

The Jim Hamilton
Heritage Society of Coalburn
Newsletter 77
Spring 2025



Timbertown and Bellfield Road



Chairperson's Remarks and Heritage News *Spring 2025*

This Newsletter finds us at the end of another season – our 21st. A copy of the annual report, looking back on this latest year, is enclosed for those of you who have not yet received it.

Our 2025 AGM was held on April 30th, and the outcome of the annual elections is that office bearers are as before and Billy Struthers and James McBain remain on committee too. Our constitution allows for up to three further committee members, however at this time there was no one else wishing to stand. We are hopeful that one or more of these positions will be filled in future, meanwhile we are grateful to all of those who help and support the JHHS of Coalburn, in whatever way they can.

In terms of meetings, we had a varied programme for 2024-25, welcoming Terence Wise of Lesmahagow Parish Historical Association, Bob McDonald & Colin Findlay of Rutherglen Heritage Society, local authoress Ethyl Smith, and Dr Edward Stewart of Archaeology Scotland. Other meetings were 'in house', variously looking back at Coalburn of the past, building on the information we already have, and viewing some of the many films available in our collection. The season began with a wonderful talk by local ex-miner Alex Watson, who returned to tell us about his lifelong love of cycling.

This newsletter covers meetings and activity during the latter part of the season. We also have features on Betty Bell's schooldays, the life and heritage work of overseas member Billy Clelland, and the rediscovery of a long lost trophy.

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### *Jim Hamilton Heritage Society of Coalburn Meetings February-April 2025*

**Legendary cyclist Alex Watson was our speaker on February 5th.** This was a welcome return and the prospect of hearing from Alex once again attracted both members and a substantial number of guests. We were particularly pleased that two of his fellow former Nethanvale Wheelers – Davie Mathieson and John Thompson – were able to be there. Alex gave a fantastic talk on his lifelong passion for cycling. In time his prowess as a cyclist went far beyond the local area, as he travelled all over Britain and parts of Europe, cycling to the highest level and gaining friends along the way. To this day Alex continues to cycle day and daily.

Alex, a man of many talents, has donated one of his latest paintings, a quoiter in full flow, to the Jim Hamilton Heritage Society.

Thank you Alex – much appreciated.

A mini-display on mining heritage was set up at the meeting and gathered interest. Here Donald Williams and Jim Derek discuss the photos.



On February 19th we had an interesting presentation about the long history and varied archaeology of the Clyde Valley by Dr Edward Stewart of Archaeology Scotland, who is engagement officer on the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework (CVARF). Please see webpages (on back page) to find out more about this, and read the CVARF newsletters. We are pleased to report that the JHHS of Coalburn features in Issue 3 (April 2025).

other local heritage groups on this visit. We were pleased to be joined by Dr Iain Kane of Douglas Heritage Museum Trust (right) and Richard Haworth of Lesmahagow Parish Historical Association.

Eddie was keen to reach out to





This was also our first foray into on line participation in JHHS meetings, as overseas member Bruce McCowan joined us from Ontario, Canada. Connecting on line via the 'zoom' platform went to plan and Bruce was able to enjoy the presentation and contribute his thoughts.



**At our March 3rd meeting we watched a very special film, shot around 2004, with Betty Bell and Gilbert Dobbie reminiscing about Coalburn School.**

Things began with Gibbie, who had worked as janitor, interviewing Betty, however the conversation soon became

a joint reminiscence. Betty recalled her first day at Coalburn School and the circumstances surrounding her starting at the young age of 4 ½. She spent nine years as a pupil in Coalburn, seven in primary and two in junior secondary. Little did she know then that she would go on to work in the school as a well-respected secretary for 34 years, starting in 1966 and retiring in 2000. The audience could be heard joining in too and there was footage of heritage society members on the night. Sadly many are no longer with us, including John Zawadski, who shot the film.



Once again we were able to facilitate remote participation, with several joining from south of the border: guest Andrew Brownlie and members Ann Thomas and Kylie and Marilyn Murray. There was of plenty laughter and good-natured banter throughout, with pauses from time to time as folks joined in with comments and memories. We were particularly pleased that Kylie and her mother could be part of this as schoolteacher Martha Barr was Marilyn's aunt.

