

*The Jim Hamilton*

# Heritage Society of Coalburn

Newsletter **65**

Winter 2021





## Peter McLeish

**1938-2021**

It is with great regret that we report the death of our chairman Peter McLeish. Peter passed away on October 1st, just a few weeks after intimating his resignation from his position as chair due to poor health.

Peter wrote the following letter to secretary Geoffrey Brown at this time:

Dear Geoffrey,

Further to the committee meeting on the 17th of August held in the Heritage Centre I wish to resign from the post of chairman, which I have held since the society was founded in 2004.

My decision has been based purely on my health.

At the meeting on the 17th I was greatly encouraged by the members' keenness to continue in the circumstances, which is a positive move in keeping the society in the forefront of the activities in Coalburn.

I would like to record my sincere thanks to the many officials and members who gave up their time to support the society in the last seventeen years.

yours sincerely,

Peter McLeish

23rd August 2021

We are saddened by his loss and all of us at the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn extend our heartfelt condolences to Peter's family.

A tribute to Peter is enclosed. Grateful thanks to David Halls who has been our mainstay in this sad task.

*In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths*

Alexander Addison [doctor]

Sylvia Dempster

William Gardiner

Bella Logan (Shankly)

Peter McLeish

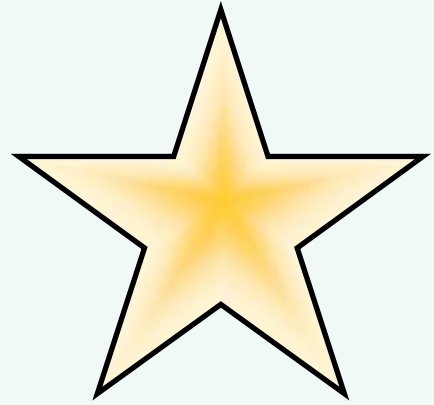
Anne Russell (Rae)

