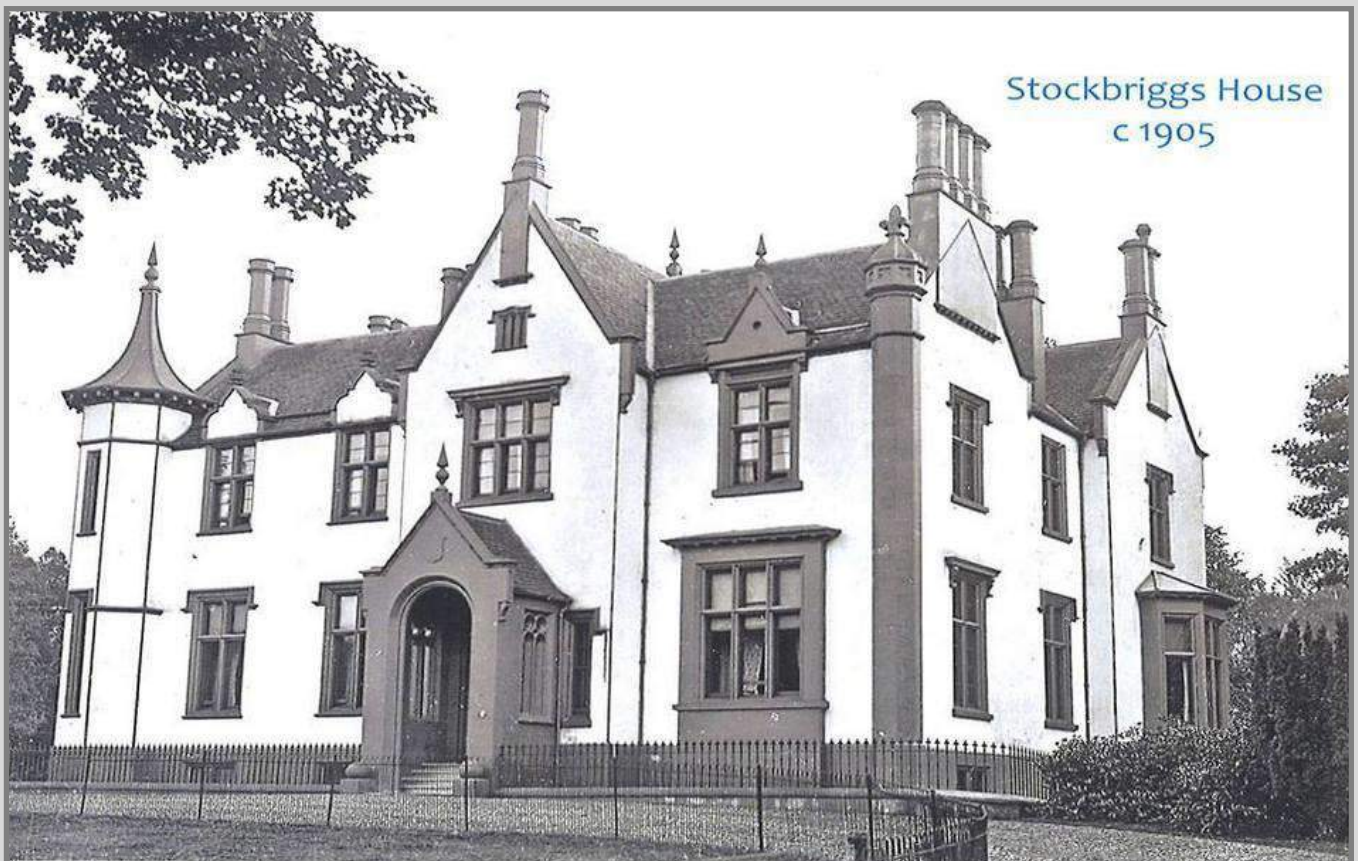


The Jim Hamilton

Heritage Society of Coalburn

Newsletter **63**

Summer 2021





Chairman's Remarks

Sadly, yet again, two of our members have passed away. Tributes to John McGhie and Archie Cameron are in this newsletter.

As can be seen on the page of deaths, Coalburn has been particularly hard hit in the last few months. There was a spell last month where I was being notified of a death every few days.

At this time lockdown is still with us though Gilbert and I have visited the Heritage Centre twice so far. As most of you will know access to the Heritage Centre is restricted due to social distancing being in place, hopefully that may be eased soon. When we were there we discovered several books to add to our library, written by Wilma Bolton about Lanarkshire mining disasters. They had been left by the women who give advice to former miners and their families.

