

The Jim Hamilton
Heritage Society of Coalburn
Newsletter 59
Summer 2020





Chairman's Remarks

At the moment I am looking out at blue sky with not a cloud to be seen. No, I am not at Bellfield; I am self-isolating in Devon. I was whisked away from Coalburn and am now in my fourth week here.

Thanks to Helen and Betty I received the latest Newsletter and with this in mind I feel that, despite us being unable to hold meetings, we should keep the Newsletter going. Hopefully by the time it is produced the restrictions that are currently in place will be a little less severe and it can be prepared and issued. At least that should keep us in touch.

The cover of this Issue shows Pipe Majors Donald Williams and James Findlay. The paintings are the work of Billy Clelland, a Lesmahagow man living in Australia who is working with Donald Williams on a history of the Pipe Band. The pictures are presently in storage awaiting display in the band hall when venues open up again.

It goes without saying that there will no display in the Leisure Centre and also no Gala Day this year.

Keep safe till we get back together again.

Peter McLeish

15th April 2020

What with the exceptional circumstances this summer I thought that members may appreciate a section with photographs of more carefree summers gone by. Several have been provided by my uncle Andrew (pictured, May 2020), who extends warm regards to all.



If you have a photograph or any other items that you would like to share for the autumn issue please feel free to send to me at: hm.brownlie@virginmedia.com. Thank you.

Helen Brownlie

In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths

Billy Mathieson

Letty Meikle (Henderson)

Helen Smith (Thomson)



The Miners Institute and War Memorial

This summer sees the 95th anniversary of the Miners Welfare Building

“The opening last Friday of the Miners Institute erected in connection with the Welfare Fund marked an important event in the history of Coalburn.

Incorporated within the Institute is the village war memorial which has taken the form of a beautifully designed tablet, with, in bronze letters the names of the men belonging to the district who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War. The memorial is placed in the vestibule to the left of the main door and its unveiling on Saturday formed a second and impressive ceremony.

A grant of £6000 was sufficient to cover the cost of the bare building. Other funding would be needed to chairs and other necessary items however. A further award of £1500 was later given.

It was said that upstairs hall could accommodate between 500 and 600 persons.”

Hamilton Advertiser Saturday 11th July, 1925

The reference to the village war memorial got me thinking about the loss of life in those times and how the end of hostilities brought fresh tragedy.

Earlier in 1918 a highly contagious strain of influenza had emerged. Most of Europe was involved in fighting the war and suppressed reporting lest this undermine morale. In Spain, which was not involved in hostilities, the outbreak was freely reported: hence the pandemic became known as ‘Spanish flu’.

Incidence subsided over the summer, however troop journeys home saw trains and boats acting as incubators with mass movement providing potent vectors for spread across the globe. Celebrations to mark the end of the war in November saw vast crowds gather which also led to more deaths as the incidence of H1N1 influenza flared with a vengeance.



Card home from WWI

*Flags representing Britain and Allies
France, Britain, Italy, Russia,
Belgium, Serbia, Japan*

'The Fallen of Lesmahagow Parish in the Great War 1914-1918' includes the stories of three young soldiers from Coalburn whose deaths were attributed to influenza or pneumonia. (Details of this Lanarkshire Family History Society book can be found inside the back page.)

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### **Private James Watson Little**

James Watson Little was born in Coalburn in 1896 and lived with extended family in the home of John and Lily Little at Pretoria Terrace. Still called 'New Buildings' in 1901, the family home would have provided superior accommodation to the old miners' rows. However with four adults and seven children aged 2 months to 16 years of age in 1911 conditions for young James, then a boy of 4, must have been cramped.

The 1911 Census shows James aged 14 and working at the pithead. Thereafter he worked as a miner and this continued through the war. However in 1918 he was conscripted into the army due to shortage of men. There must have been huge concern at the prospect of army enlistment, knowing how heavy casualties had been.

James Watson Little went on to serve in the Cameronians, fighting at the battles of St Quentin Canal and Cambrai. A few days later James was dead: not of wounds, but of pneumonia. He passed away at a Military Station Hospital in Calais on the 13th October 1918, aged 22.

