

ANN HILL BEQUEST

Interview with Meg Byers, Broomlands,
Beattock

29th January, 1987

Meg Byers was born in 1894 at Wyseby Mains Cottages and lived in Kirkpatrick Fleming till she moved with her nephew, George (Dod) during World War 2. She continued to have close associations with the parish until she came to live with her great-niece, Mrs. Kate Miller, at Broomlands Farm, and indeed still makes regular visits to her nephew and niece in Eastriggs.

She wasn't as forthcoming as one might have hoped - apparently some days she is full of reminiscences, but Mrs. Miller (who was a member of Kirkpatrick Fleming Church and has close associations) helped and was able to contribute a lot herself. Some of the information was given on the understanding that it was for background knowledge, and should not be used without Mrs. Miller's or Miss Byers' permission.

School

At first she said the teachers were all right, then conceded that Blackie Broon was a 'rotten man'. He could see into the next door classroom through a glass partition, and would come through to strap those who were misbehaving. He was very hard on the girls from Notwen, seemed to have a spite against them, although they were clean and tidy. One of the Poor House families concerned was called Roxburgh.

She couldn't remember the names of the other teachers, of whom some were good, others not. But she hated school at first so much that after about her second day she came home at lunch time (?) and stayed till school closing time in her father's shed in the Quarry. She wouldn't go back until her younger sister Kate was ready to go. (This sounds unlikely. Surely the attendance officer would chase her up. Maybe he did).

Her two oldest siblings, Cis and Will both walked from Wyseby Mains to Breconbeds school, but then the family moved to the village. She didn't know whether her father or mother went to Kirkpatrick Fleming school, but her mother might have, for she lived at Fairyraw.

For school she had a school bag, and books. Some wore bare feet in Summer but she wore clogs (which she wore until quite recent times) - from Johnstone the clogger. Cis went barefoot to Breconbeds.

She left school at 14 to work in Noon's shop. She

later worked in various farms and at the hotel - see below.

Her nephew, Willie, now in Eastriggs, had left a note of his teachers - Mr. Christie, Crooks, Anderson, Brown and Jimmy Rae.

I think she said that there was no playground at the school. The soup kitchen started up soon after she left (I should have asked about toilet facilities which were criticised by the inspectors in World War I).

Her closest friends at school were Jean and Mary Watson, but she couldn't remember what their father did.

Jenny Thomson lived at Cove Cottage.
Jean and Mary Watson.

Church

The first Minister she remembered was John Walker (later she called him 'Johnny'), under whom she joined the Church. Later she suddenly said 'I lykit Mr. Fyffe' who took his own life by taking too many pills. She remembered Tom Beattie coming to tell her.

They used to go to Sunday School about 10 o'clock (?), then to the main church service at noon. Sunday School trips went by horse and cart, never very far away.

Mrs. Miller added a fair amount about recent Church history. Mr. Cartwright was a funny (odd) man who caused havoc, but Mr. Grimson - who married them, was a fine man, plump, friendly, round faced, easy to talk to. He wasn't old. Even so, every Minister had critics - which presumably means that there was an anti-Grimson faction. Tom Beattie, a Church elder, used to rabbit on about the Ministers. Their elder, when they lived at Failsyke, was Robin Irving. I think it was Meg Byers, but possibly Mrs. Miller who remembered that the Grahams of Mossknow were always the last to arrive at Church.

I asked what Mr. Cartwright looked like - 'mean looking'.

Meg Byers also went to Bible Class at night.

Sport and Entertainment

Meg Byers didn't take part in formal sports like badminton, bowling and so on, but she went a lot to dances. Nor was her father a curler, quoiter or bowler. Not whist drives.

For the dances she had a long black dress.

Isabel and Willie (her nephew) remember singing songs by the Scout camp fires (Scouts - must be just Willie!)

She also recalled the annual show at Mossknow, but she didn't compete, although it is agreed she was a marvellous baker.

She also went to dances at Chapelknowe. And every year till it stopped, to the Eaglesfield Show which was followed at night by a dance at Kirtlebridge. (It would be good to get more about the dances if possible).

The Bowling Green was in a field beside John Johnstone, the clogger's shop.

