

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Jack Burnett

7th January 1987

Jack Burnett and his wife live at Broadlands, a bungalow near Robgill Tower. Aged 72, he still works at Nouthill everyday. His wife comes from Fenrith, but had been in the area long enough to be able to help with the interview. I had hoped to learn mainly about horse-showing and curling. As it turned out, he didn't say much about curling, but had a good deal to say about the tennis club and the Victory/Victoria Band, as well as farming.

Mrs Burnett, a keen baker, provided a very pleasant supper.

School

Mr Burnett didn't go to Kirkpatrick Fleming school but to Gretna Township (a 2 mile walk), the family having started there when they lived at Whinnyrig (They moved to Cranberry about 1908). The school was upgraded about that time, so that he stayed on there and took his advanced certificate, after which you could, if you wished transfer to further education. His father, who left aged 13, had won the dux medal at Gretna.

He knew some of the Kirkpatrick Fleming teachers - Hogg (quite a nice man), who played tennis, James Rae, and Mr Doull (whom they liked), who had no family. Hogg and Doull both came from Wamphray. Rae's family were about the same age as himself.

He also mentioned that his aunt Vi -Violet - was a cookery teacher (She married Bob Sloan).

Church

The Burnett's used to provide horses to take the children to the Sunday School treat before they started using charabancs. You needed a quiet natured horse for that. He remembered trips to Mossknow and Woodhouse. He also mentioned the Sunday School going to Rockcliffe by train.

He himself went to Sunday School, and later to the Bible Class. I think he said that his sister taught in the Sunday School. His father was an elder in the church, and he thought they had an old photograph of the Session - but his wife said no - with Willie Rogerson of Williamsfield in it.

He talked of the ministers. Walker, 'a great man', Fyffe good, Duncan very clever, left the ministry became a headmaster, they thought, perhaps near or in Dunfermline. Audrey Duncan, his daughter, was very friendly with Jack Burnett's sister, and used to visit her at Nutberry (Jack Burnett's sister married Irving,

who took Nutberry when Jim Mitchell left for Berwickshire about 1945). He was asked by Mr Cartwright to become an elder, but he didn't like Mr Cartwright (one day they turned up at church and found the communion rails had disappeared). They also seemed not very keen on Mr Gregory, but they had a high regard for Dr Horsburgh. McKenzie was quite nice, quiet - christened their boys. But one thing to be said for Mr Cartwright was that he could preach a good sermon when he wanted to. He died very soon after leaving - having gone to Orkney. I gather that some of the congregation tried to get rid of him.

The only other point about the church was his remark that Willie Rogerson was a great churchman.

Sport and
Entertainment

For showing horses see 'Farming'.

Curling:- His father was a keen curler, went to Crossmyloof and Ayr, won cup(s) at the latter. His team-mates were Jim Mackie (Calvertsholm), Jim Irving (Shawrig) and Bobby Graham (Scales). John Mackie (Redhouse) was another good curler. I got the impression that Jim Mackie was his closest curling associate. But Jack Burnett is not himself a curler.

His father was also a great green bowler at Grætna. At one time there was a bowling green at Kirkpatrick Fleming.

Jack Burnett himself played a lot of tennis and won a few prizes locally. At one time there must have been up to about 40 members - it was the main summer sport. Hannah Wyllie, Davidsons of Hayfield, Hogg (the school master), the Raes of Kirkpatrick, and the Mackies were the players he best remembered. He mentioned that the court had originally been where the new houses are, and then moved - I forgot to ask when - to Toppinghead. There were two courts, and such was the demand that you were lucky to get two games a night. But membership dwindled until there were only eight or so left. I wondered if the departure of Mr Hogg could have hit the club, but he thought it was in decline well before that. A man was paid to maintain the courts.

Another strong tennis player was Jenny Graham, who was an outstanding badminton player. Badminton was available on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the hall, carpet bowling on Monday, Wednesday, Friday - but in both cases priority booking was given to dances or whist drives (e.g. for the Infirmary). The badminton was like the tennis - you put your name down, got your turn, and would be lucky to get two games in your

evening (say 7.00 to 9.30). You could also play dominoes. The 'big man' in carpet bowling, he thought, was Jim Johnstone. Mr Fyffe - although not a particularly active player - used to go to the club.