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Corporal George Hamilton

There was more bad news for the village that October with the death of Corporal George Hamilton.

The son of James and Agnes Hamilton, the 1911 Census shows George aged 15 and working as a colliery pony driver. He is living with his parents, seven siblings and his uncle George at Gall Cottage, then a house with two windowed rooms. George is the second eldest (his older brother James later became the father of Jim Hamilton whose work provides the foundation for the Heritage Society.) George senior died in 1913, aged 48.

Young George may have enjoyed working with equines as he enlisted in the Scottish Horse Yeomanry, serving in Yorkshire and in Ireland. It was in Ireland that George Hamilton died. He passed away in Limerick Military Hospital on the 21st of October 1918, aged 22. His death was also recorded as due to pneumonia.

2nd Lieutenant David Hart Provan

David Provan was born in Uddingston in September 1897. He was the fourth of five sons of Edward Provan and his wife Janet (née Vassie). Edward had been a police constable there but by the time of David's birth was working as a van driver. Thereafter the family took up farming at Nether Fauldhouse, by the old main road just south of the junction for Douglas Water (now sandwiched between that road, the B7078, and the new M74). David and Janet remained there for the rest of their days.

David was sixteen when war broke out. He and his four brothers all served in the military. Initially in the Lanarkshire Yeomanry in 1914, David went on to serve in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. He received a Distinguished Service Medal in 1917 and in spring the following year was awarded the Military Cross. The Gazette (official public record) records that David received the Military Cross for "*conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in an attack*". Specifically: "*When the advance was held up by an enemy strong point he at once collected fifteen men, counter-attacked and captured the strong point, taking two machine guns and twenty prisoners. He showed great courage and contempt of danger.*"

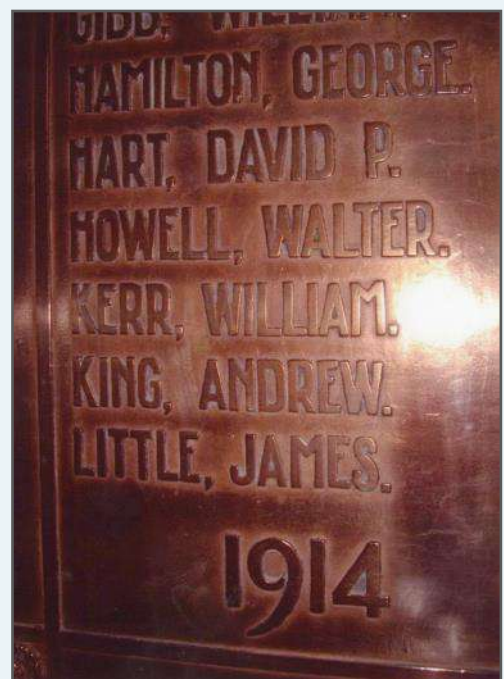
David Provan lived to see the end of the war but died of influenza seven weeks later at the King George Military Hospital, Dublin. David passed away on 27th December 1918, aged 21.

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Recording pneumonia as cause of death in respect of James Watson Little and George Hamilton in October 1918 may have been intended to allow for accuracy while obfuscating the root cause while the war was in progress: it is notable that David Provan's death certificate, from December 1918, states 'influenza'.

RIGHT: The Village War memorial, showing the names George Hamilton, 'David P. Hart', and James Little. (David Provan sometimes used the middle name 'Hart', including during his military service. When the war memorial was engraved these names were transposed.)

Helen Brownlie



# 100 Years in Coalburn

## Photo Supplement Summer 2020



ABOVE, left to right: Willie Weir, Bill Steele, Jim Steele and Mitchell Jeffrey. Mitchell Jeffrey married Agnes Garrett in 1914 and emigrated to New Zealand so the photograph is from fairly early in the 20th Century.



LEFT: Andrew Brownlie - around 1940.

| 7   |                            | 8                             |  |
|-----|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| ge. | Father's name and surname. | Rank or profession of father. |  |
| 11  | James Moss                 | Mobile                        |  |
|     | Brownlie                   | Restaurantier.                |  |

ABOVE: His father's inimitable response to registrar's enquiry at Andrew's wedding in Surrey.





