

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Bob Sloan,  
Langshaw Cottages.

1st February, 1987

Bob Sloan, aged 85, was working on the farm when I arrived, and would be so doing again in the afternoon. Smallish, alert, with a twinkling eye, his face would light up at the mention of someone he liked. He said people tell him that he's good at making friends - which is easy to believe. ~~(although he~~

Born at Carmaddie, Irongray, his father came to Wyseby Mains first as tenant, in 1907, then as proprietor. In 1947 Bob Sloan bought Langshaw, and when he retired he moved to the cottage beside the A74, while his son runs the farm next door.

Most of the interview concerned farming, but there was also some new material on Pincode and the tennis club. A follow up could be to list the prize tickets from various shows.

He lent me two <sup>estate</sup> books about Langshaw.

School and  
Teaching

Kirkpatrick Fleming short time, then Eaglesfield, a year or so at Annan, but railway timetable unsatisfactory so father moved them to Lockerbie Academy, which he left aged 13.

Eaglesfield:- infants Miss Scott, also Miss Boyle and her brother who took oldest.

Not long at Kirkpatrick Fleming - remembers taking big tree across road where he took a big drink. Caught pneumonia (attended by Dr. Carruthers) and was off a long time (he remembered lying in front room at Wyseby Mains). One teacher whose name he thought he remembered was Miss Murray.

Jack — [It  
looks just like a dash  
- perhaps put a  
double dash?]

He walked both to Kirkpatrick Fleming and Eaglesfield but took the train to Annan and Lockerbie, travelling with Mabel Donaldson, the Hill girls, a boy Young (Eaglesfield) and Jack - and one or two others. The boys got up to a lot of mischief in the train - but not the Hills.

He left school to work a pair of horses, but he later started attending evening school at Kirkpatrick Fleming, under Mr. McKerchar, a tall man. (I think

this may have been after the War). He remembered Mr. McKerchar telling him that if you joined the army it was like wheeling a barrow with 2 cwt in it.

His own two bairns went to Breconbeds, the nearest school.

His wife, Violet Burnett, was a Domestic Science teacher. She taught at Langholm, and then - about 1927/28, just before their marriage, at Sanquhar. He remembered taking her up one Sunday to hunt for digs, at a time of an exceptional hard frost which lasted for weeks. She never taught after marriage.

When I asked about Mrs./Miss Moffat who taught music, he remembered Miss Stewart - who lived near the Burnetts house at ? Catbridge - see Church. The Mrs. Moffat may have been the coal agent's mother.

#### Church

He went to Pincod Church where his father was an elder, & he later a Deacon, and Mr. Hill, a grand church-man, sang in the choir. Miss Stewart played the organ at Kirtle Church for many years.

The Pincod Minister, Mr. Donaldson, was there many years, a real gentleman, very popular, probably without many hobbies outside the Church, which he was wrapped up in. He died at the Rigg, and had two adopted children, Bob and Mabel, both now dead, with whom Mr. Sloan used to go to school.

The elders he remembered were Mr. Henderson, Mr. Green, both from Eaglesfield, and Mr. Graham of Wysebyhill. There was also Mr. Irving, the caretaker, who put on the stove. It was a small Church with a little vestibule and square inside, most of the seats at the middle and the side, with 2 or 3 at each corner. They went to the Sunday School at 11, then Church at 12 - and, he said, it was a Sunday School, with 3 or 4 teachers. The one he remembered was Mrs. Donaldson.

Mr. Donaldson also used to preach in an old cottage in Eaglesfield, in which a loose box had been built as a sort of Minister's changing room. As Deacon one of Bob's jobs was to help arrange these services.

Another great churchgoer was Mr. Davidson, the road man, who died an old man. Mr. Sloan himself went to Band of Hope Meetings and to everything concerned with the Church. He has been a merry tee-totaller all his life. He mentioned the Burnetts too as non-drinkers.

After Mr. Donaldson came Mr. Fulton, quite a short man,

with one boy, a good Minister, buried in a Cemetery not far along the Dumfries - Castle Douglas road, but he couldn't remember which.

4 which

(N.B. I'm not sure whether this was for the Church hall or the public hall). So <sup>were</sup> his next door neighbour Mr Clowe and Mr Colvert - the blacksmith.

Although he went to Pincod, he - and other young ones - used to go down whiles to Mr. Walker's evening services at Kirkpatrick Fleming. Walker was well liked, and taught a lot of young people to play the fiddle. I have a note at this point 'with Davidson, George Notman, and the two John Mackies of Hillhead and Redhouse', as if they used to go to Church together. Mr. Sloan also went to the Bible Class at Pincod.

See Mr. Sloan (senior) p

Sport and  
Entertainment

Unless you count showing horses and cattle as such, Mr. Sloan denied any interest in sport. It later transpired, however, that he had been a regular tennis player when the Court was at Newton - in fact it was the former bowling green. When the green closed, the tennis club was formed, perhaps about 1921 or 1922. It moved to beside the water tank at Toppinghead perhaps about 1926. It certainly had moved there by his marriage in 1928. He never played at Toppinghead. They had regular tournaments. Among the best players were Billy Walker and Vi Burnett (Bob's future wife).