Jack Burnett went to whist drives, and used to play nap. He had never played bridge but knew that the Mackies were keen players. He also mentioned Ian and Jean Graham, now in Crabtree, Gretna, as members of one of the local teams (presumably Annan). These are connections of Jenny Graham (above) and Graham the blacksmith.

There was no hare coursing in the parish - but near Annan.

He took part, sometimes successfully, in ploughing matches in Gretna and district.

He also played football, but not in a team.

He played in the Victoria or Victory Dance Band (he wasn't quite sure which was its name, but the first time he called it 'Victoria'). It started probably before the war, and he thought it had evolved from the Drama Group (see below). They played throughout the war, as far as Corrie. (During the war there were petrol restrictions but you got a taxi hire. This may have been made easier for approved concerts in favour of the troops). Jack played the accordion, Margaret Collinge the piano, Gavin Fleming from Crowdieknowe the saxophone, Jock Notman the fiddle and Dave Johnstone the drums.

They seemed to have played as much for pleasure as for money, and often played free to the troops.

Jim Mitchell and Charlie (surname not given) started a sort of drama club. Molly Mackie acted and was a lovely singer. Jim Mitchell and Jim Irving used to sing comic songs. One was something like -

'Some thinks as we are very much alike,
But we are the opposite'.

Jim Mitchell was very tall, Jim Irving very short, which helped the song.

After World War 1 there was a picture house at Gretna. Sometimes vaudeville acts were put on by touring companies at Victoria Hall.

Mrs Graham of Mossknow was a great sportswoman, marvellous with a gun. But she hated to shoot a fox. There was a story of how they were shooting through the turnips and kale when they raised a fox. She wouldn't

shoot it - she'd hunt it with the hounds, she said, but not shoot it.

Fishing. the Kirtle is quite good for trout, but is not a salmon river, although occasionally Jim Irving (?) got a salmon in his nets which had been trying to swim up river to spawn.

No local point to point, not anyone who kept ponies, and not a hunting area.

Farming

They went to Nouthill in 1921, having been previously in Cranberry (which stayed in the hands of his uncle). The previous tenants (I think of Nouthill - but check Valuation Roll, possibly Cranberry) were Twaddles, who didn't know the farm was coming up for sale and had left for a farm near Carlisle. His father at first rented but then bought. He lived for a time in a cottage in 'The Valley', Nouthill.

From the start they went in for horses. They broke so many a year and worked them on the farm so as to get as much as they could out of them before selling them. They would buy them as foals or 2 year olds at Langholm (?), (or Lanark ?), Carlisle, Wigtown. They seldom bred the horses themselves. Generally they would have 5 or 6 Clydesdales, and 2 or 3 foals. They would sell one at Candlemas, and perhaps one each of the next three months, maybe breaking in about 6 a year. There were no regular horse fairs nearby by then, but at the Dumfries Rood Fair a man Johnstone used always to have 15 to 20 horses for sale.

They used to show at the local shows - Lockerbie, Annan, latterly at Dumfries, and all round Cumberland, where every village used to have a show. The stables (now the garage) at Nouthill ^{are} ~~is~~, or ^{were} ~~was~~, covered with championship rosettes. They showed me photographs of three prize winning horses. One of their best was to be entered for the Highland Show the last time it was at Ayr, but was bought by Peter Sharp just beforehand and was to go to Canada. (I think Sharp may have been merely the agent; John Kerr of Redhall also comes into the story.) Its new owners got it accepted as a late entry - and it won everything (in harness and yoke).

Horses were entered either as work horses or in harness. The Burnetts, I gathered, were especially successful with the former, but also competed, often enough successfully, in the latter. Then the horses had to be decorated, brasses polished and so on. He would often walk the horse to Carlisle, leaving at

5.00 a.m., and get it washed before the show. I asked why he never rode the horse - he wasn't sure. It just wasn't what you did. He had also walked horses to Dumfries and elsewhere - either for shows or to sell them - and sheep to Longtown. He still shows horses, but not for himself. There was a coloured photograph of one he showed recently in Cumbria (gifted by the Canadian owner, so delighted with its success).

One of their great successes was to win the Langholm Cup outright for 4 wins in a row, in 1950. They showed me the cup. They also won the next Langholm Cup, but not, I think, for keeps.