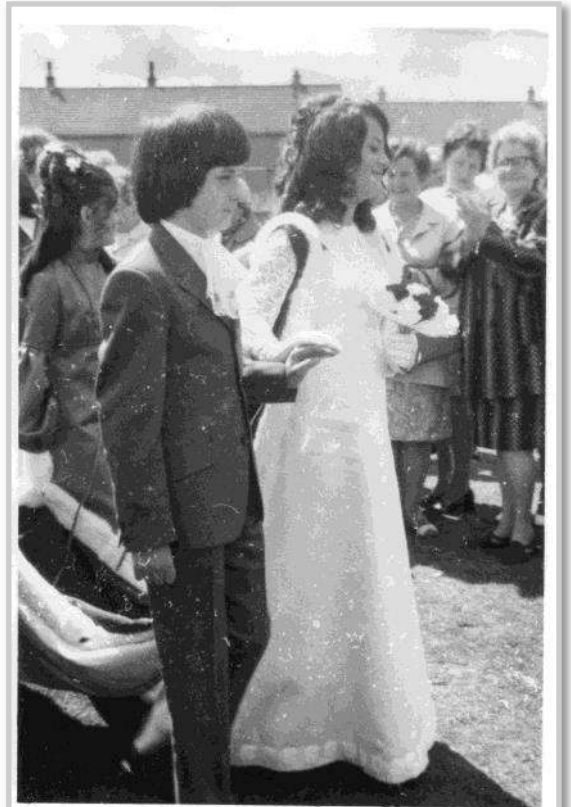
**Bellfield Farm, 1940s**

Jean Adam and Miller  
Brownlie

**Gala Day 1973**

LEFT: Gala Queen Fiona Bell, daughter of  
Betty Bell

BELOW: Womens' Guild Lorry. The lady in  
the middle is Margaret Findlay





### **Midfield Road**

Mrs Fred Kirk with  
son Jim's Triumph  
Herald - early 1960s



### **Midfield Road 1950s**

Janey Lundie  
(left) and Mary  
Kirk

Guy Kirk's MG  
behind brother  
Fred junior's car





**Gala Day Parade** 5th July 2014 Dunn Crescent



**Shoulderigg Moor** prior to the open cast mineworks that began in 1988

Alex McMurdo recalls that Pipe Major Findlay used to practice out at the abandoned farm encircled by trees in the centre distance

## Poetry Corner

### The Wall

Approaching evening spread its quiet haze,  
The lovely country scenery tae enfold,  
As slowly doon the Bankend Braes,  
Wi' gun and dug, a lonely homeward strolled.

Ma hert was filled wi' national pride,  
As a surveyed the countryside.  
Nae land thought I can fairer be,  
The morn I'll jine the SNP.

But oh! Alas ma dreams were shattered.  
Ma dreams of Scotia's grandeur scattered,  
Broken sublime serenity,  
By a monstrous red brick built obscenity.

Beside the road, just next the mair,  
It reached for sixty yairds or mair,  
A thoosand bricks masel' a measured,  
An' sand enough tae start a desert.

Thinks I, nae Scottish man alack,  
A studied till ma een were burly,  
But roon the back, a wee square plaque,

**'THIS WALL WAS BUILT BY DANNY TURLEY'**

Willie McKenzie

*The wall in question is in Middlemuir Road and was built  
by Mr Turley for his mother in law*



# History of Birkwood

## Part II

In Part I we covered the Birkwood estate from possession by Lesmahagow Priory Church until the death of proprietor John Gregory MacKirdy in 1881. We start with a recap, taking into account further research that has revealed new information.

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The Birkwood estate came into the ownership of the MacKirdy family 1807. Proprietor John McKirdy was descended from landowners on the Isle of Bute, where other branches of the family still owned extensive land. He was married to Mary Elliot, daughter of David Elliot of Liddesdale. As he was styled 'of Demerara', we had considered the possibility that John MacKirdy made his fortune in sugar. Further research suggests the cotton trade.