He met Vi through local dances. She came from Cranberry, and was the youngest of the family.

He mentioned Dave Mitchell, who died very recently, as a keen tennis player.

The bowling green he described as being for Cove Quarry.

His other 'sporting' interest is cards, although he pays little now. He and his wife used to go to whist drives, and did quite well. He mentioned one night at Middlebie when they should have won but the scores were added up wrong. The organisers apologised to them later. But he much prefers bridge, a grand game with much more to it. He learned to play at Wicket-thorn from Tom Beattie, who played a lot - the Beatties were good players. He played socially with the Beatties, Tom Graham of Wysebyhill, Mackie of Aitchisonbank and Fred Moffat the coal agent. He loves the game so long as it is played properly without any suggestion of cheating.

Shooting -See Farming and Miscellaneous.

#### Economic

Most economic material comes under farming.

#### Farming

I got the impression that you could almost say Mr. Sloan had farmed for fun. Most of the local farmers were dairy and he thought there had been - until recently - far more money that way, yet he concentrated more on beef cattle (and horses, sheep, and pigs) simply because that was what he liked.

He had been a judge at horse and cattle shows on many occasions, and has himself won many prizes for Clydesdales and for cattle. On two or three occasions he won the Cawder Cup (spelling?), which is the top prize. Not so many years ago he sold a horse at Carlisle for £2000, about 8 or 9 years ago one at Glasgow for £1000. He learned about horses from Jim Burnett and his brother, who had good ones. He used to breed horses himself - having 8 or 10 at a time, and they broke a lot in, often purchased from Wigtown. We also discussed how to judge horses.

He used to sell fat bullocks at Lockerbie, or elsewhere, the auctioneers would ring him up and ask when he wanted half a dozen or so.

*\* If possible we  
must check this  
feeling before  
printing*

As a hobby, he remarked, showing is cheaper than boozing. He was in a pub only once in his life, when he took a man Johnston to a show and then they went to the pub so Johnston could drink whisky with his pals. Bob sat, quite unperturbed at their astonishment, drinking grapefruit juice or lemonade.

He's always liked working with sheep, especially Cheviots, which are quiet natured once you learn to handle them, and the best for this time of year. He bought them in Autumn, fed them off. We talked about feedstuffs too.

Like his father and most local farmers he has always bought 'Scottish Farmer', which he likes, and other magazines on farming. They're much more expensive now, 'Scottish Field' too.

When he started, I think he said, they had 3 pairs of ploughing horses, and he had a pair of old horses. He remembered the men offering him a pipe of the thick black tobacco they smoked in clay pipes. He was sick and never smoked again.

The only significant building change at Langshaw was the demolition of an old house where Sheena Beattie now has her cottage. He used the stone to stop erosion by banking the river. One or two old houses have been re-conditioned. The cottage we were in (one building, 2 cottages) was "old, old", but he couldn't date it. Above the door at Langshaw is a stone dated about 1700. Alterations have been made by the new owners - e.g. recent dining room. (See Inventory for rooms in 1947).

look

His father told him that when the public water supply came they had to pay whether or not they used it, so they ~~took~~ it too, and put troughs up in various places. He thinks it was then from around Middlebie. Previously they had their own supply from an old fashioned well in the field. The pipes got corroded with iron ore (see court case about 1902). They also had an old well in the yard, disused when he was a boy. There is still a well to be seen at Wyseby Lodge, back of house.

His son Jim has all the Langshaw land, including the muir, where there is an 80 acre farm which was paying a very low rent. ~~They got it valued at £30 per acre, but the tenant has agreed to re-roof the farm buildings, so Bob suggested they ask £25, but Jim thought £22.50 per acre fairer, and the tenant accepted willingly. (Not for printing).~~ About 10 years ago they got electricity put into that farm, at a cost of about £4000 - having considered but rejected a generator.



The previous owner of Langshaw was Mrs. McDougal, Dundee. Until Robert Sloan bought it it had been let as grass, but he farmed it - oats, turnips and so on. It wasn't until Jim took over that they started silage.

For cattle he liked Aberdeen Anguses for quality beef, but they always had Herefords, and Angus crosses. Not foreign cattle in his day.

He'd been a little reluctant to change from horses to tractors. The first he remembered was Tom Graham, then, about the same time, perhaps 1920, his father and Young, in Robgill Mains - his father's an old Fordson, the others Internationals. His father also had a little Morris Cowley car which Bob sometimes had to pull home by horse. His mother died in Prestwick in 1937, his father, aged 84, about 1944. His father, an Ayrshire man, got the 'Ayrshire Advertiser' sent every week. His great interest was the church. l.c

He remembered his father saying pasteurisation took the goodness out of milk (Mr. Sloan disagrees). They had their own cow for milk, but the villages were supplied by Donaldson of Sarkshields. He remembered Chrissie, the daughter (now Edinburgh) going round with a pony-drawn lorry. Later it was delivered, same way, by a very good man, Mr. Hall, who lived up the road. He added other information about Jenny Kirkland and her family.