In 2008 the JHHS published a booklet with Betty's memories from her schooldays. As we might expect, these are vivid and very readable – we have included the first part as a pull out section from the middle pages of this newsletter.



### **On March 19th we enjoyed Jim Hamilton's film of Gala Day 1997**

Needless to say this stimulated discussion and brought back memories for many members present.

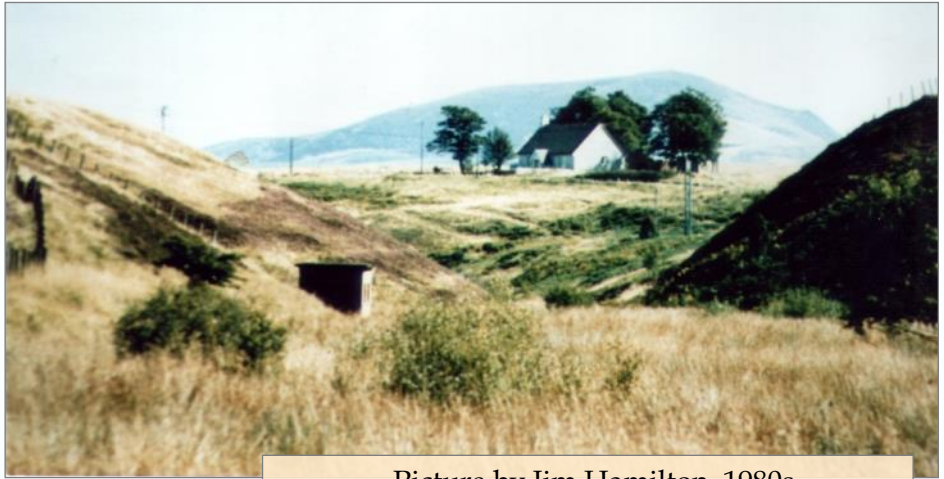
#### **Picture Opposite: Gala Court 1997**

Queen Amanda Williams  
Lord-in-Waiting Mark Hamilton  
Maids of Honour Nicola & Clare Graham  
Page Boys George Douglas & Craig Kennedy  
Train Bearers Steffi Burt & Kerrie Thorley

Donald Williams gave an absorbing presentation on the history of the area from the Inns Brig to Bankend at our meeting on 2nd April.

Donald brought the story to life very effectively, covering early history, evolution of the area, and industrial highlights,

with the experience of people living and working in the area woven throughout. Largely desolate now, this area was once a hive of industrial activity and the centre of population. For example, the picture here shows where the railway line ran from Coalburn Station to Bankend. It was taken from what was the Bankend terminus, looking back towards Westoun Villa, with Tinto Hill in the background. The house was formerly used by pit managers at Bankend colliery. Jim Hamilton recalled that it had been the home of the Cook family, and of the Hislop family. On the hillside on the left occurred the fracas which became known as the 'Coalburn Riot' (described in detail in Chronicle 77).



Picture by Jim Hamilton, 1980s

### *Other Heritage Society News*

***Peter McLeish Memorial Prize*** We are delighted to report that 2024-25 sees the re-introduction of a heritage-related project for primary seven pupils at Coalburn School and that this award will be made in memory of the late Peter McLeish.





We have arranged for an engraved shield, to be kept on display at the school, and a medal, to be kept by the prize winner. At time of writing the pupils are busy with their projects and the award will be made at the school leavers' assembly on Tuesday June 24th.

**Children's Rock Trail** Meanwhile, two Rock Trail adventures have taken place with younger children (Primaries 3, 4 and 5), part of the Eco-Museum of Mining



Landscapes project. Painted rocks, many depicting mining related themes such as a miner's lamp and tools, were placed along the route and the children were tasked seeing how many they could find. Historical information about the village was given along the route, and they were also given some questions on a simple sheet, that the rocks could help to answer—for example, 'what did miners wear on their feet?', 'what did the coal wagon run on?'