It has been proposed that the Gala Day take place on Saturday 11th September this year. As it happens, the first Coalburn village Gala Days, back in the 1920s, were held in September. If you have any suggestions as to what we should display if that is possible, please let me know. Meanwhile there are some of Geoff Brown's excellent photographs of the 2013 Gala in this issue.

Another item is a calendar for 2022. We are usually in production by this time. I'll see what can be done.

The list of speakers will be another consideration assuming we can start on 1st September.

My thanks once again to Helen for her work in producing the Newsletter and to Betty for distributing it.

Peter McLeish, 4th June 2021

In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths

Archie Cameron

Isobel Donoghue

Johnny Forsyth

Helen Lang (Scott)

John McGhie

Tommy Meikle

Peggy Wilson (Meikle)

Robert Mitchell

Margo Prosser (Turley)

Patricia Shearer



The Language of Covid-19

As our lives have got smaller through **Covid-19**,
One thing has got bigger, or so it would seem.
Our vocabulary has grown **exponentially**
We now wash our hands and sing '**Happy Birthday**'.
We all know to keep **two metres** apart,
It's called **social distancing**, though for my part,
It's more anti-social, like **self-isolation**,
And **shielding**, in loneliness and near-desperation.

Doctors, nurses, and others in the **NHS**,
Are known as **frontline staff**, no less.
Dressed from head to toe in their **PPE** -
That's Personal Protective Equipment to you and me -
(Not a Plastic Pinny Each, though it might well be),
Their worried eyes are all we can see.
We owe them a debt we can never repay,
The **Thursday night clapping** went a small way
To say 'Thanks' - and we'll do our best
To stay home, save lives, and protect our NHS.

With schools all closed kids have **distance-learning**,
But they (and their parents) now find themselves yearning
To get back to their classrooms, teachers and mates,
They'll wear masks, keep their distance, whatever it takes.
For some, **blended learning** will be the new rule,
With lessons divided between home and school.
No formal exams - while teachers assess
Who's doing best with their **Covid test!**
Who can poke at their throat without retching or heaving?
Or tickle a nostril and not feel like sneezing?

People working from home have **meetings on Zoom**
With colleagues admiring their kitchen or front room!
If you can't work from home, you'll get paid compensation -
A new meaning for '**furlough**' - not a soldier's vacation.
If you do go on holiday, wherever you've been,
You'll get ten extra days in **Hotel Quarantine**.

A virus once meant 'flu or a cold in the head,
Not a **lethal pandemic** that's left thousands dead.

Corona would mean a cigar to some,
Or a ring of light around the moon or sun.

Lockdown once brought prison riots to an end,
Not confined folks at home for weeks on end.

The system of tiers should have been called tears,
When it seemed like it might go on for years.

At **a time like no other**, masks are worn every day,
It's **unprecedented** but they're here to stay.

And now, more new words - **Astra Zeneca** means,
With **Moderna** and **Pfizer** three brand new vaccines.
The **bubble** we've shared with a select two or three,
Will burst with a bang and we'll all be free
To get back to **some form of normality**.

What that will be remains to be seen,
But it can only be better than how it has been
For months - so now that life has begun,
Let's all go out and have some fun!

*By Marean Johnstone
March 2021*

Coalburn: 1924 and 1974 (Part II)

This is the second instalment of an article written by Jim Hamilton in 1974, reflecting on the 'present day' while looking back to the village as it had been fifty years before. In this part he starts by listing initiatives involving women in 1924 - which clearly did not extend to using their own names after marriage - goes on to discuss the Parish Council, then rounds up information about bands and musical activities in the village, which were - as he says - "gey thrang".

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The interest in political matters had, in 1924, spread to women and Coalburn formed a Women's Section of the Labour Party, with Mrs Tom Dickson addressing the first meeting. The committee appointed included Mrs James Scott Davidson, Mrs David Reid, Mrs Robert Logan, Mrs James Hamilton and Miss Jessie Garrett.

This emancipation of women from 'the kitchen sink' had found expression in the widespread movement of the Women's Rural Institutes. Coalburn W.R.I. had Mrs Charles K. Wells as president and she introduced various speakers such as Dr Harrison of Lesmahagow to give a lecture. Lintfieldbank W.R.I. was also functioning and Mrs Smith of Birkhill, the president, gave a talk in 1924 on a holiday in France. I imagine that she would be about the only person in Coalburn who would be able to give a talk on a foreign holiday in that year. Fifty years later, holidays are taken by villagers on every continent of the world and even weekends in Majorca are commonplace.