On John MacKirdy's death in 1835 Birkwood estate passed to his eldest son, John Gregory MacKirdy, then 28 years of age. John Gregory MacKirdy, served as a Justice of the Peace for Lanark County and it was during his time that Birkwood House was built - described in The Annals of Lesmahagow Parish (1864) as *"a handsome castellated mansion, beautifully situation on the river Nethan, about half a mile above the village of Abbeygreen."*

John Gregory MacKirdy was proprietor for 46 years. He had no offspring but he did have two brothers. It's not quite clear which brother inherited Birkwood estate and his extensive Lanarkshire property portfolio on the death of John Gregory MacKirdy in 1881 (we'll come back to this in Part III). However what is certain is that the younger of the two - David Elliot MacKirdy - was proprietor for many years and considerably expanded Birkwood House and associated buildings.

Before going on to look at Birkwood in David Elliot MacKirdy's time we provide some information about those who worked for John Gregory MacKirdy.

MacKirdys and the Cotton Trade

In 1855 and 1865 John Gregory MacKirdy was proprietor of extensive commercial premises at 31, 33 and 35 Virginia Street, Glasgow, inc

luding a calender: *'a machine in which paper or cloth is smoothed by passing between rollers'*.

His brother Charles Clark MacKirdy was proprietor of a spinning factory in Reid Street, Dalmarnock, in 1875.

Details are to be found in the Valuation Rolls. These were not compiled prior to 1855 and it is quite possible that the family had commercial interests in cotton for some time previously.

Demerara contained many cotton plantations and, like the sugar plantations, these too relied on slave labour.

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**Birkwood Staff** In 1878 John Gregory MacKirdy - then aged 72 - set about putting instructions in place for the disposition of his wealth and property. In so doing he made provision for several of his house servants and other staff "*who may respectively be in my employment at the date of my death*". A Codicil to his Will bequeathed varying cash sums to:

Sarah Pickering, housekeeper (£30)  
George Williamson, land steward (£20)  
Thomas Brown, gardener (£20)  
David Pringle, coachman (£10)  
Andrew Jackson, ploughman (£10)  
William Davidson, gamekeeper (£10)  
Andrew Reid, labourer (£10)  
Hugh Cameron, groom (£5)

A further Codicil directed payment of a year's wages to footman James Longhurst.

Such legacies may to some extent have operated as an incentive to keep staff in place who might otherwise have been inclined seek alternative employment in anticipation of redundancy on their employer's demise. However since many staff were not provided for, and furthermore several of those specified did not live in property owned by Mr MacKirdy nor even necessarily work exclusively for him, there may have been a simple desire to reward service, albeit selectively.

*The April 1881 Census* provides a snapshot of staff shortly prior to the death of John Gregory MacKirdy. These included:

**Birkwood House:** Sarah Ellen Pickering, Housekeeper; Edwin James Longhurst, footman; Catherine McIntyre, laundrymaid; Robina Leitch, cook; Margaret Udington, housemaid; and Agnes Yuill, nurse.

**Old Birkwood:** House I - James Cranston, engine keeper at limeworks, with wife Ellen and young children Ellen and James; House II - George Williamson, land steward and wife Ellen and infant Jeannie and baby Andrew.

**Monkstable:** Peter Blackwood, shepherd and wife Marion.

**Birkwood Lodge:** Isabella Taylor or Miller, a widow and retired seamstress now acting as lodge keeper .

**Highmains Cottage:** William Davidson, gamekeeper, and family.

**Heather Cottage:** David Pringle, coachman & groom, and family; Andrew Jackson, ploughman and wife Margaret.

**Beerholm Feus:** Andrew Reid, labourer, and family.

#### **'MacKirdy'**

The family name was originally spelt 'Makurerdy' or 'MacKuerdy'.

In keeping with some of the early written records pertaining to this branch of the family, Part I used 'McKirdy'.

However the family used 'MacKirdy' throughout the period covered here.

Similarly in respect of 'Elliott' *vs.* 'Elliot'.

