

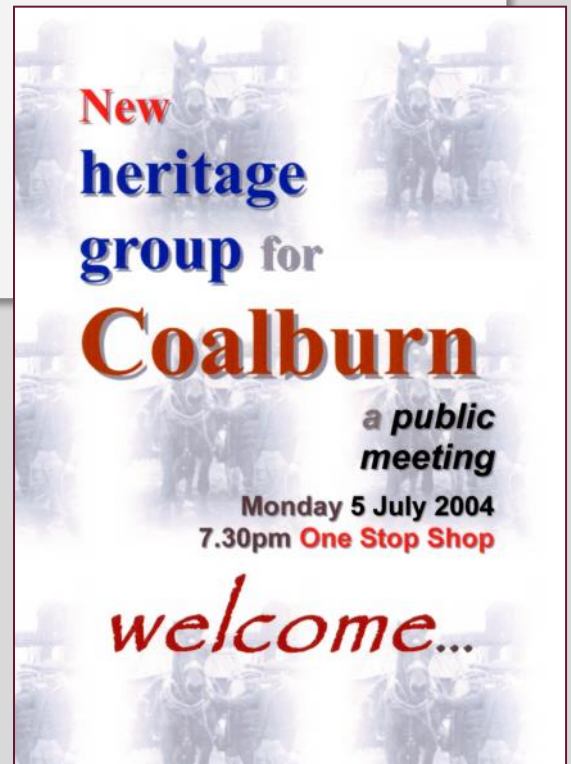
*The Jim Hamilton*

# Heritage Society of Coalburn

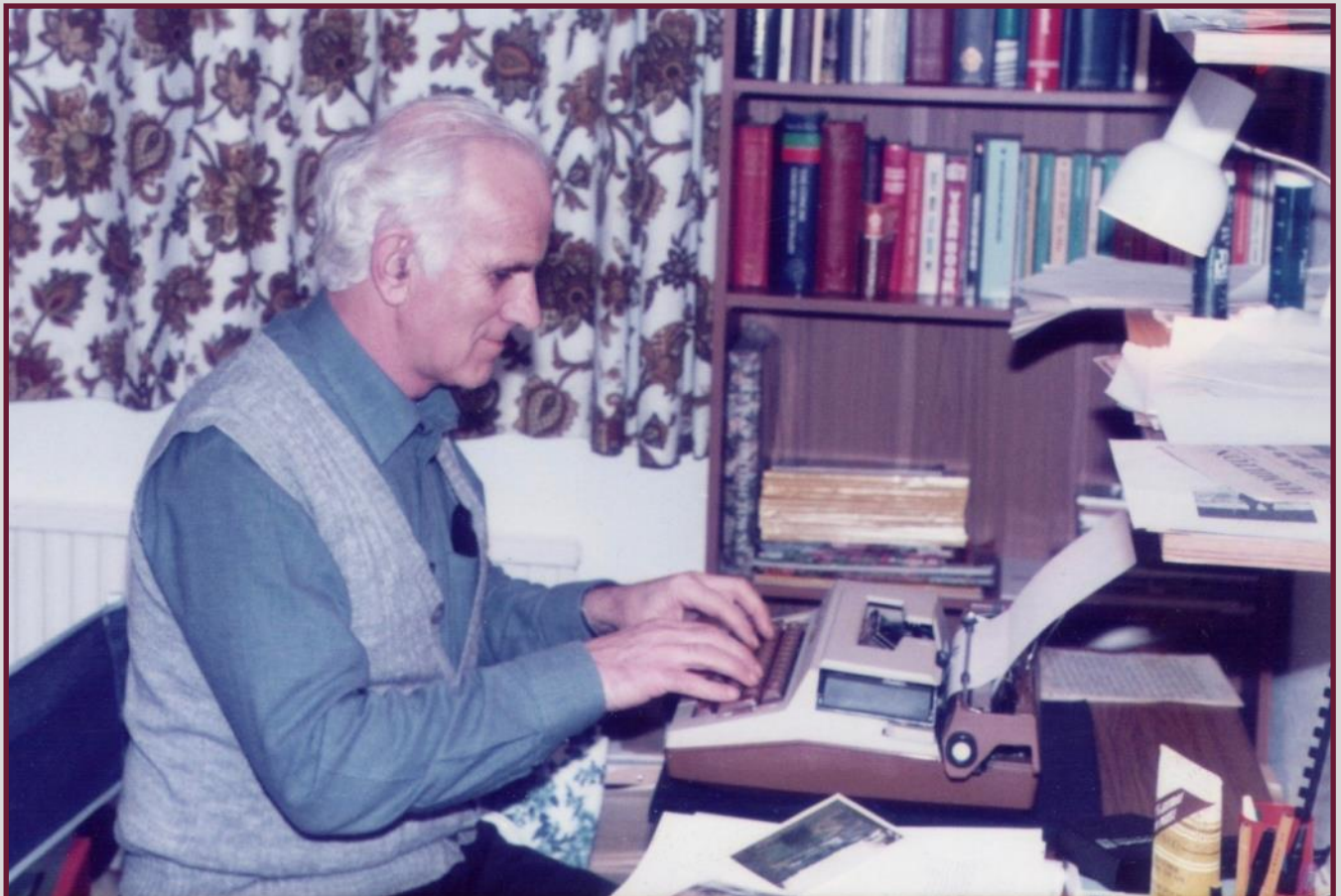
Newsletter 75

Summer 2024

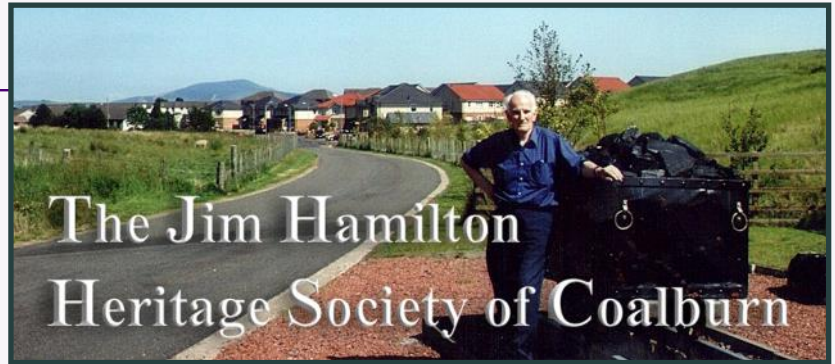
*20th Anniversary Issue*



**New**  
**heritage**  
**group for**  
**Coalburn**  
**a public**  
**meeting**  
Monday 5 July 2004  
7.30pm **One Stop Shop**  
*welcome...*



# Chairperson's Remarks



## and Heritage Society News

~~~~ *Summer 2024* ~~~~

Congratulations to the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn! As of 5th July, 2024, we are 20 years old.

For our 10th anniversary in 2014 an exhibition was mounted at New Lanark over a four week period in March. We haven't stretched to anything on that scale for our 20th, but I'm pleased to report that we did have a presence at the Gala Day on Saturday July 6th which was very successful, with our display at the Leisure Centre attracting well over 100 visitors.

With considerable assistance from our own Donald Williams, a substantial section of this exhibition was devoted to the 130 year history of Coalburn I.O.R. Pipe Band and their many achievements. We also focussed on Gala Days past, displayed some great photographs donated by former schoolteacher Marean Johnstone, and highlighted the new edition of Jim Hamilton's 'Lanarkshire Coalminers and their Wives'. We marked our 20th anniversary too, showing some milestone moments from the early days.

We were able to host the Gala Day event because sufficient members came forward to assist. Thanks to Marean Johnstone for reception duties, to Marion McBain and her daughters June and Wendy for laying on drinks and nibbles (delicious), to Billy Struthers for staffing our popular fundraising tombola, to Ian Lundie who saw to the book stall, and to Ian's wife Rona, who helped out anywhere that an extra pair of hands was needed. Jim McBain looked in after Gala Day driving duties and helped with the considerable task of clearing the room at the end of the day and Geoff Brown, despite a long day including duty as Gala photographer, came in to see the exhibition and offered to stay on and help. Geoff did not look too well so we sent him home and which was just as well as he's been quite poorly recently—here's wishing you better health Geoff. And last—but by no means least—Donald Williams, on duty with the Pipe Band on the day, did a sterling job back at the Heritage Centre the following Monday, single handedly returning the display tables back where they came from: no mean feat.





**GALA DAY TEAM, 6th July 2024**

*Rona Lundie, Ian Lundie, Marion  
McBain, Jim McBain, Helen Brownlie,  
Billy Struthers ...*



*... and Marean Johnstone  
- with her tombola prize -*