The first event, on April 23rd, went down the nature trail and behind Bellfield bog, and from there back to the school. The second, on May 14th, went down the bogie line, returning to the school along Bellfield Road. Donald Williams was involved in the planning for this and attended both events, it was good to hear that the children were all very enthusiastic and enjoyed the experience.

**Raising our Profile** We have updated our entry at several heritage related websites. As a result, the Scottish Local History Forum featured us in an e-newsletter and included a short section in their published magazine.

Further to our recent test forays into zoom for remote participation at meetings, we have now obtained a grant from Dalquandy Community Benefit Fund which will cover the purchase of a zoom pro licence for the coming session as well as other items of expenditure.

Helen Brownlie, June 2025

## Gala Day 2025, Saturday July 5th

We will be hosting a Heritage Display at the leisure centre on the afternoon of July 5th. Fortunately we have sufficient cover but more hands are welcome, should you fancy joining us for a hour or two on the day.



## *Betty Bell's* *Memories of* **COALBURN** **SCHOOL**

**I was enrolled at Coalburn School on 1st April, 1935, although my fifth birthday was not until August of that year.**

This came about through very unfortunate circumstances. Whilst my sister and I were playing dressing up (I was 4½ and she was 3 years of age) a spark from the fire came through the fireguard and landed on the dress she was wearing. The dress caught fire and by the time my father ran from the adjoining room she was in flames and I was screaming my head off. She was rushed to the Royal Infirmary in Glasgow and was on the danger list. My parents stayed in Glasgow to be with her and I was with my grandparents.

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Miss Martha Barr, the Infant Mistress at the School visited my grandparents and suggested that I should start school and that was why I was enrolled. Miss Barr was a small lady with gray hair, pulled back in a bun. She wore long skirts. I have very fond memories of her.

I can recall Miss Barr doing the register and when she called my name she said 'Elizabeth Bryson' and I told her that my name was Betty. She took note of this and never referred to me as Elizabeth again.



Primary 1 classroom was separated from the other infant classes by a folding door. This was opened up for religious education, singing and other events when the other classes would join us. It was also opened for Christmas parties.



The classroom had an open coal fire which was kept burning by the janitor, **Mr Tam Brown**. I remember him coming into the class several times during the day with the coal bucket and shovel.

I don't recall a great deal about my time there except I enjoyed the lessons and doing the lacing cards.

Another event I enjoyed was when Miss Barr chose me to go over to her

house, which was situated in the playground, to deliver a note to her sister, Miss Isa Barr. The house was situated within an 'L' shaped building which was originally used as a hostel for student teachers in the early days. It had since been altered to provide two homes, one for the Misses Barr, the other for the janitor and family, but was always known as the hostel. Miss Isa Barr would answer the door and take the note I was delivering. She would be accompanied by their small dog, Judy. After reading the note she would offer me a sweetie from a box she carried.

The toilets were outside in the playground and located close to where the dining-room was later. A long way to run as we were not permitted to go down the corridor and out of the boys' door. The boys' shelter adjoined their toilets and the girls' shelter was located outside the back wall of the Primary 1 classroom. These shelters were our only protection from inclement weather as we were not allowed into the school at playtimes or lunch time—snow, hail, rain or shine.

Together with the other pupils who lived at Glaikhead, we walked the mile to school and back home. There was no dining-room in those days. Those who could went home, those like us who couldn't carried their lunch and flasks of tea from home in the morning. The flasks were collected by the Janitor and he put them on the boiler to keep warm. Even so they were more or less lukewarm when we collected them at lunch time.

My aunt Margaret, who was still at school, was my carer during my time in P1.

When I left Miss Barr's class I received a prize book for merit.

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The teacher in **Primary 2** was **Miss Gilchrist**, who lived on the outskirts of Lesmahagow. She was a very gentle person, soft spoken and kindly. Again, I don't have much recollection of Primary 2, so I suppose I must have been happy there as well.

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Miss Jessie Purdie taught **Primary 3**. She was very pretty and all I can remember of her class was that I liked the teacher, and there ended my infant days.

Miss Purdie later left to marry Bob Barr, headmaster of Bent School, and they lived in Blackwood. When I started work at Blackwood Junior Secondary in 1964 Mr Barr kept me up to date and she sent me many kind messages.