Both W.R.I.s are still very active in the village. It would make interesting reading to peruse a summary of all the talks given to its lady members during the past fifty years. What a lot of educational talks and happy social evenings there have been.

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In 1924 the Parish Council - which has still six years to run - was being administered from Lesmahagow. In 1974, its successor, the Second District Council, also administered from Lesmahagow, has less than a year to run, with re-organisation of District and Regional Councils due to start on 16th May 1975.

Incidentally, I found a note in the Hamilton Advertiser in 1924 which reported that James Millar of Main Street, Lesmahagow had been appointed as junior clerk with the Lesmahagow Parish Council at a salary of £50 per annum. Although the salary he started with is low by today's standards, I was surprised that it was so high because when I started in 1939 as a junior clerk in the same office in Lesmahagow, I only got £40 for a year's work. Now my salary is much more each week.

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The Coalburn Silver Band, which had been founded as a brass band in 1902, bought a full set of silver plated and engraved instruments in 1924 from Messrs. Boosey and Co., Regent Street, London. Mr Joseph Walker was secretary and his widow is still alive in the village. Mr John McCubbrey was engaged as professional conductor and he had a disability which makes it hard to believe that he was as successful a conductor as he was. He was very deaf but never had any difficulty in hearing the discords. Alex Hamilton, the present secretary of the band, remembers how the old conductor used to sing how he wanted the music played and even indulged in a few dance steps to demonstrate the lively parts. The band is still to the fore and the Gazette, in a December issue, carried the story of how the same musical instruments, bought fifty years ago, had been retuned to low pitch at a cost of £400.

Many villages were running band contests because the silver bands were popular in nearly every village of the Upper Ward at that time. In a contest held in Springhill Park, Douglas, Coalburn was placed fourth equal with Lugar, behind Muirkirk, Wanlockhead and Lanark. There are few bands left now in the district covered by the Gazette. Gone are Lesmahagow, Auchenheth, Stonehouse, Strathaven, Ashgill and Larkhall with only Coalburn surviving.

In 1924, possibly the peak was reached in musical interest in the village as this report from the Hamilton Advertiser of that year reveals:-

#### **Musical Rally**

In aid of the local nursing association, a well organised and highly successful musical rally was held in a field kindly lent by the Caprington and Auchlochan Coal Company. Mr. David Todd, colliery manager presided.

A splendid programme was contributed by the following bands in Coalburn – the silver, district pipe and the Rechabite pipe. In addition the male voice choir and the United Free Church choir also performed.

£8.4/- was collected and handed over to the nursing association.

Also in 1924, Coalburn Rechabite Pipe band led a Labour Party gala day procession from the Weir Memorial Hall in Kirkmuirhill to a field kindly lent by J. Young, Kirkmuirhill. Coalburn Rechabite pipe band is still leading such processions fifty years later but the District pipe band is defunct.

The Coalburn District Co-operative Society promoted an annual gala day around 1924 and in that year, it was held in a field at Glaihead. 800 children attended, with boys and girls from Blackwood and Lesmahagow proceeding to

Coalburn by train and then joining the local children in a march to the field. The two bands in the procession that year were the Coalburn Silver and the I. O. G. T. [The Independent Order of Good Templars, like the Rechabites, is a temperance organisation founded in the 19th Century; since 1970 the organisation has been known as the International Organisation of Good Templars.]

The Coalburn Church Choir under their conductor John Walker was placed second in the fourth annual Upper Ward Musical Festival held at Lanark. Lesmahagow Male Voice Choir, still a name bringing pleasure in the district by their singing, were placed first in their class. Here are the adjudicator's remarks :

#### **Lesmahagow Male Voice Choir**

The Lesmahagow choir had the highest number of points during the whole festival and was fortunate in having a conductor of the ability of Walter Burnett, who was an artist to his finger tips and an asset which any community would be proud of.

Other names mentioned in the report of the festival were William Borland, winner of the baritone solo contest, and Miss Nance Pelling (now Mrs Steve Turley) for a dramatic reading of the part of Portia. Mrs Turley's sister, Belle Pelling (later Mrs Ralph Jones), was also mentioned in the newspaper that year for a quite different reason: gaining her Poor Law Diploma.

Dancing was also a popular entertainment. Under the heading 'Terpsichorean', a report in the Hamilton Advertiser on the Durham H. Bertram's season of training dancers in the Coalburn Masonic Hall mentioned a display given by Miss May Purdie, Miss Jeanie Hamilton and Miss Greta Hair of Coalburn and Miss Nettie Telfer of Lesmahagow. [Terpishcore was the Greek muse of the dance.]

The reports in the Hamilton Advertiser showed the social life of the village was 'gey thrang' in these far off days of 1924.