~~~~~  
This newsletter covers similar themes to our Gala Day exhibition and we're producing it as a larger booklet, which we hope will enhance appreciation of the many photographs, making this a special issue for our 20th anniversary.

~~~~~  
There is lots of Heritage Society news so this is just a flavour for now, there'll be more to say in our autumn newsletter (which should - like the buses - arrive before long). Although there's quite a lot going on at the moment, there's more that we'd like to undertake, particularly with regard to enhancing the archive and facilitating access, and other work in progress that we could complete sooner, if we had more resources of person power. So please do come forward and have a chat if you might like to be more involved. We all have different skills to offer. This is important - there's no pressure to be trying something that you discover not suited to or simply don't enjoy, or to keep up an activity if it's not working out - just dip your toe in the water and see how you get on. Meanwhile, we are delighted to say that..... (contd. on page 13)

# *130 Years of Coalburn I. O. R. Pipe Band*

## Part I 1894 - 1960

In the summer of 1894 there was a national miners' strike, during which Coalburn miners were idle for around three months. It was a hot summer and many played cards and other games to pass the time. However some of the more musically minded miners decided to learn to play the bagpipes.

The pipes were not entirely new to the area at this time—as far back as 1874 piper William Brown had accompanied the local Sabbath School to an outing at Tinto Hill, and many other such excursions would have had bagpipe accompaniment. Now experienced pipers, some of whom had learned to play in the army, stepped up as the first tutors. Chanters and drumsticks were sourced and practices organised. The foundations of the pipe band, as we know it today, were laid.

Most of the founding members of the band were members of the Rechabites, a strong temperance movement. The band initially affiliated itself to the local Rechabite Tent, Bellfield Home, changing to their present title—'*Coalburn Independent Order of Rechabites Pipe Band*'—four years later, in 1898. In these early days any member caught drinking alcohol was expelled from the band.



**COALBURN I.O.R. PIPE BAND: Around 1910**

Band members outside Kirk Cottage (names listed inside back cover)



The Band soon set about arranging to have their own hall for practice. After sterling fundraising efforts and success in obtaining the feu on a piece of ground belonging to Bellfield estate, the Victoria Hall was constructed on Bellfield Road. This opened in December 1907 and remains the band's home to this day.

Times were hard in the years after WWI and 1924 saw the departure of four band members hoping better their fortunes in New Zealand, including the first pipe major, David Kerr Finlay, and Gilbert Rae – known as ‘Gibbie’ – who was bass drummer for many years. Piping continued in the new country, with a press notice from May 1925 advising that ‘Mr D K Finlay, late of Scotland, is prepared to give lessons. Mr Finlay is the winner of over 400 prizes in open competition’. Together with many others from Coalburn, the Finlay family settled in Blackball, a coal mining town in North Island. Descendants of the émigrés remain, and we now have contact with the Blackball History Group via our Facebook page.

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Many people have contributed to the stability and future of the IOR Pipe Band over the 130 years of its existence, however during this first period one family in particular made a tremendous contribution: the Findlays.



Colliery worker Tam Findlay (left) was born in 1892 and joined the band as a young man, serving as Pipe Major during WWI, while still in his 20s. When his playing days were over Tam served on committee, a commitment broken only by his death in April 1956 at the age of 64.

As a boy, Jim Findlay (right) had followed his father Tam into the band. At the age of 14 he was among the band when Coalburn IOR were chosen to lead the procession at an event in Manchester in 1935 to mark 100 years of the Rechabite movement (below).



Four years later and still in his teens, Jim Findlay became Pipe Major. He remained so for the rest of his too short life, his tenure broken only by army service in WWII.

As a piper in the army Jim Findlay took part in many ceremonial march pasts and

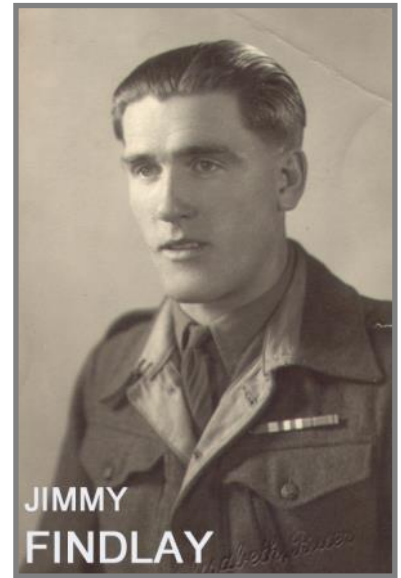
had a conspicuous role in the victory parade in London in 1945. Legend has it that his wife Margaret, on a visit to the cinema, was unable to answer a neighbour's enquiry regarding Jim's whereabouts, only to see her husband appear on screen, leading the parade.

## *Tribute to Jim Findlay*

*from Jim Allan (Pipe Major 1974-79)*

"When Jim Findlay rejoined the band after his army service, a new generation of members started to grow.

