

*The Jim Hamilton*  
Heritage Society of Coalburn  
Newsletter 74  
Spring 2024



**Bellfield Farm**  
*circa 1990s*



## Chairperson's Remarks and Heritage News *Spring 2024*

This is a rather late newsletter, however it's been a busy time and reporting now lets us include developments occurring since the recent update *via* annual report in mid-April. (If you weren't at the AGM there's a copy of the annual report enclosed with your newsletter, where you'll find some updates.) So, on with the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society news .....

### *Meetings and Visits*

**On 22nd February we enjoyed a nostalgic look at Coalburn past, with film shot by Jim Hamilton back in 1960.** Jim had taken his cine camera to the Gala Day, and to the 25th Anniversary of Coalburn Church Women's Guild and the 40th Anniversary of Coalburn Scottish Women's Rural Institute – complete with dancing to Jim Brodie's band, both in November that year. Fortunately he transferred this material to video. Then, in the early days of the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society, these videos were converted to DVD format by heritage support worker John Zawadski. I'm pleased to report that the issue with sound experienced in previous trials has been resolved (it was nothing to do with the DVDs), so we have many treasured films available to view in future.

**It was memory lane again on 7th March, when we continued viewing and adding information to a powerpoint on Coalburn 'Then and Now'.**

**On March 21st Dr Catherine Mills gave a captivating presentation on her project to develop an 'Eco-Museum' around former mining areas** (see Newsletters 72 and 73, also annual report). Coalburn was represented at the project launch at the National Mining Museum, Newtongrange, on April 24th. Billy Struthers, Donald Williams, James McBain and Johnny Hamilton made the trip and by all accounts it was a most enjoyable afternoon. At this time work was already underway to develop the Coalburn arm of this project – Dr Mills had visited on April 18th, meeting up with Donald Williams and George Callan to start mapping out a route and points of interest. Unfortunately it was a very rainy day but the intrepid team did their bit, *and* managed to muster a smile for the camera.

The next venture will be at Bellfield bing on June 28th – details on next page. If you are interested but unable to book on-line please get in touch with us and let us know, as soon as possible.





### **Eco-Museum of Mining Landscapes—Walk & Workshop**

You are invited to join the Scottish Mining Landscapes team on June 28th for a walk and workshop exploring the geology, ecology, and landscape at the former Bellfield Colliery bing. This event is free and open to all aged 18 and over.

**Booking is on-line via 'Eventbrite'**

***See enclosed flyer for more information, including how to book***

***For more about the Project***

Website : <https://www.mining-landscapes.org/>

Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100067820630536/>

(or <https://tinyurl.com/mr462ctk>)



**We were delighted to welcome Ann Thomas (née Scanlon) on April 4th.** Ann left Coalburn back in 1968, initially to live in Canada, then settling in England from the mid-1970s. But, as the saying goes, Coalburn has never left Ann and she recently published a memoir that includes her early years here. We very much enjoyed Ann's presentation, and sharing memories together. Ann was particularly pleased to see Kathleen Purdie as she has fond memories of Kathleen



well as Girl Guide leader back in the day. We were fortunate to have Ann's company during a rare trip north, together with husband Peter, to meet old friends and especially to see her sister Charlotte, who unfortunately is not in good health. Charlotte was a good friend of Peter McLeish, going back to when both were in Coalburn Drama Group. As a young woman she moved to Ayrshire, but she has regularly returned to Coalburn for Gala Day and enjoyed many a summer drive through the village. We send Charlotte our very best wishes.

Ann's book is available on loan from the Heritage Centre, also several copies for purchase (Ann has kindly donated proceeds to the Heritage Society). Feedback has been very positive—it's a page-turner.

There is more about the Scanlon family later in this newsletter.



Ann and sister Charlotte enjoying a chat with Davie Mathieson at Gala Day, 2nd July 2022

The last meeting of the 2023-24 season was our AGM, held on the evening of **Wednesday April 17th**. There was quite a bit to discuss and a draft minute is enclosed. Note that we have not yet met to ratify this minute, so if you have any amendments please inform a member of committee.

### Jim Hamilton Heritage Society Committee 2024-25

**left to right: vice chair, Geoffrey Brown; committee member, James McBain; secretary, Donald Williams; chair, Helen Brownlie**  
**seated: committee member, Billy Struthers ...**



**... and the one and only Marion McBain, treasurer and membership secretary**

**Memorial Fund** We have excellent news regarding the award of a Peter McLeish memorial prize for Primary 7 pupils at Coalburn School. Following a suggestion at our AGM, we enquired about the feasibility of making an award in respect of some existing aspect of the curriculum this year and this option was enthusiastically accepted. As we go to press P7 pupils are presenting personal projects and the best, as judged by teacher, will be awarded the Peter McLeish memorial prize. We are delighted at this development, and hopeful that 2024-25 might see the re-introduction of a heritage-related project for P7 pupils.

**Website** There is also good news regarding our website. We included a request for assistance in a recent community council newsletter and are pleased to report that a local person has got in touch offering to help us resolve the issue that is barring progress (see annual report). This is a very welcome development towards once again being able to add to and update our website.