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David Elliot MacKirdy Known locally as 'The General', the army career of David Elliot MacKirdy began when he joined the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment as Ensign. Since 1833, aged 19, he had progressed through the ranks and after a full military career he was placed on the retirement list on 1st July 1881. In 1886 he became Colonel of the 2nd Battalion of the Welsh Guards.

At Birkwood David Elliot MacKirdy set about building a further extension "at enormous cost". Completed in 1890, it is said to have been built to impress a foreign dignitary. However no such visitor materialised.

Later the **South Lodge and Gate** (pictured) were built, together with a bridge, to give access over a burn running between the new Lodge and the House. The South Lodge and Gate were impressive and still stand to-day.



1891 Census Birkwood House had two occupants that April night: Elizabeth Davidson, housekeeper; and Agnes Johnston, under-housemaid. Two houses at 'Old Birkwood' were respectively occupied by engine keeper William Brown and his wife Elizabeth, and coachman David Pringle and family. Birkwood Lodge was occupied by gatekeeper William Freeland, a Carlisle man with his wife Janet and family.

David Elliot MacKirdy was not present. Perhaps he was at his Villa in Cannes. Known as the Villa Beau Regard, it had been built by one of the MacKirdys of Birkwood. It was described thus:

"An Italian styled mansion of three storeys, situated in a garden with successive terraces and arcades. The façade is orderly and symmetrical. The N.E. corner of the building is surrounded by a panoramic viewpoint. A balustrade crowns the entire roof. The overall quality of the structure is very good. Homogenously in its original state. The remarkable part is its overall condition."

It was there that David Elliot MacKirdy died, in January 1894, aged eighty. In keeping with his expressed wishes his corpse was brought to Lesmahagow from Cannes to be interred in the family vault in Lesmahagow Churchyard.

The General was the last of his generation. He had not married and - like his brothers and his elder sister before him - left no issue. Only Susan, his younger sister, had had a family. Her eldest son, William Augustus Scott, now inherited the Birkwood estate - taking the name 'William Augustus Scott MacKirdy'.

Peter McLeish & Helen Brownlie ... to be continued

The Fallen Of Lesmahagow Parish in the Great War 1914-1918

This illustrated book was researched and compiled by Lindsay Free-land and Morag F. White and published by the Lanarkshire Family History Society in March 2018.

A copy is kept in the Coalburn Heritage Centre for reference. Copies can be obtained from the Lanarkshire FHS, cost £6.

<http://www.lanarkshirefhs.org.uk/>

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### **Can You Help?**

There are four soldiers in respect of whom information is lacking, including two with a link to Coalburn. Can you help identify these men?

**Corporal John Docherty** - served in the Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment); exact date of death unknown; said to have had a brother Matt and sister Jean, in Coalburn

**George Hislop** - all that is known about George Hislop is that he is commemorated on the Kirkmuirhill Parish Church Roll of Honour

**Ian Muir** - lived with his parents in Blackwood; served with the Argyll and Southern Highlanders

**James Steel** - commemorated on Coalburn Miners Welfare Roll of Honour

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Scottish Military Research Group Commemorations Project

<http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com>

The page includes a list by area. Coalburn Miners Welfare Roll of Honour is featured at 'Lanarkshire - Other memorials'.

Lanarkshire Heritage Forum

The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn recently joined the Lanarkshire Heritage Forum. Membership was originally confined to museums in south Lanarkshire, however it has since broadened out to form a networking forum encompassing a wide range of heritage organisations in Lanarkshire.

Physical meetings are presently suspended, however a virtual meeting via 'Zoom' is scheduled for June 24th. A report will be provided in the next issue.

The Jim Hamilton

Heritage Society of Coalburn

www.coalburnheritage.org.uk

Some websites for local history and heritage in these restricted times:

SCOTTISH MINING: <http://www.scottishmining.co.uk/>

[CLYDESDALE'S HERITAGE FACEBOOK PAGE](#)

ASSOCIATION OF LEADING VISITOR ATTRACTIONS:
some are opening virtually - go to <http://www.avla.org.uk/index.cfm>

INTERNET ARCHIVE: <https://archive.org/index.php>
search term 'Lanarkshire' reveals a range of historical texts

Till we meet again