'Big Jimmy', as he was affectionately known, took the band to the competition arena. This was a vast new experience for the band and created a new interest and keenness among its members - Coalburn I.O.R. got its name on many a prize list and trophy."



**COALBURN I.O.R. PIPE BAND: Around 1947**  
(names listed inside back cover)

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Donald Mathieson and John Dyet were two others who followed their elders into the Pipe Band. Piper Dyet was particularly successful, as this press notice from 1954 attests:

"A product of Coalburn Rechabite Pipe Band, Piper John Dyet of the Highland Light Infantry, at present serving with his regiment in Egypt, has been gaining considerable distinction in the bagpipe world. At a sports meeting held recently he won two silver cups and a medal in the piping competitions. He took first prize in march, strathspey and reel: and, considering that the contest was open to several regimental bands, his achievement was of no mean order."

However the obligation to undertake National Service at this



time posed problems for the band back in Coalburn: as of February 1956 no fewer than four of the younger members were absent on duty.



The gentleman in the light coloured coat and hat at the centre of the above photograph is former bass drummer Gibbie Rae, that July day occurring during a lengthy return visit from New Zealand. 'Barding chronicler' Geordie Clark penned a lengthy poem to mark his friend's stay and we've included an abridged version in this newsletter. The picture looks to be a quick snap rather than carefully posed or composed and it's remarkable how well it evokes the village of the time. Taken outside the Auchlochan colliery office, it shows Pretoria Terrace in the background on the left with No.6 pit on the right and the reading room tree visible in the distance, behind the bus stop sign.



**BURNS SUPPER IN THE VICTORIA HALL: around 1960**

Wull Clelland pipes in the haggis.

Guests included Tom & Elizabeth Knox, George & Rachael Clark and Peg Currie.

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# Landscape Legacies of Coal

***“Scotland’s first industrial ‘eco-museum’, celebrating and recording former mining landscapes through a series of community created cycling and walking routes.”***

Coalburn’s contribution to this project continues apace. Thanks to the work of Donald Williams, a local walk is now well advanced and can be viewed on the project site, complete with information and illustrations: <https://www.mining-landscapes.org/route/44>.

This is intended to be the first of many and we would welcome your feedback, whether of taking the walk or, if you’re at a distance or not too mobile, simply following on-line. We’ll have this as the focus of our second meeting of the new season, on the afternoon of Wednesday 25th September, in Coalburn Miners’ Welfare lounge.



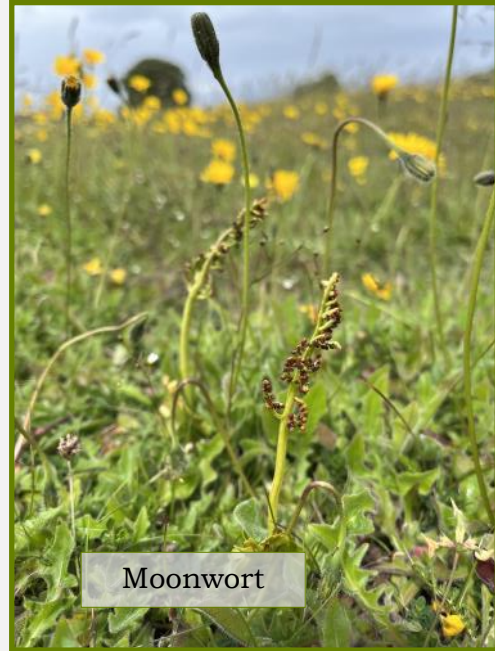
*Meanwhile, the event at **Bellfield** Bing on June 28th went very well....*

...on a preparatory visit, 175 species of plant life were recorded by Matt Harding (Scotland Officer at the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland) and Michael Philip (lead botanical recorder for Lanarkshire). They found a colony of Greater Butterfly-orchids, Common Spotted and Northern Marsh orchids and also their hybrid, “which is massive”.





Orchid



Moonwort



The most exciting botanical find was Moonwort, as this was the first time that this plant had been seen in the area since the 1960s - described as "a stunning find for Coalburn".

Fossils were found too: a fossilised fish and a head of horsetail (pictured). Also known as mare's tail, this is a common weed which has persisted for 330 million years—no wonder today's gardeners find it impossible to eradicate.

Shown below is one of the beautiful images produced by cyanotype—a sort of natural development process, using sunlight—and some of the botanical materials gathered to produce the images.



The geologist found interesting mineralisation too, resulting from burning in the bing material. All in all it was an enlightening day from a professional team, and we're looking forward to reports documenting the various botanical and geological findings.



# *Coalburn Gala - through the years*

## Nettie Tait 1947 - 1949 - 1951



Our Gala Day display looked back 75 years to 1949, when Joan Weir had pride of place as Gala Queen. Also on the platform that day was Maid of Honour Nettie Tait (3rd left).

To this day, Nettie is the only person to have been in three Gala Courts: she had been a flower girl two years previously (far right) and was to be queen two years later, in 1951 (below).



*Names of the children in the 1947 and 1949 Gala Courts pictured above are listed inside the back cover*

Nettie's commemorative picture as Gala Queen is especially beautiful and it's no wonder that, from many possibilities, it was chosen for the major display that marked our 10th anniversary in 2014.

Nettie's married name was Law and she lived in Lesmahagow. We're sorry to say that Nettie died earlier this year.





# Welcome to Gibbie

## by George Clark, 1953

(abridged)