The church choir had a social evening with 42 present and songs were contributed by Misses Turner, Walker, Park, and Naismith, Mrs Meikle and Messrs Ross, Johnstone, Lockhart Brown and Barr. One of these singers, Miss Nessie Naismith, died this year.





A company of officials and employees of Auchlochan Nos. 9 and 10 met together in a social capacity to do honour to William Muir who was promoted to No. 6 colliery. Mr Birrell, the manager, presented a roll-top desk to Mr Muir and a wristlet watch to his wife. Songs were sung by William Carswell, Thomas Johnstone, Robert Park, William Muir and James Gold.

It was the custom of the Hamilton Advertiser in 1924 to list the persons attending the 'top table' at socials. Here are the names given for the annual dinner of the Auchlochan Colliery officials:- Mr and Mrs David Todd, Dr and Mrs McFarlane, Mr and Mrs J. Edmiston and Mr and Mrs G Cranstoun. Only Mr and Mrs Edmiston are alive in the village to-day.

Various bands are mentioned as providing music for the dances being held, including the Harvey Quadrille Band of Lesmahagow, Messrs Fotheringham and Dyet of Lesmahagow, and Messrs Reid and Bryson of Coalburn.

Radio in 1924 was still in its infancy and the BBC had just been born, arriving in late 1922. W H Cox of Lanark, in conjunction with the Marconi Company, installed a powerful wireless in his garage showroom in 1924 for the Lanark public to hear the first Royal Broadcast – that of King George V at the opening of the Wembley Exhibition. The railway company was running day excursions from Lanarkshire to London for people to attend. How many of us have been listening to Royal broadcasts especially at Christmas in the intervening years since 1924.

Coalburn Juniors were supplying the local football interest in 1924. The team was often Connor; Stewart and Gray; Graham, Smith and McNeil; Hamilton, Nisbet, Carmichael, Mitchell and Thomson. (The names for the team were given in the traditional way of goalkeeper, two backs, three half-backs and five forwards. How different it is today with formations of 4-3-4 or 5-4-2.) Only three of the many local men in that team are alive to-day – Jockee Hamilton, Bobby Carmichael and Jimmy McNeil. Coalburn Colts are the name mentioned in 1974 as sustaining the local interest in football.

*The 3rd and final part of Jim Hamilton's reflections will be in the next issue*



# Members' Deaths

## John McGhie

Another of our members who passed away recently, John was brought up in Lesmahagow, the only child of Joe and Craigie. His father was from Lesmahagow, his mother was the daughter of Dan Maitland and she came from Coalburn. His dad was a miner and they later moved to what were called the "miners' houses" at Auldton Drive. Joe was lover of motor-bikes and the one he owned had a side-car. John often talked about the places the three of them visited.



When John left school he started work at Taggarts' Garage in Motherwell in the Parts Department and there remained for the rest of his working life, quite a unique achievement.

His dad died in an accident and some time later John and his mother moved house again, this time to Coalburn, where John was very much involved in the Masons with Lodge Newlands No. 949 where he was elected Right Worshipful Master, as was his father before him. John was also a member of the Royal Arch Chapter, Victory 450. There he also achieved the highest office and also held the post of Treasurer for many years right up until his death.

John liked to travel, and he took his mother by caravan to many popular places in Scotland, though latterly he kept it in a caravan site at Southend in the Mull of Kintyre, as it was a favourite spot.

His other great passion was walking - and not only locally, as he met Tom Weir from Gartocharn (who introduced 'Weir's Way' on television) during his walks. John travelled to New Zealand to visit relatives also. In recent years he confined his walks to local trails with several other keen ramblers. He had been with them just days before his death.

John McGhie was a quiet, unassuming person who will be sadly missed at the Heritage Society meetings and as a neighbour.

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Archie Cameron

Born locally, Archie had two brothers - Donald and Joe -and a sister Ruby. Their father was the postman in the village and surrounding areas for many years; he was originally from Glen Borrodale in north west of Scot-



land. Their mother, Elizabeth, was a member of a well-known family in the village, the Strangs. Unfortunately I don't know much about Archie's early life, though the Strang family had a connection with Auchenbegg. In the village they resided in two houses in Dunn Crescent, the latter being number 10.

Archie was a colliery worker before he did his National Service in Egypt with the Royal Army Service Corps from January 1951 to 1953. During that time he was able to count in Arabic from 1 to 10 and he could still remember it 60 years later. Archie was at based at Lake Bitter, near Faid, and was the recipient of the General Service Medal (with a Canal Zone Clasp) in 2004.

