

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 Kissock 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.