**John Zawadski's Work** We recently discovered photographs and other work by our late heritage support worker John Zawadski, contained on CD ROMs and on an old laptop at the Heritage Centre. What's more, John's widow Shona Harrison kindly provided access to memory sticks and other storage devices, as well as John's laptop, so that we could extract relevant material. As John abbreviated the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn to CHS and since another great interest for John was the Clydesdale Horse Society, we had to scratch the surface of file-names here and there! But we got there, and it's great to have access to this top quality Coalburn heritage-related work.

Another example of how John's work reverberates to this day is the documentary film 'Saving the Greatest Horse', as his archive of material on Clydesdales proved invaluable in the production of the film. Shona's assistance is credited and she was pleased to be an invited guest at the premiere cinema showing in April, one of a series of events to mark the 10th anniversary of the Kelpies. Shona told us: *"I wouldn't have been involved if it hadn't been for John and his archive."* She has kindly shared this great photo, taken at the cinema together with Janice Kilpatrick, the woman whose quest to rescue Clydesdales from the brink of extinction features in the film:



<https://www.savingthegreatesthorse.com/>

John Zawadski and Kathleen Purdie  
- staffing an exhibition at the Heritage  
Centre in the early days -



## Auchlochan Men's Social Group

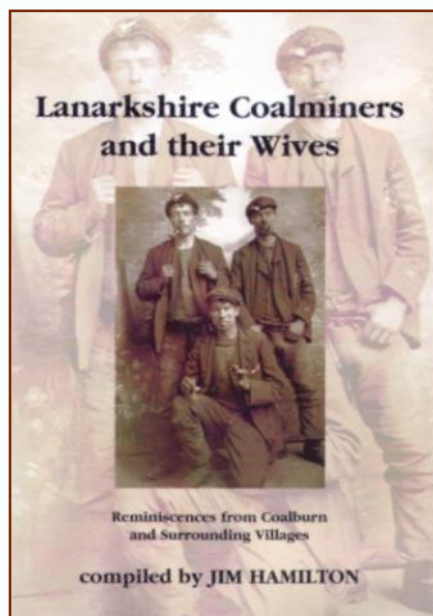
We were guests of Auchlochan Men's Social Group at their meeting on May 16th, having been invited to let them know a bit about Jim Hamilton, the Heritage Society and Coalburn's history as a mining village. Donald Williams and Billy Struthers went along, together with local ex-miner Alex Watson. Alex was at our meeting on March 21st, and kindly indicated a willingness to share some memories with us. So we are looking forward to welcoming him to the first meeting of our new season (see back page). Meanwhile Auchlochan were treated to Alex's debut.

This engagement gave us a prompt to update and refresh our leaflet about the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society. We also reviewed and revised the illustrated booklet 'A Potted History of Mining in Coalburn', and took along some 'Coalburn Chronicles' and Newsletters- all of which were well received.



## Jim Hamilton Heritage Society 20th Anniversary

On 5th July 2024 it will be the 20 years to the day since the public meeting where it was agreed to set up a Heritage Society for Coalburn.



To mark this anniversary, we have been liaising with Lanarkshire Family History Society (LFHS) regarding a reissue of Jim Hamilton's book, **Lanarkshire Coalminers and Their Wives**. First produced in 2003, this was Jim Hamilton's final publication. An initial run of 200 copies quickly sold out and the following year the LFHS, in whom the rights are now vested, produced a second run to meet demand.

The book continues to be sought after, both as an authoritative piece of writing on the subject and as a valued family record for descendants of those featured. But few copies remain.

"I have always thought that a tribute should be paid to the thousands of coalminers who laboured in the pits in and around Coalburn for so little reward. At the same time appropriate acknowledgement should be put on record of the contribution of their mothers, wives and daughters, the unseen heroines who toiled to provide as much comfort as possible in the home for their families amid primitive conditions."

Jim Hamilton

"He was always interested in how the miners lived and worked and his last book was essentially about the miners' wives who were, in many ways, the backbone of the community. It proved to be very popular."

Maureen Hamilton

So we are grateful to the LFHS for having undertaken the considerable task of producing this edition for 2024.

In-house publication by LFHS means that this edition will cost less than the original, selling for £6. We will have copies available at Gala Day on July 6th, our 20th anniversary almost to the day.

### Gala Day 2024, Saturday July 6th

We will be hosting a Heritage Display at the leisure centre on the afternoon of July 6th.

Fortunately we have sufficient cover but more hands are welcome, should you fancy joining us for a hour or so to assist.

Hope to see you there.

# Sarah Mitchell (Scanlon)



*Sarah, with her sister Margaret*

Long before publishing her own memoir, Ann Thomas encouraged her aunt Sara to commit some of her memories to paper. Sarah was born on 25th December 1902, which at that time would have been a day much like any other for working people. Her parents were Robert Scanlon and his wife Annie Howie (after whom Ann is named). They had one older child, Robert, who had not yet reached his second birthday when Sarah was born. Seven more siblings followed and Sarah, as the eldest daughter, was her mother's helper from a very young age.

Sarah married James Mitchell in 1925 and they had a family. James was a miner and Sarah was suddenly and tragically widowed when her husband James was killed at work.