In a varied working life, for a time Archie worked in knitwear and had his own business based in Douglas. He was later in charge of the occupational therapy department at Carstairs State Hospital.

Archie married Elizabeth Paterson who came from Muirkirk and outside their home Dunn Crescent there is a notice saying "MUIRKIRK HOUSE". They had a son and a daughter.

Archie and Jim Hamilton were friendly and on many occasions Archie was the cameraman when Jim was interviewing individuals and families for the many videos Jim produced. When the Heritage Society came into being in 2004, Archie was a regular attendee. Following the opening of the Heritage Centre he gifted a painting he had done of Garden Street, which is on display in the Heritage Centre.

Archie Cameron will be sorely missed in the village.

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Peter McLeish

# Birkwood: Part VI

In 1920 the Mackirdy family moved out of Birkwood. A glowing description of the property was made available to prospective tenants or new owners at this time (it isn't clear what exactly was envisaged).

## **Birkwood House**

The house is in excellent order and fitted with all modern conveniences. The lighting is by incandescent gas from the Lesmahagow Gas Works and ample gravitation water is obtained from Coalburn and District Water supply. In this connection, it is necessary to reduce the pressure of the water supply before entering the estate. Hot and cold water is laid throughout the house. Heating is effected by means of open fireplaces and central heating. Fire hydrants are installed in close proximity to the house, the telephone is also installed.

Attention is directed to the Panels of Painted Glass said to have formed portions of the painted windows of a church at Coire, Grisons. The style of design is characteristic of the works of Italianised Flemish painters of the last half of the 16th Century.

The exposure is South and South-West, and the approach is by three winding drives from the South-East and West.

## **Accommodation**

### **Basement**

Eight servants' bedrooms; servants' hall; housekeeper's sitting room, caretaker's room (formerly gymnasium); servants' bathroom (hot and cold) and two WCs; kitchen, scullery, pantries; service lift; strong room; laundry; furnace chamber; wine cellar; brush room, boot room; coal cellars; box room.

### **Ground Floor**

Main entrance hall; morning room or library (27' 6" by 18' 3"); business room (20' 9" by 17' 3"); north entrance hall; dining room (34' by 19' 3"); ante dining room; drawing room (28' 6" by 18' 32"); west entrance hall; picture gallery (52' 3" by 21' 6"); billiard room (30' 3" by 22' 6"); smoking room (16' by 16' 9"); cloak rooms and WC; butler's pantry; safe; telephone room; linen room; gun room; box rooms.

### **First Floor**

Thirteen bed and dressing rooms; nursery; nurse maid's bedroom; three servants' bedrooms; four bathrooms (hot and cold), WCs; housemaid's pantry; box room.

**Second Floor (in New Tower)** Two bedrooms; box room

**Third Floor (in New Tower)** Bedroom

### Grounds and Gardens

The grounds and gardens are beautiful and artistically laid out. There is a curling pond and tennis courts. The walled Garden exceeds 2 acres and was highly productive. The district is noted for the excellent results obtained in fruit *etc.* The building comprises, greenhouse, winery, peach house, forcing house, potting house, coalhouse and implement shed.

Picturesque Lodges have been built at each entrance.

It would appear that neither landed gentry nor nouveau rich businessman came forward to buy or tenant this magnificent house. Records show that the then local authority - Lanark District Board of Control - agreed in early 1923 to make an offer to purchase the property, which thereafter became Birkwood Hospital.

### Birkwood Hospital

28<sup>th</sup> February 1923

At a sub-committee meeting of Lanark District Board of Control, it was agreed by those present to recommend to the District Board to offer the sum of £10,000 for the mansion house and grounds of Birkwood belonging to Captain Elliot McKirdy.

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Stockbriggs

A most interesting article by David Halls on the history of Stockbriggs is now available on the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society website:

<http://www.coalburnheritage.org.uk/coalburnhiststockbriggs.php>

The fleur-de-lys of Stockbriggs House is now used as a feature in the walled garden at Auchlochan.

This embellishment can be seen on the top right-hand column of the old house in the cover photograph.

These are two of many photographs, past and present, featured in David's illustrated history.

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# Gala Day July 2013





Photographs  
courtesy of  
Geoff Brown





*The Jim Hamilton*

# Heritage Society of Coalburn

[www.coalburnheritage.org.uk](http://www.coalburnheritage.org.uk)

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## Gala Day 2013

**Betty Bell, Anna McLachlan and Gilbert Dobbie welcome visitors  
to the Heritage Society display at Coalburn Leisure Centre**

*Photograph by Geoff Brown*