David Steel



# My 3 Minutes of Fame

*By Geoff Brown*



When we were young we tend to remember things. One event has always stuck in my mind. It was 1961. I was three years old. I stayed in Garden Street - the same side as the Miner's Welfare Club. The Garden Street flats were allocated to the miners. My dad, Adam, being a miner we got the bottom house. Well, anyway, here starts the story...

~~~~~

I was outside playing in the street when my mum Grace rushed out the house and grabbed me. I was plonked in the sink, hair washed, soap stinging my eyes, scrubbed down, dried and new clothes put on. Then there was a knock at the door.

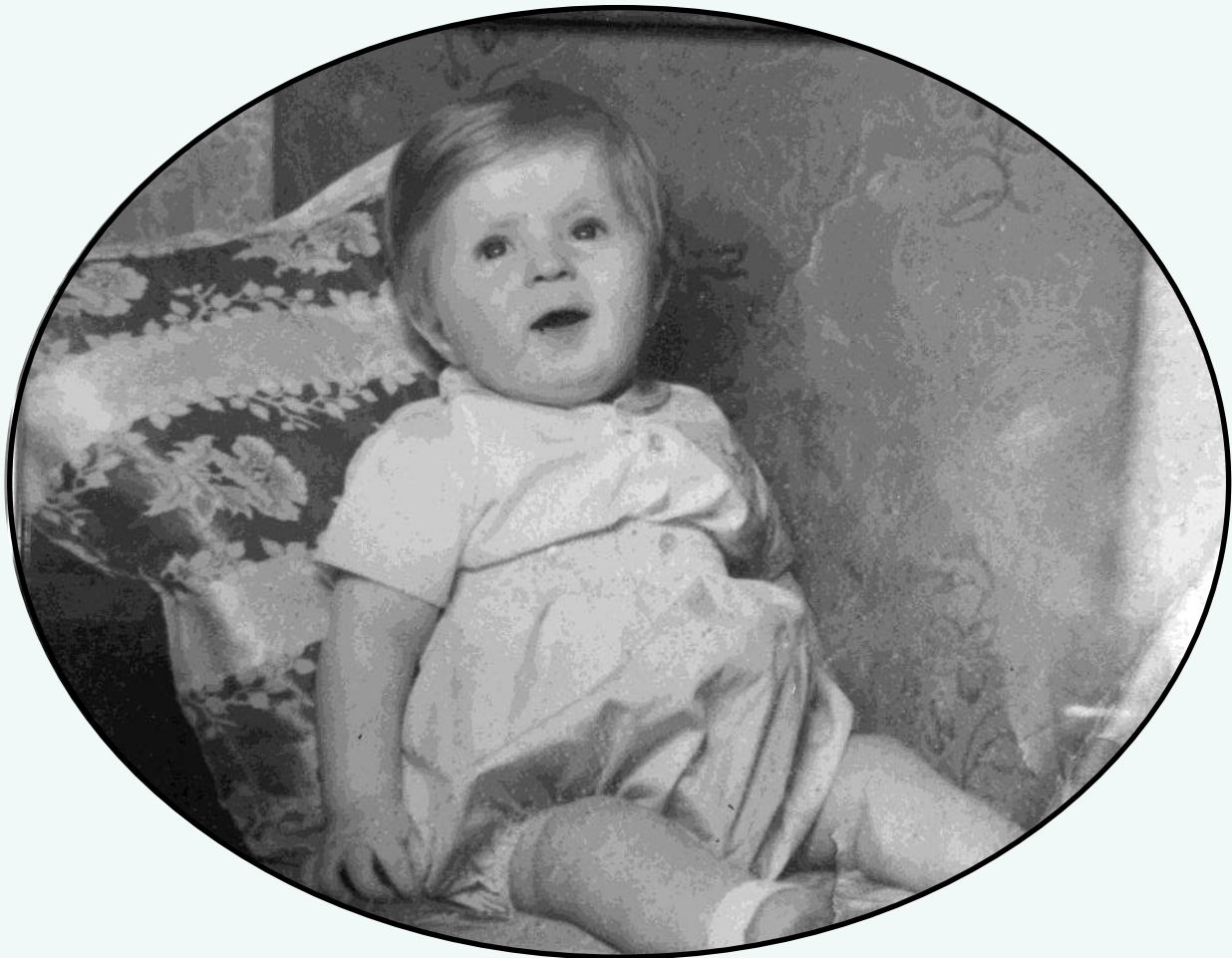
A Mrs White from the upstairs flat took my hand and led me upstairs. I thought - I'm being kidnapped. But when we got up the stairs there were three men standing there. Two of them had tripods with cameras on them. The other one had a microphone.

Then Mrs White spoke, saying "*This little boy ... (yes, I was little once) ... is at times unwell because of the fumes from the burning bings in the village.*" There was a burning bing close by, behind McKenzie's shop.

Then I was handed back to my mum. My mum had been too shy to speak to the media, so Mrs White did the job.

I never could find out how the television people knew about me in the first place. I'd been hoping Hollywood or any TV companies would have contacted me about starring in films etc. if they were looking for a child star.

I'm still waiting. But Hey Ho - that's showbiz!



~~~~~

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.

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.