Gradually there were fewer and fewer horse shows, and they stopped competing. His sons have no interest in horses at all, whereas he worked with horses all his life - he was ploughing before he left school. He notes with satisfaction that Clydesdales are coming back into fashion, but economically they could never compete with a tractor

The Burnetts got their first tractor in 1939. At the start of the war his father was on a committee which had to persuade farmers to plough more land for crops, but many hadn't tractors, so Jack was sent to plough land by tractor for miles around while horses were still being used at Mouthill. He remembered finishing at 5.00 p.m. one day in Gretna, and just after that a bomb fell on the field. Next day the roads were all closed. he was on duty that night as a member of the Home Guard, looking after things until the troops came.

As well as showing horses they used to show turnips, with less success. They won, often, at Eaglesfield, Langholm and Lockerbie, and sometimes (not much success) at the Edinburgh Stock Show: one year they had a 2nd and 4th, another a 3rd.

Two other parishioners showed horses. His uncle at Cranberry - with whom they were seldom in direct competition, and Bob Sloan (earlier) Beechwood started long after he stopped. Bob bred 2 Cawdor Cup winners - this, I gather, being the top show.

He thought the first local tractor was John Mackie's in Redhouse about 1935 (same year as Alan Hodgson said for Newton). Electricity came about the same time, with many attendant developments such as milking machines. Redhouse would probably be first there too. The Mackies seemed to have more money than most. They had the impression that other members of the line kept dying out without children and left it to Redhouse. Molly and Annie would be especially well off. They

were exceptionally nice neighbours for (I think) 36 years.

The main income for the farm came from cattle. It was a dairy farm, and was already such when they got it. They used to take the milk in cans to catch the 8.00 a.m. train, whence it went to Dundee (Dundee Equitable). They never had any complaints despite the fact that it was barely cooled - this being in the days when the water cooling system was primitive. Some milk went to Lockerbie Cheese Factory, who sometimes gave them little round cheeses. They (I think Lockerbie) used to return the whey to the cans, which could be used for feeding the one or two pigs which were kept on the farm. His father had to upgrade the byres at Nouthill by installing cement floors.

They grew a few crops, mainly for feeding the livestock. They talked about an 8 year break, although his description accounted for only 7 years - oats, turnips, hay and 4 years grazing. They sowed clover with the grass which helped manure the land. He remarked that, despite its theoretical benefits, cows don't actually like clover - they tend to leave it uneaten. The only thing they brought in for the cattle was slab cake (linseed cake, put through a cake breaker). Before they used to collect it from the station in 18 stone bags. Then Jardine, the Gretna grocers, started to deliver it. (I think). They got eggs from the farms which they sent by train to Glasgow, got slab cake to bring back from the docks. About the start of World War 2 compounds began to be produced which could be used instead. They didn't grow potatoes until they were forced to in World War 2. Redhouse did.

Farm tiles were got from Carlisle - none made at Kirtlebridge in his time.

Kirkpatrick Fleming was never hit by Foot and Mouth. The nearest was Pennersaugh. When the first outbreak occurred they were forbidden to take their carts across the road (F & M in Dumfries area). He was then quite young. During the last epidemic he had a few cattle at Tarabie (check spelling) near Carlisle, and couldn't shift them in time. he could get a permit to take them to the Border, from Carlisle, and one from Dumfries to take them from the Border! Yet he was told if the Carlisle cattle caught the disease, all his cattle would have to be slaughtered. He was told privately that he was too honest - he should have collected them at night.

The cattle were at Tarabie because he rented grass there. They used also to rent grass parks from Mossknow (see gentry).

So far as he knows there is nothing of interest historically at Nouthill. The house itself is very old, although they have added a lot to it, and it is not listed. When they first went the floors were simply flagstones, lying on earth. Most of the rooms were too low to require beams, but there were beams through the kitchen. The walls were 18" thick (but he spread his hands more than that) and made simply of sandstone and lime. There were no proper foundations. They just laid big stones and started to build on top.

There were, in these days, a number of men like old Jim Thomson who worked as drainers - which they dug with a spade. In Winter they might turn into hedgers. They were 'working louse' - i.e. loose, self-employed. There was always plenty of labour available. Extras would be taken on for singling turnips, hay and harvest and (in other farms) tattie-picking (the Kirkpatrick Fleming pronunciation - never 'tatty', always a long 'a').