~~~~~

Jist watchin' Gibbie sittin' there  
Sets memory's wheels asteer,  
And thochts flee back tae bygone days  
When PHEME and he leaved here.

A worthy pair you'll a' agree  
Weel kent by ane an' a',  
An' herts were sair in '24  
When they baith sailed awa'.

Noo, efter a' thae lang, lang years  
We welcome Gibbie hame,  
But fate denies us o' the cheer  
O' yince mair seein' PHEME

I'm shair I speak for every yin  
Amangst this getherin' here,  
That in oor herts she'll aye remain  
Her memory ever dear.

But let us noo gang back a bit  
An' dwell jist fur a while  
On things concernin' Gibbie, there  
They'll maybe mak' ye smile.

When Gibbie leaved in Coalburn raws  
An' a' the weans were wee,  
He'd always company in the hoose  
An' they aye got their tea.

The Steeles and Jimmy Hamilton,  
The Findlays, Tam and Hugh,  
Sannie Reid and ither yins  
Tae mention jist a few.

The times were hard for Gibbie then  
So each yin did agree  
That every time they had a bite  
They'd pey a wee bit fee.

A poother box was then procured  
An' nailed baith firm an' ticht,  
Wi' a wee bit slit doon thro' the lid  
Tae keep the coins bricht.



An' when the wee 'jile bank' wis burst  
Tae rig young Barbara oot,  
A sum of £19 wis foun'  
A braw nest egg, nae doot.

At Glesca Fair in '23  
Tae Prestwick we did hie  
Tae spend a week there in a tent  
Gib, Jimmy, Jock and I.

Oor next door neebours, douce young lads  
Were bible punchers a',  
An' sang an' played the hymns and psalms  
While we jist kicked a ba'.

Ae famous tune cotch Gibbie's ear  
He likit its refrain  
'For Me who sends the sunshine  
He also sends the rain'.

Of coorse the weather then wis guid  
But rain cam' an' some thunder  
Then Gibbie shouts 'They've brocht the juice,  
Is it ony bloody wunder?'

When Gibbie startit keepin' hens  
His scouts were oot in force,  
An' the loads o' wud that he took hame  
Wad tax a Clydesdale horse.

O' a' the ploys that he's been in  
'Twad tak' me oors tae tell  
An' if he ever gets the chance,  
He'll tell ye them himsel'.

So welcome back tae Coalburn, Gib,  
We're a' gey prood tae meet ye  
An' may guid health an' happiness  
Aye be on haun' tae greet ye.