Mrs. Miller went to the Kirkpatrick Fleming Young Farmers from around 1958 - 1964. Campbell Beattie was there too.

Economic

(Farms mentioned separately)

Her father, William Byers, worked in a number of farms (Wyseby Mains, Grahamshill, Hillhead), at first as a ploughman, then as anything, but after leaving Wyseby Mains he had a job at Cove Quarry as a fireman in sheds there. She remembered the crans.

I think her eldest brother, Will, must also have worked at Cove, because after it broke up four of them went out to Singapore to work - Bob Proudfoot, brother Will, Tom Lamb and Aunt Chat's first husband, who was boss of the group. This must have been pre World War 1. She thinks they would work on the crans.

Mrs. Miller recalled visiting Jock Johnstone's clogger's shop as a girl (she was born 1943). Next to London House Cafe, there seemed to be rows and rows of clogs of all sizes - and the workers in leather aprons, i.e. Jock and his family. (I didn't ask - but would the cloggers make the schoolbags?)

Meg Byers hadn't much to say about Bella Noon and the shop. She worked mainly in the house. It was 'a right' as a job, not well paid. At night she would go home to Grahamshill Cottage. Pay was low.

Wallace, drapers, were just across the road from Nelson's Buildings. Mrs Miller thought her great aunt had said Nat Wallace had the first car. There were 2 brothers, Tom and Nat Wallace, Tom the older.

They always used coal - from Davidson.

Doodle, another clogger, used always to have a nettle behind his back. (This from Bill)

Bakers used to come round with a van. So did Kissonck with fish and other goods by horse and cart before he went to Canada.

The butcher was Irving, bottom of the road to Fauldingcleuch (?).

When Meg Byers worked at the Station Hotel she washed glasses and so on, never served drink. Her sister Kate had worked there, and Meg helped out on a part-time basis when Kate died. The owner died and his wife went to Ecclefechan. James Rae used to arrive every morning and was back again at 5 p.m.

Willie had told them how he remembered the poor people had to queue at Harvey Bryson's for a ticket to the work house, or they could go to the soup kitchen where (says Meg Byers) they could get a bowl from Mrs Kirk or Jane Currie for about a penny. They had a friend, Walter Glover, in Notwen because he was simple. He used to come to Dod Byers (Kate Miller's father) and brought them the 'Sunday Post', sometimes worked at a local farm. When Notwen closed Walter went to Ladyfield?Lydiafield in Annan, where he died (Kate Miller remembers this).

Another of Willie's recollections was of hunger marches in 1926 (Better check date). The marchers had goats and geese with them, to kill for food.

Another travelling group were the gypsies who came up 'the auld road', across from Nelson's Buildings, and up by Wicketthorn. She remembered them sitting with their horses between two hedges. Meg Byers couldn't recall, but Kate Miller could, them selling wooden roses: long wooden taper stock with petals from shavings. They used to camp at Woodhouse near the Tylefield on the back road - where she used to gather brambles.

We asked about 'Tylefield' - but it was just the name the field had (Campbell Beattie told me that tyles were once made at Woodhouse).

Aunt Peg was a Johnstone, daughter of Jock, the clogger, married Will Byers.

Farms and
Farming

See 'economic' for Will Byers.

After working with Bella Noon, Meg Byers worked with Davidsons of Hayfield, then Mackie of Redhouse, then did part time work. She left Hayfield because she was fed up with working at the same place: she insisted she had no complaints, and indeed spoke highly of the Davidsons as employers. She left the Mackies to look after her mother. She would start milking about 6 a.m. then do housework and baking before milking again in the evening. At Redhouse she used to bake bread, and sometimes scones at short notice for the morning.

Mrs Mackie could be unreasonable: she would send Meg on a message by bike to Gretna and then complain because the windows weren't cleaned in the time. The Mackies gave nothing but bread and porridge for breakfast - they got a Sunday fry-up. Mrs Miller had heard a story that if they didn't eat their porridge they had to get it again later, or get no meat for dinner, but Meg Byers refused to confirm this. At that time Annie Mackie went to a private school in Carlisle. Sometimes her father, Charlie, would take her to the station, but once there she refused to speak to him.