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Next came **Primary 4** with **Miss Agnes Thornton**. She was small in stature with a no nonsense attitude. When displeased with you she made a fist of her right hand and hit you under the shoulder blade with the knuckle of her forefinger. Very painful it was too.





The only real conflict I had with her was during a class exam. Since Primary 3 I had been afflicted with attacks of migraine, which generally led to vomiting. During the exam I experienced an attack and realised I was going to be sick. I put my hand up and asked to leave the room and told her why. She refused to let me go so I promptly vomited all over the test paper and my desk. The janitor was not pleased and I was definitely not a favourite of Miss Thornton.

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Miss Mary Craig was teacher of **Primary 5**. She was very elegant in appearance and very strict. The only memory which stands out for me was that she was the only teacher to use corporal punishment to me.



Again we were in the middle of an exam. We doing dictation and I put a capital 'T' instead of a small 't' at the word 'the'. I was told to cross my hands and received two of the belt. The belt curled up my arm and I was left with a blistered hand and arm. I never made that mistake again. My parents were not at all concerned. Their attitude was that I had made a mistake and therefore should take the punishment.

The other thing I recall about Miss Craig was that she played piano. When not being used in class or hall the piano was usually in the corridor. Miss Craig played when the pupils were entering the school in the morning and afternoon. Infants and girls lined up at the front of the school, boys at the back. We went into the cloakroom and removed our outer clothing and again lined up. Miss Craig would be playing a march of some sort on the piano and we marched along the corridor, the older pupils continuing upstairs, marching strictly in time to the music. Teachers were stationed along the corridor and Miss Harvie was at the foot of the stairs, Miss Jeffrey on the middle landing, and Mr. Scott at the top. It was more than your life was worth to be out of step.

One of the customs at the school was for all pupils to gather in the gym hall for the two minutes silence on Remembrance Day. Miss Craig played the piano for the hymns and on one occasion was seen to be crying. The story went around that she had lost her fiancée in the war, but I now realise that was highly unlikely, although I am not aware of her age at the time. She and Miss Purdie were friends and travelled together to and from school, by bus.

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My next move was of great importance to all in our class. We were going UP-STAIRS to **Miss Jean Harvie's** class, **Primary 6**. Miss Harvie's family originally came from this area, somewhere near Waterside, and she cycled to school. I believe she had a sister who taught and brother John was headmaster at Douglas School.

Miss Harvie had taught my mother, Agnes Odger, at Coalburn School. Mother was born in 1909 and I recall her asking me if, when Miss Harvie was angry, her neck turned red and then her face. Sure enough it did and only the foolish pupil

ignored the warning sign. You tried to be as quiet as possible—even moving in your seat was enough to bring her wrath down upon your head.

Throughout my school years, the staff were aware of the effects migraine attacks had on me, and they duly sent me home. However, Miss Harvie obviously thought I was not being truthful and instead of sending me home when I told her I was experiencing a migraine attack, she sent me to sit beside the radiator. The worst thing she could have done. I duly had to run out of the room without her permission and proceeded to vomit my way downstairs, but had enough sense to exit through the boys' door, to the toilets.

When I returned to the school I was met by an irate janitor who wanted to know why I had waited so long before going to the toilets. I told him Miss Harvie told me to sit beside the radiator. He escorted me to my class where he collected my bag and in no uncertain terms told Miss Harvie that she must have known of my history and had no business keeping me in class. He then escorted me to the bus stop. I don't know what the outcome of the confrontation was.

Miss Harvie and Miss Thornton were friends.