from *'Coalburn's Burning Bing'*

by Peter McLeish

January 1961



# Village personalities added to Coalburn's happy life

This was the headline over the following article by Jim Hamilton, one of many which he wrote for local newspapers. It appeared in the Stonehouse and Larkhall Gazette, September 4th, 1973.

~~~~~

Mining villages, like Coalburn, were invariably built in the 19th century near where the coal was to be 'howked' because of the lack of motorised transport to get miners to work.

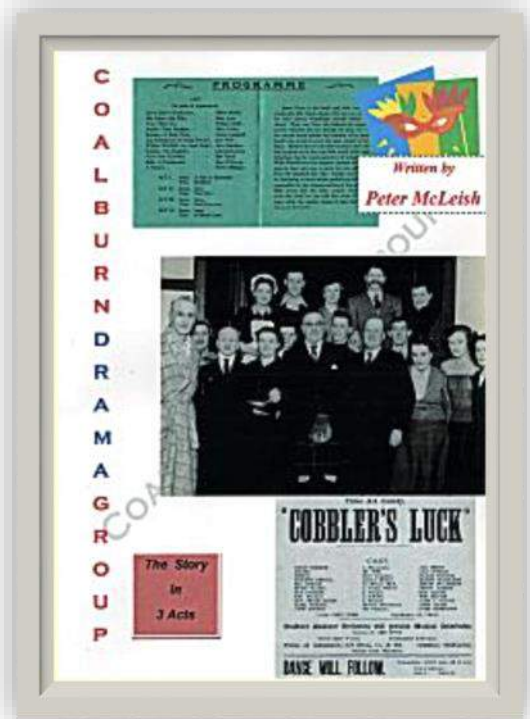
It tended to make the community isolated and introverted and this insularity resulted in the entertainment being self-produced. Perhaps it was all the better for that as I think we rely too much today on tinned entertainment from television, radio and transistors.

In my life of half a century, and even in the present day when I have colour television available at the turn of a switch, my happiest evenings with the greatest laughter from a stage were spent watching the productions of the Coalburn Drama Group in the heyday of Jock Sorbie, their talented producer.

For clean and non-suggestive fun, entertainment that the whole family could enjoy, I cannot recall anything at which I have been present where there was louder or longer laughter.

\*\*\*\*\*

A perusal of the columns of the Hamilton Advertiser of over a hundred years ago reveal that the thoughts I have just expressed seem to have been foremost in the mind of the local correspondent as he



wrote on May 3, 1862:

*“Mr Shaw, a well known comic and sentimental singer in the district, gave an entertainment of vocal music in the Bankend Schoolhouse on 28th April, consisting of a variety of comic and sentimental songs, assisted by Messrs. Logan, Brown and amateurs from the village.*

*The concert gave satisfaction to the audience and the inhabitants more especially in Mr Shaw’s songs and recitation of ‘The Highland Sergeant’ in character. Messrs. Logan and Brown’s songs took well, their voices under cultivation might even be heard in concerts in our cities.*

*Such meetings tend to promote the intellectual capacity of our mining districts and we think the exertions of such local entertainers ought to be encouraged.”*

It is thus recorded, that at least 111 years ago some local persons were making efforts to entertain and make the village happier. These people became well known in their village and beyond.

Just think of how much happiness the late Poneil Clark gave to the village audiences for over 40 years as raconteur, actor, singer and compere.

\*\*\*\*\*

Some villagers, because of their jobs, become better known than others because they are more regularly in contact with people. Just compare the encounters that a shopkeeper has in a day with the chances a shepherd has in a year of work in contact with other villagers.

A shopkeeper, well known and a favourite in the village until his death in March, 1954, was Johnny Giavarini. His main shop opposite the Welfare Institute sold fish and chips.