A workman at Redhouse was Kenneth Tait, who lived at Redhall. He was an occasional workman, father of Tommy Tait, who married a sister of Aunt Et, and Kenneth Tait himself was said to be related to Meg Byer's father, although she didn't know how. Kenneth Tait's grandson, Tom's son, also Tom, lives in Annan. There was in today's Moffat News a sad story about a boy aged 20, married to Tom Tait's daughter, who was killed.

Aunt Et (Henrietta) came to work at Redhouse when Meg Byers went, and got on with her brother Dave, with whom she went dancing.

Although she thought Chairlie Mackie a good boss, she said he could be hard on his family, and Mrs Mackie could be strict with the servants.

She was at Redhouse at the time of the Quintingshill disaster, feeding chickens when the troop train went by. The station master cycled and told them about the disaster and they all went to the scene. They'd waved to the soldiers as they had gone past - but now it was a terrible sight. A lot of the soldiers were begging to get shot. There was nothing the women could do to help, there being plenty of men, so she said to Mrs Mackie, 'Come on, we've seen plenty' and they went back to Redhouse.

The men lived in a big loft at Redhouse, in a room containing nothing but beds, which she made every morning. They washed downstairs in the house, which had both an outside toilet (for workers) and inside (for household).

She didn't say nearly so much about Hayfield. Mr Davidson, fair sized, a 'guid boss'. The workers there were well fed (). She, Mrs Davidson and their aunt did the milking, starting at 6 a.m. Mrs Davidson was a good woman to work with. Mrs Miller mentioned the fire at Hillhead which Mrs Davidson had said was responsible for Gillian being born with the birthmark on her face.

At some point she left Grahamshill and they took a cottage at Wicketthorn. This may have been before Tom Beattie moved there, for she described his predecessor, Bob Davidson as 'a right hard yin' who liked to keep hold of his money. She used to do a bit of work with him. He died in Eaglesfield.

She also used to help Tom Beattie if required. As so often in interviews Tom Beattie emerged as a controversial figure. She quite liked him, ~~she used to help him~~. Often Tom would give her mother a lift in his horse and cart to Annan on Fridays. She didn't find him a frightening figure. In fact she and Jean Watson often used to torment him and say anything to him. They teased him when he became a father. He used to visit them at Foulisyke and helped Dod Byers to do his books. Kate Miller, however, remembered how everything went quiet in the Beattie household when Tom came in.

From time to time Meg worked at other farms. At peak times they would knock up the doors and ask for volunteers for harvest, potatoes, turnip shawing or the like. She and Jane Currie from Nelson's Buildings worked part time for Jim Farish (always pronounced Fairish locally) at Newton - morning and evening, but not in between. I had the feeling that she was going to describe him as hard, but the conversation shifted.

They bought the Wicketthorn cottage, which had a bathroom, living room and 2 bedrooms. After her father retired they kept pigs now and again, and hens.

I've quite a few notes about the Lockharts, but may not have them right. Perhaps Meg used to go twice a week to visit a Lockhart girl at Robgill Mains. Maim Lockhart married Jock Notman and they had the wedding, birth, and her funeral all within one month. They have the funeral card still - died 23.4.1929 at Robgill, aged 22. ~~(I think she said that Pim came to collect her for the funeral on his bike. I meant to ask if it was a motorbike).~~ Old Willie Lockhart was, I think she said, an 'auld bugger' - hard to work with. Pim Lockhart (Jim) courted and eventually married his wife, Gladys, after years of courting. She worked for him for some time after Ted Lockhart died and Pim went to Fauldingcleugh. Kate Miller remembered that they used to go to Fauldingcleugh, every Christmas for holly. There were no carpets, all stone floors - and great thick slices of bread which she loved. Pim married Gladys after leaving 'the Faulin' and went to live at Eastriggs, where she is still (52, The Rand, Eastriggs).

She also worked for the Burnetts of Cranberry and Nouthill who were good to work for because they were good payers.

One or two other points about the Beatties, who had very plain food - bread, jam, scones - Mrs. Burnett was charming and must have been good at sewing.

She also used to work when a travelling threshing mill came. That was when they used to come knocking at the doors.

