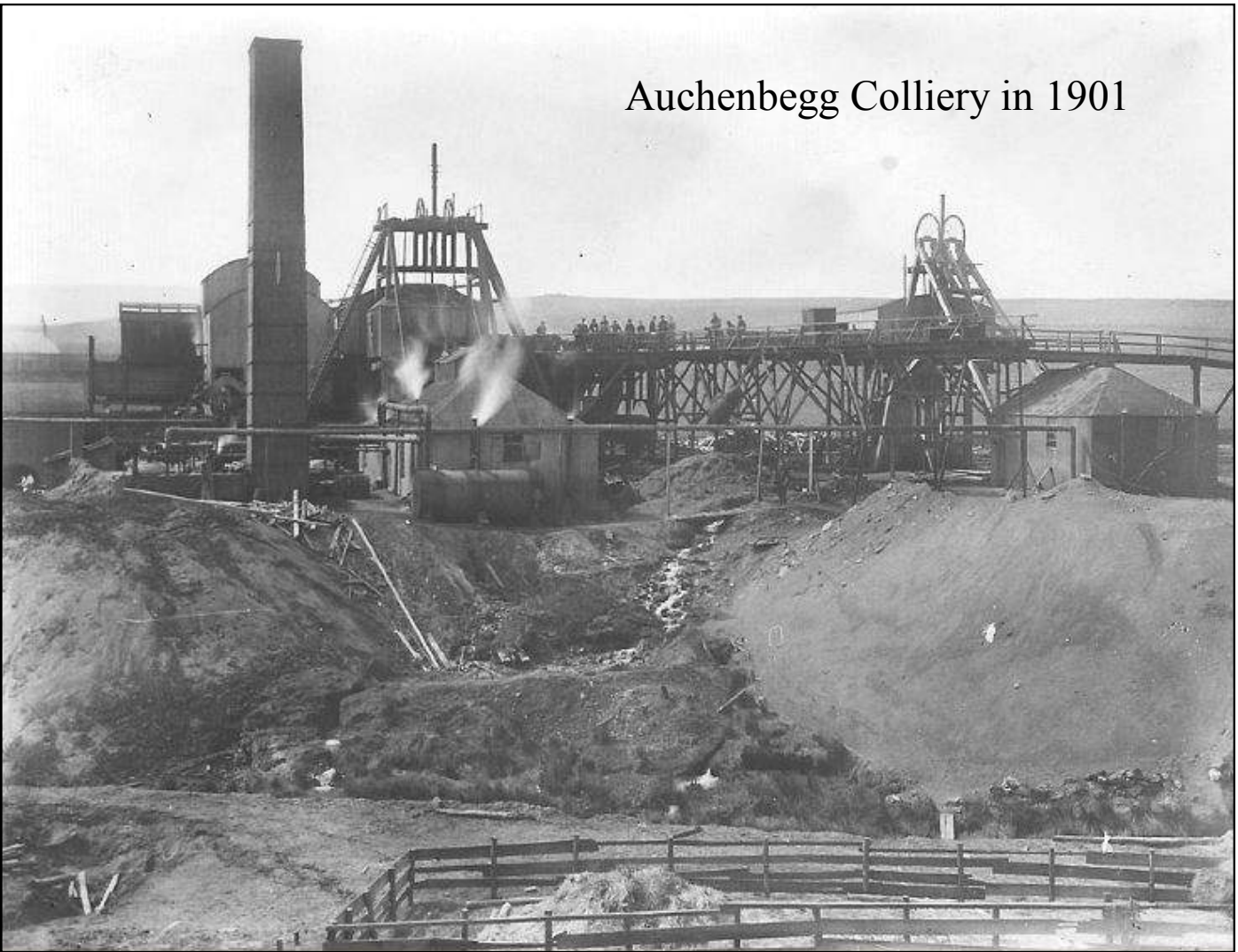
I remember when Auchenbegg pit was working. Many of the colliers came by workers trains from down Larkhall way, or from Lanark. They got off the train at the small platform near Auchlochan points box, where the Forkins road crosses the railway going towards Merchanthall farm. They walked from the platform to Coalburn and then up Shoulderrigg road, then branched through the fields to Auchenbegg pit.

### Waddell & Son, Coalburn

#### ***Auchenbegg Mine – situated near Coalburn***

*Persons employed underground 223; above ground, 17; total, 240  
The employees reside in the following localities:- in mine-owners' houses situated at Auchenbegg, Shoulderigg, Porterhall, High Stockbriggs, and Meadows, 20; in houses rented by miners situated at Lanark, Auchenheath, Lesmahagow, Blackwood, Tillietudlem, Crossford, 220*

Auchenbegg Colliery in 1901



*Can anyone put names to these photos?*



The above was at a Gala Day in 1987.

The one on the right has "An Auchenheath Family" written the back. No date.