Sarah's memoir has reminiscences of her early childhood in Coalburn and goes on to describe how she managed after the death of her husband – working abroad and making trips to France, travelling alone to visit her family.

We're grateful that Ann has shared her aunt Sarah's wonderful memoir with us. It can be borrowed by members from the Heritage Centre and several of us have already read and enjoyed Sarah's story.



What comes through clearly from her narrative is how, from her childhood when she had to look after her younger Scanlon brothers, even when they were sick, she had to 'manage' to help her mother.

Sarah's lifelong work ethic, courage and capabilities were amazing, as was her strength of character at being informed - as a young wife and mother - that her husband Jimmy Mitchell had died down the pit. It is an inspiring and emotional account, and gives the reader a great understanding how big families had to cope and 'get on with it' before and after the war.

It's interesting from the point of view of how things were back then, not only for children of miners in Coalburn, but how life transpired for them as adults and what happened after they emigrated to the new world. It's unsurprising that many of the family sought different lives abroad. Sarah worked as a home help in USA, Australia and Canada.

The fact that she followed her family all over the world on her own is inspirational to me as it was such a brave thing to do, having looked after her younger brothers and sisters, then working her socks off throughout life in the spirit of 'doing her best' after her husband Jimmy Mitchell was killed down the pit.

Ann Thomas (Scanlon)

## William Scanlon



Ann's father was William Scanlon. Born in 1906, he was the fourth child in the Scanlon family. William married Margaret Laird in 1938.

Employment options were limited when William was a young man and he chose army service rather than a working life down the pits, travelling to Germany, Egypt, Italy and Bulgaria during his military service.

William was a talented amateur artist and it was a lovely surprise when Ann donated her father's painting of Waterside School, which can be seen at the Heritage Centre.

However, William's greatest talent was for music. Ann says: *Dad brought back a fiddle, accordion, banjo and /*

*penny whistle from his travels and he could play them all. He couldn't read a note of music, but could get a tune out of anything – spoons, paper and comb, even the garden saw."*

William later worked as a civil servant for the local council, based in Larkhall. His heart health was not good, likely due to smoking heavily from a young age. People forget now that in the first half of the 20th century the dangers of smoking were not understood, indeed they were denied and some advertisements even proposed that the habit was healthy. William Scanlon had his first heart attack when still in his 50s. Still, it was a terrible shock for his family, including Ann who was then far away in Canada, when he collapsed and died of a heart attack at work in February 1971, aged just 64.

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*There is more about the Scanlon (and Laird) family in Newsletter 15 in an article by Peter McLeish called 'The Changing Face of Coalburn'. This focusses on shops including the confectioners and later chip shop run by the Laird family. There is also a lovely letter that we received from Ann Thomas in 2009. Unknown to Ann at the time, this was printed in Newsletter 19. It includes her memories of being train bearer on Gala Day 1954.*



#### COALBURN GALA 1954

Queen – Helen McInnes   Lord in Waiting – Alex Reid

Maids of Honour – Irene Watson & Margaret Dobbie

Pages – Tom Wilson & Billy McGowan

Flower Girls – Ann Scanlon & Sheila Dempster

*In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths*

Jim Dickson

Robert Harrison

Nettie Law (Tait)

Walter McGaffney

Moir Mitchell (McIndoe)





# *The Jim Hamilton*

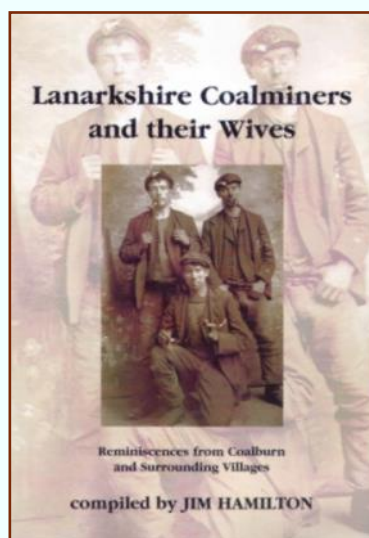
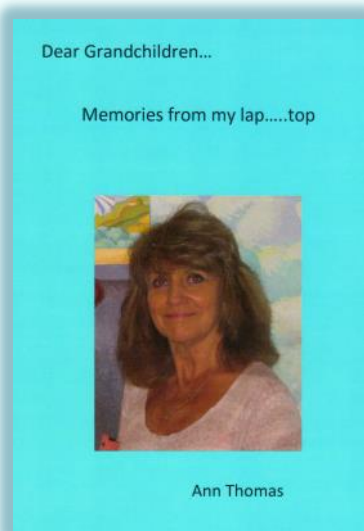
## Heritage Society of Coalburn

**Heritage Exhibition Coalburn Gala Day**

**Saturday 6th July**

**Leisure Centre, 1.00 - 3.30 pm**

*— great books available this year too —*



Autumn Season begins Wednesday 4th September  
7 for 7.15 in Poppy's at the One Stop Shop  
Guest Speaker Alex Watson, former miner

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**or** <https://tinyurl.com/ms2tchxe>