Another person she worked for was Jimmy Gibson - not a bad sort, she milked at harvest time.

Miscellaneous The Byers family:-

(a) Will, (b) Cis (Elizabeth), (c) Dave, (d) Dod, (e) Kate, (f) Meg, (g) Charlie.

Mrs. Miller is the granddaughter of Kate, who went from Wicketthorn to work on the railway, then went to wee Wicketthorn, then Howes (Annan), then Foulseyke.

(b) Cis had a son, William Byers, known as Uncle Bibby, who married Peg Johnstone the cloggers daughter. Uncle Bibby worked as a motor salesman at Carlisle.

(c) Dave worked on the railway and had a son Willie Byers (Who had been ill ever since being in a P.O.W.

camp in World War 2). Born 1913 he lives in Easttriggs - 29 (or 39) Vancouver Road. His sister Isabel lives with him, and his brother Angus nearby. Dave had a cottage at Toppinghead. Foreman ganger.

(a) Will Byers went to Canada in 1919 and returned twice for visits. His children have visited recently and collected a whole lot of family photographs. Mrs. Miller is to write to her cousins (?) for reminiscences. He died in Saskatchewan, mid 1960's, family all over Canada. He, Dod and Dave were in World War 1, though Dave never left Britain. When he came back his wife (Jenny or Janie) Ann Wallace, of the drapers, I think) made him strip at the back door before letting him in, because the soldiers were so louse-covered. Cameron Highlanders.

- (d) Dod - Mrs. Miller's line - was shot in World War 1.
- (f) Meg - interviewee.
- (e) Kate - mentioned as working at Station Hotel.
- (g) Charlie - worked railway, married Aunt Jean from Dalswinton, who worked at Newton.

Aunt Lizzie at Ecclefechan, Dod's daughter, was unmarried but had boy Angus Byers. (Angus being a Highland name, I wonder if it had something to do with their relationship to Kenneth Tait, whose mother was a McKenzie - but it's a long shot).

On the mother's side (Meg's mother) were Aunt Chat (Charlotte) at Nelson's Buildings, Janie at Howgill and Jen (Irvington). Lizzie Rae, now in Carlisle, was mother's sister's lassie. Mother had another sister, Aunt Jean. Mrs. Miller remembers Aunt Chat, an old, old woman who always wore a black skirt and a woven apron.

In some unspecified way one of these was connected with Willie White at Clerkiston, through Aunt Sarah at Green, but who Aunt Sarah was I don't know.

Dod - Meg's father - died aged 85, mother in her 70s.

Aunt Et (Henrietta) came from Parkgate (Dave's wife?). She lived in the Mossknow Lodge.

Aunt Chat married twice - the one that went to Singapore, then Jim Davidson in Kirkpatrick.

Meg and Kate caught Diptheria at one time, and had to be isolated in a bedroom which only their mother could enter. Kate got it first. The room was disinfected. The rest of the family had to live in the other room and the kitchen. The Doctor was Dr. Christie,

Eaglesfield. It wasn't so bad, because Dav had married and most of the others had married or left home. She had no recollection of anyone every dying of Diptheria.

Graham of Mossknow was a bit of a tyrant. At one of the elections in 1920's one of the estate worker's daughters cycled around with a 'Vote Labour' placard on her back. Her father was almost immediately dismissed.

Robin Irving married a Nouthill lass, and had no family. She (Agnes Burnett) was a cripple before she died. Meg thinks Robin Irving is still alive.

Meg and Mrs. Miller are both excellent bakers - with, in the latter case, a cup to prove it.

(Her son is 6' 8".)

Dave Byers was 6', yet Meg was small. Aunts Chat and Janie (not Jenny) were fat, with hair tied back, black stockings and boots, old kitchen ranges, paraffin lamps. (Electricity didn't reach the back roads till well after the houses on the main road got it - 1940's or even later).

Jock Richardson from Kirkpatrick Fleming, who worked for Tom Beattie, used to visit every Saturday night, brought the 'Sunday Post' and read Kate and other children 'Oor Wullie' and 'Broons'. He used to give them 'OOr Wullie' and 'Broons' Annuals every year and rather fancied Meg.