I can remember one night in 1946, after a Monday evening meeting of the Junior Discussion Group, several of us including Jim Clark, Alex McMurdo and Jock Cairney, went down the Welfare steps to cross and go into the Welfare Café.

Johnny, as ever, smiled a welcome, as a duster in his hand wiped the high counter, a characteristic gesture of his.

Alex McMurdo, ever the joker, asked Johnny, *“Have you any chips left?”* Johnny in his broken English, assured Alex he had. Alex’s rejoinder is still in my memory - *“Serves you right for making too many.”*

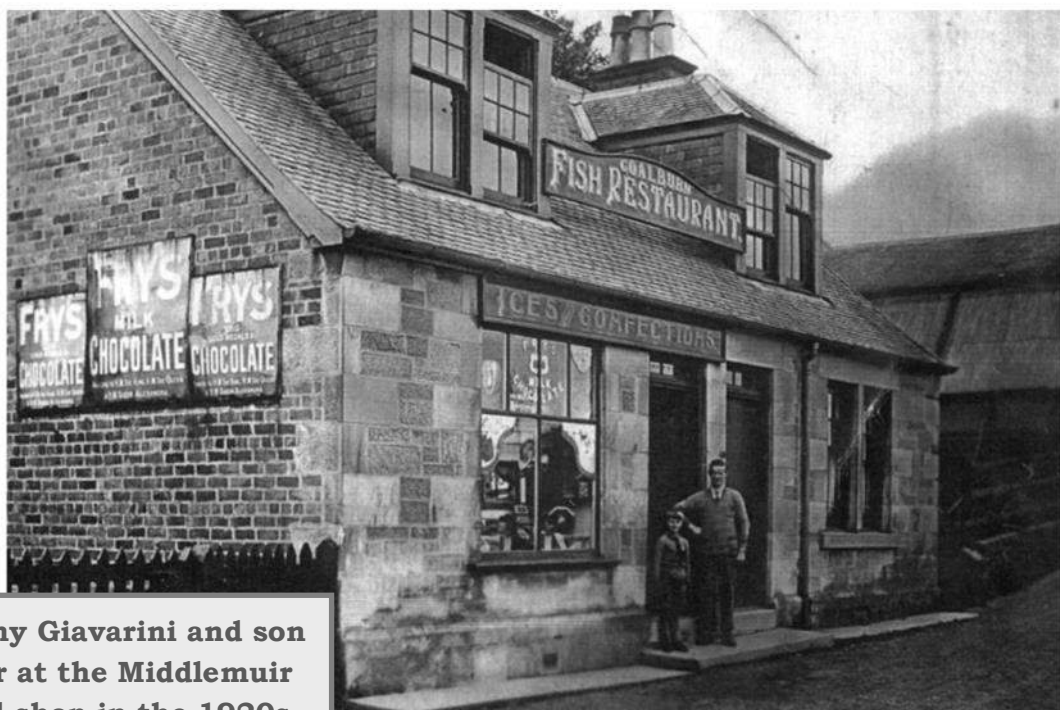
We settled into a table with wooden seats and table. Soon Johnny was serving us with chips, hot peas, and tumblers of aerated waters like Vimto and Iron Brew - Coca-Cola had not yet become the universal favourite it is today.

Many an older member in the community must have pleasant memories of sitting down with a soft refreshment in the Welfare Café after an evening out at the cinema, or walking home eating a bag of chips liberally sprinkled with salt and vinegar.

As I have said, Johnny Giavarini and his family were well-liked by the villagers, who showed restraint and no recourse to vandalism when Italy declared war on Britain in 1940 and set up an outburst of window-breaking at shops belonging to Italians.

How could it be otherwise in Coalburn? Johnny's two sons, Peter and John, were serving with the British Forces. Peter was a fine cuist and a natural born footballer. He had plenty of opportunity for home practice at billiards, as his parents had a billiard table in their other shop, in Middlemuir Road.

Johnny's daughters contributed to village life, being keen on choral work and stalwarts in the affairs of their church, the Roman Catholic chapel in the tin hall between the cottages of Steel and Morrison in Bellfield Road, formerly belonging to the Miners' Union.



**Johnny Giavarini and son Peter at the Middlemuir Road shop in the 1920s**



## *Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn News*

### Annual General Meeting

Our AGM took place on Wednesday October 27th and changes to the constitution, as circulated in advance, were approved. These include introducing flexibility in scheduling, in view of the coronavirus pandemic, permitting us to hold an AGM at this time rather than this requiring always to be in April as previously stipulated.

A minute of the AGM, including election of office bearers and other committee members, is enclosed. This minute was ratified at a subsequent meeting of the Society, held on November 24th, rather than being held over until the following year's AGM as is custom and practice. This procedure was required to fulfil conditions set by the Royal Bank of Scotland in order to effect changes to their records regarding authorised signatories to the Society's bank account.

We were delighted to welcome some new members at the November meeting.