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Betty is standing, 4th right, in this class photo from 1940

CHILDREN IN THE PHOTO ARE:

back row – Ian Edmiston, Willie Walker, George Gray, Andrew Lindsay, Bobby Clark, Matthew Thomson, (unknown), John Thomson, Bruce Shaw and Guy Scott

2nd back row – Mary Strang, Betty Aitken, Mary Smith, Mary Black, Isa Patterson, Jane McLean, Betty Bryson, Bellan Shankley, Annie Hislop, Isobel White

2nd front row – Peterina Cosgrove, Jean Menzies, Jean McGowan, (unknown) Smith, Ann Hampson, Betty Knox, Kit Mochrie, Nan McNay, Jean Shaw, Nan Maitland, Nancy Nicol

front – Alex Adam, Jimmy McLaughlan, Jack Weir, Jimmy Lumsden, Bobby Lightbody, Archie Groves

The second part of Betty's Coalburn Schooldays will be published in the summer newsletter

In deepest sympathy - Coalburn related deaths

Isobel Adams

Steve Bailey

Helen Farrell (Cameron)

May Fotheringham

Billy Struthers (of Lesmahagow)

Yvonne Kydd (McGowan)

Bobby Hendry

Tam Tait

Jean Tennant

Jimmy Tennant



Billy Clelland- his life and heritage work

In December 2021, after the long period of shutdown, the present JHHS Committee decided to head down to the Heritage Centre for their first time. Waiting for us there was a very welcome package that had come all the way from south Australia. It contained Billy Clelland's phenomenal body of work, placed on a USB pen, all ready for us to plug into a computer and wonder at the contents.

What a great start. But who was this Billy Clelland?

We didn't have to look far to look to find out. Jim Hamilton had documented his encounters with Billy in Chronicle 57, after they were met at Lesmahagow Parish Historical Association in 1990. He learned that Billy had emigrated to Australia back in 1951 while still in his teens, yet he was author of a newly published book *'Lesmahagow – the Parish and the People'*.

Jim Hamilton being Jim Hamilton, he had also asked about Billy forebears and discovered that he is a third generation William Clelland:

his father, William Steele Clelland, was a joiner with Jock Arneil; he married Rachel Harrison Scanlon;

his grandfather was a colliery fireman in the local mines; he married Janet Lennox and lived at 38 Dunn Crescent before moving to Mauchline where, together with other local miners—including Jim Hamilton's father—he had worked at the Friendless pit, travelling from Coalburn by Lockhart's lorry.

Of course we got in touch to thank Billy and, thanks to e-communications, there have been messages in between times and further help given to the JHHS of Coalburn from far away Australia, as well as items donated by post.



1940

— first day at school —

Some time ago we enquired of Billy what took him to Australia, and he was kind enough to share some of his story in reply. We thought it was high time for a tribute, and—with his permission—to share some of Billy's story.

A brief history of 'yours truly' starts in Coalburn in 1935 in the houses that comprised Broompark (Whisky Raw) at the top end of Garden Street. Sarah Scanlon next door had her boy on the 18th of January and my mother said she was waiting for the 19th as both she and her husband celebrated their birthdays on that day. True to form I shared the 19th with both parents.

We moved to Lesmahagow in 1937 where my brother

Tommy was born at Wellbank, Peasehill.

When my father returned from army service in 1946 he was keen to leave Scotland for pastures greener. Nothing positive occurred until 1951 when his application for a job with a construction firm in Adelaide was accepted.

By this time I had matriculated at Hamilton Academy and was geared up for university or a place at the Glasgow School of Art in 1952. My plans were torpedoed when we sailed in December 1951, arriving in South Australia on January 8th. I was desperate to get back to Scotland but it was too expensive in those days for a teenager to save the fare.



Billy in 1969

I took a job as an actuarial clerk with the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company – my ingenuousness told me that ‘North British’ meant Scotland and ‘Mercantile’ was my ticket to get there! Ultimately my actuarial ‘talents’ and training led me quickly into computer science in 1965 when my employers installed their first IBM mainframe. This led to my (more lucrative) career in the Australian mining industry from 1969 onwards until my retirement from Rio Tinto in 2000 (excepting a period on the Zambian Copperbelt 1972-1975).

Travel overseas had become more affordable and I and my family spent most of 1972 in a fitted-out Land Rover in Europe. In 1988 I made my first solo trip to Scotland planning to write a small handbook of the history of Lesmahagow Parish. This led to my acquaintance with Jim Hamilton and Robert McLeish and my regular communication with Jim until he passed away. A number of trips followed; each visit leading more and more to flesh out the history of the parish and my family connections.