He knew Jimmy Donaldson of Sarkshields who used to deliver milk to the village. The top end of the village usually went to Newton for milk, the bottom end to Coltart's shop. He kept about 4 cows. Next a man from Chapelknowe started a delivery, Gavin somebody, but it didn't last long. Jock Notman, DunsKellyrig, and then his son George took over as the main milkmen until pasteurisation became compulsory.

They took their oats to Beltenmont Mill (Fraser) and then to Dornock.

Farms carried a fair staff. At Nouthill (including family) there were 6; John Mackie had 8; Jim Duff had 8.

Horse shoes - see economic.
Rent day - see gentry.
Rat catchers - see economic.
Water supply - see gentry.

Holstein cattle mentioned - Colin Davidson keeps - Canadian breed of Friesians, reputed very milky.

Burnett ✓

Nouthill divided when dual carriageway made, and bridge provided.

Gentry

Purchase of farm - see farming.

He remembered a big party which was arranged for John Graham coming of age. All the farmers who were on the former estate were invited, and his father, as the oldest was asked to make a speech which he agreed to do. Unfortunately John didn't turn up!

Mossknow still own some of the fields on Hillhead and Calvertsholm. He knew about Rent Day, but obviously it had lost its mystique by his time.

There had been a good water supply at Nouthill all his life, but before that old General Graham (at first he called him 'Colonel') had objected to the Lower Annandale Water Scheme. So he put ponds and pumps in most of the farms. They were also expected to get water from the roofs. The pumped water ran through gravel which was supposed to clean it. There were open ponds at Sarkside, Williamsfield and Cranberry, and probably others. He remembers the pump standing, but not working, at Nouthill. The story about the General he got from his father.

The Burnetts used to rent a grass field from Fergus Graham. When James Graham 'came out' he wanted to farm the field, but Fergus refused to take it from the Burnetts. Then Fergus died, and the Burnetts agreed that James should have it. He died in an air crash not long after - he was a terribly nice chap, with a stiff leg. (They told me where the plane was going - Oban?)

Mossknow Show - Economic
Mossknow Sawmill - Economic

Economic

Sawmill. John Johnston worked with Leslie about World War 1, as an apprentice. Left, took job at Gretna, but Leslie reported him for not having done his full 5 year apprenticeship and he was paid off and had to go back to Leslie. But when Leslie retired Johnston took over (see also Ann Graham for John Johnston).

Roads were kept by a team of 4 (?) based on Gretna, led by Willie John White. The roads were so rough that in the early days you could keep up with the cars. He described the road making (see also Dave Mitchell) - stones tipped by the roadside, then broken by gangs of stone knappers, put on the road, mixed with soil, and rolled. Later they had tar-spraying carts. Men would

shovel stones on to the road while the tar was sprayed (I've seen this myself).

Few people had cars, but plenty of bikes, and pony traps. They got their first car 'latterly' - one car shared between Nouthill and Cranberry. He got his first bike from Jim Johnstone, who was a little older, so Jack Burnett would get it as Jim grew out of it. But Moffats shop acted as the middle men. As well as being cloggers they had a small bike shop.

There were 3 cloggers, who all made, didn't just repair clogs - Moffat, 2 Johnstones.

He talked about the British Honduras workers. Some were black, some like us, and others probably of Indian stock. He thought some were actually from Trinidad. From the way they talked, they had been conscripted after the regular wood cutters had been sent elsewhere. There was a lot of trouble between the workers and the Americans who were encamped at Mossknow Wood for a very short time. The ill feeling was so dangerous that the Americans were moved elsewhere. He thought they were there for only about 3 weeks.

The Eaglesfield Show stopped in the late 1920's. Kirkpatrick Fleming had a show at the 'Show Field', Mossknow, at the back of the lodge. He was a boy when it stopped. He also remembered a show at Chapelknowe.

Tramps used to come to Nouthill for mugs of tea and a piece - which they threw away if it wasn't just right. The Poor House was a lodging house for them, before becoming an old people's home.

Another road-traveller was old Charlie O'Neil, a basket maker, who used to talk to himself.

There were few tinkers, but one group who claimed to be genuine gypsies from Otterburn area. The women used to make and sell paper roses. They used a secret mixture to kill rats at the farms.

When his brother took a rat infested farm (Searig) the ratcatchers were asked for some of their mixture, but they insisted on going themselves. They stayed 2 or 3 days, and the poison was very effective. They mixed it with bran.