## *Coalburn School 1986-87*

Thanks to Marean Johnstone for her recent donation of several staff and class photographs from her time as a teacher at Coalburn Primary. A selection were shown at Gala Day and proved very popular. Here is a 1986-87 school year photograph, showing Marean with her pupils—primaries 3 and 4—and the staff photo from that same year. We're particularly pleased to find that we now have a picture of the late Betty Nicol, the lady in light blue among the staff in the picture below. (All names are listed inside back cover.)





## Heritage Society News *contd.*

...we have a new volunteer, Ben Fleming, is helping out once a week while studying at college. Here he is, with Donald and I at the Heritage Centre – thank you Ben and welcome aboard.

### Visitors

Over the summer we greatly enjoyed two visits from New Zealanders with Coalburn connections. Jean Clark was keen to browse our substantial collection of photographs of the Clark family. Her grandfather Richard Clark emigrated in 1911 with members of his extended family, including his heavily pregnant wife,



Jane (or Jean) Spence: her father, Richard Clark, arrived during the voyage. Jean was able to shed light on some of our photos while we were able to identify people in some of hers and found others she had not previously seen. Jean went off with the relevant 'Coalburn Chronicles' and has since been in touch to say how delighted she was to find a picture of her great grandmother with her Spence aunts as young women. This picture, shown below, is in Chronicle 14 and it's one that we don't seem to have the original of. So, if you can help, please do share and we'll make sure Jean gets a good quality copy.

The description for the photo is: Mary Spence (née Murdoch) and the girls in her family. *Standing:* Margaret, who married Wull Graham of Ponfeigh; Jemima, who married Sam Pirrie and went to New Zealand; Kate, who married and emigrated to USA; Marion, who married Sam's brother Wull Pirrie, and also went to New Zealand. *Seated:* Sarah, who married James Pitt of Cronberry; mother Mary; Mary, who married John McLeod of Lesmahagow. It seems that Jean's grandmother, sister Jane Spence, was absent when the picture was taken.



On the same day we were pleased to welcome surprise visitor Elspeth Thomson. Elspeth was interested to browse our (vast) collection of photos and items pertaining to the Horticultural Society and flower show, where her father John Arthur was a leading light for many years. We look forward to getting together with Elspeth again on a future visit.

Our second guest from New Zealand was a Mrs McLeish, who arrived with her husband. As far as we know he's not related to our own McLeish family, they were going on

to Dunkeld the following day in search of the McLeishes. We were pessimistic of being able to help as the starting point was simply that she had an ancestor, by name of Janet Ferguson, who had emigrated around the middle of the 19th Century. However it transpired that some of the family remained behind and that the various branches are well documented in the 'Coalburn Chronicles'. Janet's father, Walter Ferguson, was born in 1900 and lived to the famously old age for these times of 91, when the Hamilton Advertiser reported on his death on 27th February 1891, advising readers that "up to a month ago, he was hale and hearty, able to move about and in possession of all his faculties." Walter's daughter Isabella married James Smart, and they and their family lived with the elderly Walter at Little Coalburn Farm, which had been his home for over sixty years. So there is lots of coverage of different branches of the family throughout Jim Hamilton's work.

Others have dropped by with donations. We were pleased to receive photographs and papers pertaining to Jean Savage and her parents from one of her closest relatives, Tom Hamilton. These include some lovely photos of Jean that we didn't already have, some family letters, and official documents from wartime. Thank you, Tom.

Finally, we should have news regarding our website in the next issue, meanwhile please consult our Facebook page for updates on Heritage Society activities.

Helen Brownlie, August 2024

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Annie Shadbolt (Clark) [New Zealand]

David Brown

Archie Buchanan

Tam McGowan

Tom Muir

- in deepest sympathy -

Coalburn related deaths



### **PIPE BAND: Around 1910**

Photograph of band members outside Kirk Cottage.

*Left to right:* Tam Finlay, Jimmy Brown, Wull Dyet, Geordie Mitchell, Alex Mathieson, Robert Watt, Gibbie Rae, Wull McLay, John Pearson, Bob Wilson, Wull Brown, John Mitchell, Tam Findlay, Jimmy Bond

### **PIPE BAND: Around 1947**

Photograph dates from after Pipe Major Findlay's return from WWII

*Back:* Jock White, Guy Whitefield snr, John Laird, Tam Brown, Baldie Naismith

*Middle:* Bruce Shaw, Davie Smith, Guy Whitefield, Bobby Greenshields

*Front:* Jim Findlay, Jimmy Whitefield, Wullie Jeffrey, Donald Mathieson, Wull Clelland