My life wasn’t all history: pipe bands were an important part of my life. I was drum tutor and leading drummer of the John McDouall Stuart Memorial Pipe Band of Adelaide, South Australia, from January 1965 until November 1969. The band won the Australian Grade Three Championship in 1966 and the Australian Grade Two Championship in 1968 and I won the Solo Drumming in 1967.

Jim Hamilton enrolled my help to write a history of the Lesmahagow Vale of Nethan PB but before we got underway he died. Luckily Billy Wright was keen to help and we were able to present Pipe Major Archie Templeton with the final draft before he also passed away.

This successful cooperation with Billy Wright encouraged me to join him and Pipe Major Donald Williams in compilation of a 125th anniversary history of Coalburn IOR Pipe Band. This is still in draft.

My other great love, as you can guess, is painting. This



By the sea in 2001

has been important to me since childhood. The Glasgow School of Art remained just a dream although in later years I became a close friend of one of the lecturers there. From the 1950s until about 1980 I regularly designed and painted stage scenery for groups, local to my community at the time, but I didn't really return to fine art and the oily stuff until about 1999. I was shocked to discover that my old style of painting was lost so I started from scratch concentrating mainly on portraits and historical themes. At present over 200 oils on canvas have since been framed.

BILLY CLELLAND, AUGUST 2022

*What can we say, but thank you – and well done, Billy
Goes to show, you can take the man out of Coalburn*



The Jim Hamilton
Heritage Society is
proud to hold several
of Billy Clelland's
paintings, including
this impressionistic
study of
Auchlochan No.6

Clydesdale Cup – rediscovered after 115 years

It was back in 2022 that we received an email headed 'Clydesdale cup found', together with the photograph of a very handsome silver cup. The cup was engraved: 'Presented by Charles M. Douglas Esq. of Aucholchan to the Lesmahagow Farmers Society for best Clydesdale Animal. Bred by Exhibitor Messrs R. & W. Wallace, Linnhead, 1910.' and had been found in a stationery cupboard at Auchlochan.

We couldn't shed any light on this, and there matters remained until last autumn, when we brought the find to the attention of Shona Harrison. Shona is convenor for Clydesdales at Lesmahagow Show and informed us that when a category for Clydesdale Horses was reintroduced to the show in 2000 they could not find a single example of a previous trophy. She was delighted to hear that this cup had resurfaced, arranged to pick it up from Auchlochan, and got busy cleaning.

In May 2025, after a gap of 115 years, the cup was presented at Lesmahagow Show.



Finders Paul and Joyce Beeby
with Shona Harrison



The beautiful lid, as found –
took a lot of cleaning



Lesmahagow Show,
Saturday 31st May 2025.
Judge Yvonne Pringle
presenting the cup to
Willie and Janice Dunbar
with the yearling filly,
Fairbank Barbie.
First presentation since 1910

The Jim Hamilton

Heritage Society of Coalburn

Heritage Exhibition Coalburn Gala Day

Saturday 5th July

Leisure Centre, 1.00 - 3.30 pm

Website: <http://www.coalburnheritage.org.uk>

E-mail: coalburn.heritage@gmail.com

Postal address: Heritage Centre, One Stop Shop, 42 Coalburn Road,
Coalburn, Lanarkshire ML11 0LH

Membership enquiries: Marion McBain 01555 820234

Find us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/287186251435102>

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

Heritage Websites & Activities

Commonwealth War Graves Commission—Lesmahagow Cemetery
Free Tour **Sunday 20th July 2025 3.00-4.15 pm**

book on-line at <https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/war-graves-tours/>
(if you would like to go but don't have internet access please contact us
to book for you)

Clyde Valley Archaeology

Case Studies <https://scarf.scot/regional/cvarf/clyde-valley-archaeological-research-framework-case-studies/> or <https://tinyurl.com/bdfs7nxw>

Updates & Newsletters: <https://scarf.scot/regional/cvarf/cvarf-latest-updates/>

Eco-Museum of Mining Landscapes

Gala Days Blog <https://www.mining-landscapes.org/blog>

Scottish Local History Forum <https://www.slhf.org>