Photographs
& follow ups

They had a number of family photographs, going back at least 70 years.

A funeral card was for Angus Byers (Mother's sister's boy) who was drowned while repairing a fish net at Celilo, Oregon) on 4.6.1892 -Born Scotland 24 years ago, it said he left a wife and family.

Should we contact Mrs. Bell of Hoddontown, in 80's, who lives with her sons Norman and Leslie? She's a marvellous talker, but came from Blackyett, across the water.

For her relations in Eastriggs see above.

Additions

Byers references in Parish Supplement

Births

20.1.1906 Margaret Jane - daughter William and Janet Byers,
Victoria Terrace
3.8.1907 Maggie Byers Proudfoot - daughter Robert, Jane,
Victoria Terrace
20.12.1907 Sam Wallace Byers - William and Janet Anne,
Victoria Terrace
7.7.1910 William - William and Janet Anne Wallace, Victoria
Terrace
18.1.1913 William James - Elizabeth Byers, Grahamshill Cottages
11.10.1913 James - William and Janet Anne Wallace, Wicketthorn
14.2.1916 Robert - David Angus Byers and Harriet Taylor, Nelsons
Buildings
24.5.1916 ? George - William and Janet Anne Wallace, Victoria
Terrace
6.12.1920 David Angus - David Angus Byers and Harriet Taylor,
Grahamshill Railway Cottages
20.7.1920 Mary Ann - William and Janet Anne Wallace, Nelsons
Buildings
18.2.1923 Margaret Douglas - David Angus Byers and Harriet Taylor
Grahamshill Railway Cottages
23.9.1924 Isobel Stewart - David Angus Byers and Harriet Taylor,
Grahamshill Railway Cottages
5.4.1917 George Robert Spence McMurdo ? - Katie Byers,
Wicketthorn Cottage
16.9.1934 Laura Byers/Harris (obscure) - Ben and Elizabeth Byers
Harris, Carlisle

Marriages

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Funerals

22.10.1907 James John Byers age 8 months - Victoria Terrace
31.5.1921 Catherine aged 24, Wicketthorn Cottage
11.7.1930 Mrs Margaret aged 70, Wicketthorn Cottage - 'strong
character'
17.9.1935 William, Wicketthorn Cottage

People

Meg Byers - passim
Kate Miller - passim
Blackie Brown
Roxburgh
Cis Byers
Will Byers (brother)
John Johnstone (clogs)
Noon
Willie Byers (E/rig)
Mr Christie (school)
Crooks
Anderson
Miss Brown
Jimmy Rae
Jean Watson
Mary Watson
John Walker
Mr Fyffe
Mr Cartwright
Mr Grimson
Robin Irving
William Byers (father)
Isabel Byers
Bob Proudfoot
Tom Lamb
Aunt Chat
Nat Wallace
Tom Wallace
John Davidson (coal)
Kissock
Kate Byers
Harry Bryson
Mrs Kirk
Jane Currie
Dod Byers
Walter Glover
Campbell Beattie
Aung Peg Byers
Davidsons (Hay/f)
Mackies (Redhouse)
Ken Tait
Tommy Tait etc
Aunt Et Byers
Dave Byers (stat. mast)
? Mr Richardson
Bob Davidson (W/t)
Tom Beattie and family
Jim Farish
Lockharts
Jock Notman
Jimmy Gibson
Charlie Byers

William 'Bibby' Byers
Janie Anne Wallace
Lizzie Byers
Lizzie Rae
Aunt Janie at Howgill
Aunt Jen at Irvington
Aunt Jean
Aunt Sarah
Willie White
Jim Davidson
Dr Christie
Fergus Graham
Agnes Burnett
Jeck Richardson
Angus Byers (d1892)
Mrs Bell
Burnetts

Wyseby Mains
Breconbeds
Fairyrav
Cove Quarry
Grahamshill Cottage
Nelsons Buildings
Wicketthorn
Tylefield
Hayfield
Redhouse
Redhall
Newton
Robgill Mains
Fauldingcleugh
Under Woodhouse
Howes
Foulsyke
Howgill
Hoddomtoun
Nouthill
Cranberry