He didn't know of Dr. Carruthers: Drs. Carlyle and Christie in his time. Dr. Christie, from Eaglesfield, was always known simply as 'the Doc'.

No policeman in the vilage.

The blacksmith at one time had 3 or 4 workmen. Mark Simpson made, I think, 'points'. Horses especially, those which did road work, needed shoes very frequently, every fortnight. Consequently, people had a regular appointment with the blacksmith - like 10 a.m. on Mondays.

When he took oats to Beltenmont he'd reckon to get about 6/7 cwt oatmeal from 10/12 cwt oats. He could just recall Mr Fraser, big, strong, with a great beard

He thought the quarries finally closed in the '20s, an that the bowling green had been made for the workers.

The sawmill stopped working about 30 years ago when Johnston's son went to Eastriggs. It is now just nettles and rubble.

Miscellaneous

Politics evoked no response. He thought that Kerr, th Poor House governor, might have been on the Council.

Some bits of family history. Mrs Burnett remarked tha she'd had 6 men to look after, (Jack, his father and boys(?)) so had no time for outside interests. The Carlisle market, it was agreed, had been a great socia occasion.

His sister, now dead, married Irving of Nutberry. His brother had disliked farming and gave it up. Co-incidentally both he and Bob Sloan were in hospital at the time of the interview. Bob Slaon married his aunt Violet, got knocked down crossing the A74 by tractor, badly hurt, before the new year. He has to drive the tractor because his grandson, an epileptic, isn't allowed to.

Characters. Old Bill Irving, a drainer, lived in the village. In these pre-radio days Moffats had a gramophone at the end of the shop. They used to say that whenever a new record came on, old Bill would listen to it twice and then go off down the road, whistling the tune. He was a great fiddler and lived in Newton Cottages.

Bombs. See earlier Home Guard/Gretna story under farming. There was also a small bomb dropped at Woodhouse, no-one could say why. The only other time he could remember the Home Guard being called out was night alert which proved to be a false alarm. a few air-raid shelters were built.

He had another aunt, Mary Jane Burnett. I think she became a cookery teacher too. Then there was Joe, who died in World War 1. Altogether there were 5 boys and 3 girls in his father's family. Aunt Vi was not much older than Jack's sister.

Photographs shown or mentioned - Home Guard; 4 champion horses.

People and Places

Jack and Mrs Burnett
Hogg
James Rae
Doull
Violet Burnett
Bob Sloan
Willie Rogerson
Rev Walker
Rev Fyffe
Rev Duncan
Audrey Duncan
Irving (Nutberry)
Jim Mitchell
Rev Cartwright
Rev McKenzie
Rev Gregory
Mrs Moffat
Jim Mackie
Jim Irving
Bobby Graham
John Mackie
Hannah Wyllie
Davidsons
Raes of Kirkpatrick
Molly Mackie
Annie Mackie
John Mackie
Jenny Graham
Ian Graham
Jean Graham
Graham (blacksmith)
Magaret Collinge
Gavin Fleming
Jock Notman
Dave Johnstone
Charlie -
Mrs Graham (M/K)
Twaddle
Johnston (Rood Fair)
Peter Sharp
John Kerr
Jardine (grocer)
Jim Johnstone
Jim Thomson
Jimmy Davidson
Colthart
Gavin -
George Notman
Fraser
Jim Duff
Colin Davidson
John Graham (M/K)

General Graham (M/K)
Fergus Graham (M/K)
James Graham (M/K)
Colonel Graham (M/K)
John Johnstone (sawmill)
J B Leslie
Willie John White
Mrs Moffat
Moffat (shop)
Johnstones (cloggers)
George Johnstone
Charlie O'Neil
Dr Carruthers
Dr Carlyle
Dr Christie
Mark Simpson
Kerr (Poor House)
Peggy Burnett
Burnett
Bill Irving
Mary Jane Burnett

Broomlands
Whinneyrig
Cranberry
Mossknow
Woodhouse
Williamsfield
Nutberry
Calvertsholm
Shawrig
Scales
Redhouse
Hayfield
Kirkpatrick
Crabtree
Nouthill passim
The Valley
Redhall
Beechwood
Tarabie
Pennersaugh
Sarkshield
Hillhead
Sarkside
Beltenmont
Dunskellyrig
Dornock Hill
Hillhead