~~~~~

We intend to arrange regular opening times for the Heritage Centre as and when the coronavirus pandemic permits. However a plan to begin this early in the New Year has been put on hold for now, due to the surge in infections that is presently occurring.

Heritage Centre

In our previous newsletter we intimated that the Heritage Centre would be open on Tuesday mornings. Sadly, this information was quickly out-dated as it reflected Peter's attendance pattern at time of writing. We apologise to anyone who has tried to gain access to the Heritage Centre and been unable to do so and hope that you will understand in view of the circumstances that led to this.

We will notify regular hours of operation via our website in due course. If you do not have on-line access and wish to check the current position please contact vice-chair Geoff Brown on 01555 820379.

**In the meantime we will endeavour to respond to any enquiries relating to Coalburn heritage to the best of our ability.**

~~~~~

If you enjoyed the item about the Giavarini family in this Issue then you may be interested to read David Halls' article on our website:

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

## *Thanks to Gilbert Dobbie*

The Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn would like to extend thanks and best wishes to Gilbert Dobbie.



Gilbert stepped up to the role of vice-chairman in 2016 and often manned the Heritage Centre on a Tuesday, together with Peter McLeish.

A former miner, Gilbert was involved in the 'Pits, Ponies, People and Stories' project concerning the mining heritage of South Lanarkshire



and is among those credited with sharing memories that fed into the production of the children's story-book of that name.

Gilbert continued in the role of vice-chair until the recent AGM, but sadly is not in the best of health at present. Our thanks go to

Gilbert for his service to the Heritage Society over the years.

~~~~~

### Future Meetings

At time of writing plans for future meetings are on hold.

We had hoped to meet on January 12th, however the surge in infections occurring since we planned this at our November 24th meeting precludes scheduling a meeting early in the New Year. **The January 12th meeting is cancelled.**

We will be in touch with members regarding arrangements for future meetings just as soon as the situation becomes clearer.

~~~~~

Items of interest for the newsletter are welcome. Please send by e-mail to [coalburn.heritage@virginmedia.com](mailto:coalburn.heritage@virginmedia.com) or paper copy to Geoff Brown, 42 Dunn Crescent, Coalburn ML11 0LR.

Newsletter

You are welcome to contact us to discuss items in advance of preparation.

~~~~~

**Our thanks to Billy Clelland in Australia, who has provided us with a wealth of information gathered over the years, pertaining to Coalburn and to Lesmahagow Parish.**

The material was sent digitally on USB stick, which can be read on computer. It had been posted to the Heritage Centre in October and was waiting there when Helen Brownlie, Geoff Brown, and Billy Struthers looked in on December 8<sup>th</sup>. (This was the first time that any Heritage Society members had been into the Centre since a visit by Peter and Gilbert over the summer.)

We have yet to digest the full range of items that Billy has put together, however we can see that his work includes an index of the Coalburn Chronicles: this alone is an invaluable resource. As the Heritage Centre is presently closed the memory stick is with Helen to allow for more thorough appraisal and to be available as a resource as and when required, including when responding to enquiries.

~~~~~

**We are delighted to report that Peter's daughter Fiona has attended recent meetings and agreed to join our committee.** Fiona's enthusiasm, knowledge and experience will be great assets. Her sister Barbara lives at some distance (Devon) but she too is interested in maintaining links to the Heritage Society - welcome, Barbara.

*Peter McLeish Memorial Fund*

Peter's daughters have set up a memorial fund in their father's name to support historical projects. Barbara and Fiona explain why they made this particular choice:

"Although Peter had prostate cancer, the disease itself did not define him. Peter's purpose and passions (in addition to Jean and Hamilton Accies) was local history and the support he gave to the local community in so many ways. Therefore, we would like to set up a memorial fund in his name as a legacy to support historical projects in Coalburn and the Clydesdale area."

We are gratified that Barbara and Fiona have chosen local heritage as the focus for the fund and that they have expressed an interest in hearing from the Heritage Society regarding possible projects. Fiona shared some of her initial thoughts about the fund at our November meeting.

Donations may be made online using the 'Justgiving' page:

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/petermcleishmemorialfund>

*The Jim Hamilton*

## Heritage Society of Coalburn

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

[coalburn.heritage@virginmedia.com](mailto:coalburn.heritage@virginmedia.com)

### Membership

In view of the strictures on holding meetings over the present season, we are again making payment of membership subscriptions entirely voluntary. Should you wish to pay the membership fee (£15 for a single person; £20 for joint membership; £2 for under 16s) we would be glad to receive it.

Payment may be made by post to our Treasurer, Marion McBain, at 14 Bellfield Road, Coalburn ML11 0LA. Please make cheques payable to: **Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn**. Should you wish to pay by on-line transfer, the details are: sort code 83-24-38; account number 00205430; account name as above; and please provide your name in the box for 'reference' so that when our bank statement comes in we can identify who it is who has made the payment.

For anyone wishing to join, please telephone our membership secretary Mrs Betty Nicol on 01555 820647 or contact us by e-mail at the address above.

*Many thanks ....and stay safe, one and all.*



Photographs courtesy of David Halls