### **GALA COURT 1949**

*Queen*—Joan Weir *Lord in Waiting*—Willie Reid

*Maids of Honour*—Nettie Tait & Lizzie Dobbie

*Pages*—Allan Watson & Willie Allan

*Flower Girls* —Janette Callan & Ann Twaddle

### **GALA COURT 1947**

*Queen*—Nettie Nelson      *Lord in Waiting*—Andrew Shaw

*Maids of Honour*—Mattie Donaghue & Ellen Dobbie

*Pages*—John Shaw & Meikle Graham

*Flower Girls* —Alison Scott & Nettie Tait

We have studio photographs of gala queen and court at the early Gala Days, 1937 to 1955. These are available in post-card sized versions and can be viewed at the Heritage Centre. Please get in touch if you would like to purchase copies, or a set.

### **COALBURN PRIMARY SCHOOL 1986-87 Session**

#### **Staff**

*Back:* Student Teacher, Pauline Simpson, Marean Johnstone

*Middle:* Betty Nicol, Ina Stevenson, Etta Davidson, May Smith (cook), Margaret Douglas, Catherine McPherson

*Front:* Christine Slater, Sheena Caldwell, Margaret Nelson (headteacher), Linda Wilson, Betty Bell

#### **Pupils**

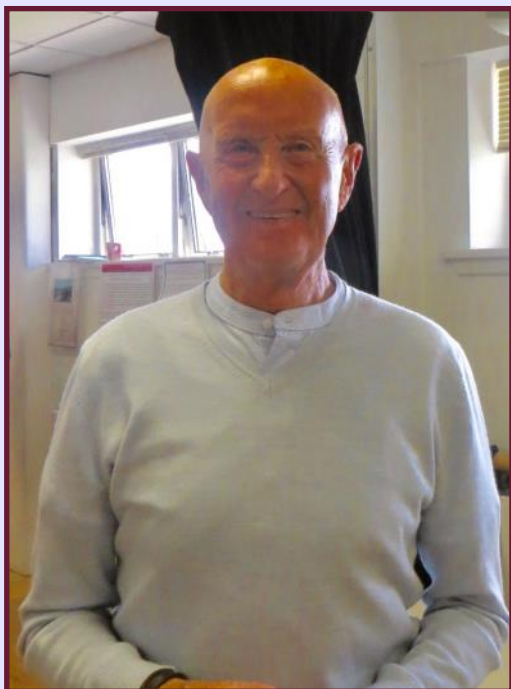
*Back:* Shelley McCaskie, Allan Gallagher, Michelle Tait, Andrew McCabe, Janice MacLean, Colin Robertson, teacher Marean Johnstone

*Middle:* Robert Greenshields, David Kerr, Michael Lindsay, Colin Williams, Ian Jamieson, Ross Clark, David Longmuir, William Adam

*Front:* Donna Hogg, Martha Morrison, Julie Thomson, Carol Boag, Lorna Walker, Vicky Graham, Dawn Menzies, Jean Morrison, Hazel Duffy

# *The Jim Hamilton*

## Heritage Society of Coalburn



### Heritage Society Meetings Autumn 2024

Autumn Season begins Wednesday 11th September, 7 for 7.15 at Coalburn Bowling Club

Guest Speaker Alex Watson, former miner

Thereafter we'll meet every second Wednesday .  
The first meeting of each month will be in the evening, the second will be an afternoon meeting in the Miners' Welfare Lounge.

11th September—Alex Watson (see above)

25th September, 1.30, Miners Welfare Lounge

Take a virtual walk through time with us—update on the Landscape Legacies of Coal Project with focus on Coalburn Heritage Walk I

9th October, 7 for 7.15, Coalburn Bowling Club

Guest Speaker Terence Wise of Lesmahagow Parish Historical Society will tell us something of the **History of the Blackwood Estate**

23rd October, 1.30, Miners Welfare Lounge

**Remembering Peter McLeish**—together with Coalburn Darby and Joan Club, celebrating Peter's uniquely valuable contribution. *We are very much hoping that this can go ahead as planned, but please note that at present there is a question mark over catering arrangements; update to follow at meeting on Sept 11th*

6th November, 7 for 7.15, Coalburn Bowling Club

20th November, 1.30, Miners Welfare Lounge

4th December, 7 for 7.15, Coalburn Bowling Club

*Topics for November and December to be confirmed*

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