I asked about Term Day, which had died out by his day, but his father used to go then to engage people who would stand around in groups and bargain with the farmers. He (Bob) just advertised in the paper. He always had two or three men - ploughman, dairyman, oddman, some for many years, and one - Bill - Mr. Graham for 40 years. Bill Graham lives in Kirtlebridge, and they still visit each other often.

I asked who else showed. Graham at Scales, Bell at Dormont. A very good friend with whom he often went to Aberfeldy and the like to buy cattle.

Tom Beattie was a grand neighbour, and very clever. His wife, he thought, was a Miss Drysdale, whose folk had a garage near Dumfries station.

I asked what machinery they had in the old days - 2 horse reapers, 2 horse-drawn binders, manure spreader, hay tedder. (I forgot to ask about horse mills, dovecots or other special buildings). He loves to go to exhibitions of old farm machinery.

The Langshaw water supply came from a well in a field (second field on left going up hill) called Windmill Field, where the windmill was demolished not long before he came to Langshaw.

In the next field, further up, there was a little croft, owned, I think by a Mr. Rae. With another small croft, Stonepark (?). It made three fields, with a dyke up the middle. Mr. Sloan demolished the dyke, made it into one big field.

They have quite a lot of wood from which Jim Sloan makes fencing stobs when needed. The march walls have been unchanged over the years, simply repaired if necessary. Robert Sloan put barbed wire along the Allerbeck march to protect the dyke from animals.

They used to get peat at Wysebyhill.

At Wyseby Mains the old original steading, probably built by General Graham in the 1890's was (is?) there.

He knew Thomson(s), great drainer(s) and remembered a story of an exchange between Thomson and the General which reflected on the wet Wyseby Mains soil. General, 'Thomson, will that keep it?' Thomson, 'General, if you hung the bloody thing along your dyke it wouldn't dry it'. - I've not got the exact words. Wyseby Mains was- and is - a 'dry summer farm'.

Mr. Sloan has an aversion to ditches, where sheep get caught. It should all be pipes.

There were no hunting gates at Wyseby or Langshaw. Jim takes two or three fields at Springkell for summer grazing and once thirty cattle got through a hunting gate left open by - presumably - a poacher, but since then it's been barb-wired up. There is little hunting here, but he used to shoot quite a lot. The land was 'well poached'. When the assessor asked him his game bag for the year, he filled in - 'nothing' - the poachers beat him to it. Springkell had once six or seven gamekeepers, about 1900, a head (Loudon) and under keepers. One of his girls, Jean Loudon, taught at Dalry, but died young; he remembered helping to carry her down (to Kirkconnel Churchyard ~~for~~ from Springkell?)

His father used to talk about a great march dispute between General Graham and Bonshaw about cattle. After going to law, Graham erected a fence at the waterside to stop his cattle crossing. It went to High Court.

Jim has a field just across the river from Fair Helen's bower, which used to be well kept with a little footbridge. It was swept away in a flood. There was a drinking place for cattle by the river there.

Miscellaneous      The Hills and Sloans were very friendly. <sup>The c</sup>Children used to meet at Springkell sawmill, go to school. When McGregor and Corbett left, Hill thought it might be his turn next, so got job in Dumfries. <sup>He</sup>He mentioned their jobs, <sup>he</sup>house in Glasgow Road. The girls used to hire a caravan for a week near Annan. Anne was the quietest, Nathalie - lovely singer - may have been <sup>a</sup>typist at one time. Bessy about his age. Mother very quiet, not seen much.

They didn't get a daily paper, just 'Standard', 'Anandale Observer', and Ayrshire paper. He now sometimes reads the 'Financial Times'.

He is very friendly with Sir Neil Johnson-Ferguson (now broken limb). Remembered fitting Sir Edward and Lady Johnson-Ferguson for gas masks in World War 2.

Knew Annie and Molly Mackie well - used to do target shooting with Redhouse boys, who had target in yard - little pointed thing, round board. Also was friendly with Davidsons of Hayfield, especially Jim and was friendly with Harry Davidson (is that a different family?) - and is friendly with Jim Carson at Cluden.

Faint memory of Dr. Carruthers. Vi Burnett said her sister got all her teeth taken out by him at Woodhouse without anaesthetic. After him, Mr. Fleming at Woodhouse, used to pick Robert Sloan up from school in big car at Kirtlebridge. Quiet, from Redkirk, nice couple. She went to Moffat. One son. Then Miller, from Springkell, to Woodhouse - Meg Miller, over 70, still farms.

Numerous friends outside parish mentioned.