

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Jim Johnstone
Raeburnhead

5th November 1986

I met Jim Johnstone at the Gala Day and appreciated him as a raconteur, since which time several people have mentioned him. The interview itself was unique, so far. First I had to wait for a few minutes till some sheep had been collected. Then the interview took place outside. ~~Presumably he didn't want me to see the house.~~ So I stood, coatless, in the cold and noted things down, leaning on the bonnet of the car.

The main emphasis was on people.

Jim Johnstone was born at Toppinghead, 1910 and has lived all his life in the parish.

Sport and Entertainment

Jim Johnstone was very much involved in organising the village dances. Until 1939 there were only 2/3 dances a year at the hall - mainly 'term' dances, associated with the farm terms (Candlemas and Martinmas). Then Mr Doull wanted to organise dances, which were held on Saturday nights regularly. Mr Tom Beattie, Hall Committee chairman, didn't want to be involved, not being a dancer, so he got Jim to help Mr Doull, till he left (c 1945?). There were also dances to help raise funds for the children's outing.

After Doull left, Jim ran the dances himself. At first they were 2/3 old, 1/3 modern, but Jim got it changed to 50-50, so as to be more popular. From 1954 to 1971, if his dates are right, he helped run dances on Friday and Saturday nights. He has a note - 'about 9 a year'. There were some dances - not for long - by the local Queen of the South supporters club. For more recent dances see Willie Wilson - top end of village.

Molly and Annie Mackie ran Scottish Country Dance classes, and won the W.R.I. Country Dance Festival at Dumfries once or twice.

He mentioned Walker and operettas, assisted by Miss Cooks, the schoolteacher. He took part in one of them. Later (?) Jim Irving and Mitchell (Nutberry), who were both musical and in the church choir used to organise soirees.

There were a great many whist drives. He played in them but didn't organise. He mentioned one of the Davidsons - Andrew, I think - as a keen whist player. He thought Tom Beattie was maybe the first to organise regular whist drives, during the war. Later Tom Graham. About the end of the war the Children's Trip

Committee organised whist drives and dances. John Graham was the secretary, David Johnstone chairman.

Another who was interested in whist was Irving the butcher who certainly used the Glebe and probably bought it after Walker's time. He and David Johnstone probably founded the Children's Outing Committee. Irving was a regular churchman, quite a character.

He recalled the Social Club, - quite good - which used to meet in one of the school rooms.

The secretary of the Bowling Club, way back, was Willaim Byers, who emigrated to Canada.

Scout movement - recent attempt at revival - see Robert Dorrance(?).

Church

The earliest minister he recalled was Mr Walker, who worked at Glebe and was the last minister to exercise his right to cast peats in Raeburnhead Moss. See operratas above.

Fyffe would sometimes look in at whist drives, but he was a nervous man who seemed to feel inferior in company. He was surprised, though, when I mentioned people saying he had a speech impediment. He thought it was just his way of speaking. Reticent. His sister used to visit the Mackies, and Miss Gibson, the blacksmith's sister.

He stopped going to church - he said - because he found McKenzie boring - but the fact that he couldn't even remember Eric Duncan suggests his attendance faded before that.

He mentioned a few of those he remembered as church elders - Abel Mitchell, John Mackie, Elliot, Willie Rogerson, (William Field) and John Lamont. Elliot from Sarkshiels.

See Irving (sport and entertainment), Jim Irving, Dave Mitchell.

Walker - interested in young people. Kept cow in Glebe.

School

His first teacher was Miss Anderson, who lodged where London House Cafe is, then a shop, with George Ritchie and his sister. He thinks she may have married George Ritchie. He recalls George Ritchie with a horse and cart.

Next Miss Bone. Then Miss Brown, bit of a character, had been in India, married a Mackie, Aitchison Bank.

Finally Mr Rae, quite strict, keen on physical fitness. Daughter married Roddick, auctioneer, Annan.

Another teacher, later, Mitchell went to Langholm, died there. Miss Cooks was away and came back. In between was Miss Jardine, a very popular teacher, from Johnstone Bridge. Contemporary (this after Jim Johnstone left school) was Miss Barclay, who was friendly with Redhouse family, never married, has been back in the village.

See Miss Inglis.

See David Mitchell.

First teacher Mrs James Irving, very good, came back - maiden name Cooks, married James Irving of Shawrigg (see below).

Economic

When he was young most of the farms were mixed, then more and more went over to dairying, which recently a number have left, accepts the government handshake.

Cove quarries. His father worked there. Victoria Terrace built for. He thinks it probably closed pre 1918. His mother told him that Mr Lamb donated the stone free for the gable end of Victoria Hall - around 1898 (it is in plain stone).

He had no recollection of the limeworks.

Nor of Beltenmont Mill. He guessed it closed about 1924. One of his first jobs as a farm worker was to take oats to a mill on the Middlebie Road. McArthur lived at the mill, but he wasn't sure that he worked it. le

No one casts peats now, but when he first came they carted 30/40 cart loads of peat away every year for their own use. (This is obscure, because his family lived as workers at Raeburnhead before he bought it. I'm not sure just what he means.). He believed a number of families used to have rights on the various mosses - also at Aitchison Bank.

Honduras Camp about 1941/44. Supervisor friendly with Miss Inglis, a teacher. Then P.O.W. (he talked as if the same place) - Italians, Germans. He had P.O.W. to work for him - some good, some bad. He recalled a story. They used to riddle potatoes and put in cwt

bags, which they were to weigh and add/subtract potatoes as need be. This Italian P.O.W. seemed to be doing it too quickly, so Jim watched him and found he wasn't taking the surplus out, always over-filling. So he challenged the P.O.W. who replied "Him Boss plenty money!". Jim had got the farm in 1938, probably as a reward for his grandparents 50 years work there.

The Mossknow sawmill kept 2 men - work mainly for the estate.

People, Farms
Places

Johnstone families. When he was young, 3 Johnstone families.

(1) Two brothers, cloggers, one also a postman. Bill Johnstone is the son of one, at start of Newton, where Scots (Scott's ?) cafe - later Ferguson's cafe - was. Johnny Johnstone, further down, from same family - in Under Newton, son of postman.

(2) David Johnstone, Victoria Terrace, founded West End Garage. He married Jean Wyllie, whose brother took over the garage. (Douglas Wyllie) Now their (which?) son.

(3) His own family. His parents (Johnstones and Irvings) lived at Toppinghead, father worked at Cove Quarry. His grandparents worked at Raeburnhead. One of his grandparents started at Howgillside, which also belonged to Gass, the other all his life at Raeburnhead. She was a Gordon from Maxwellfield, Kirkbean - her brother a fairly well-known poet, and shoemaker, Sam Gordon (Lockerbie - a frequent Black Bull patron). Jim Johnstone's grandfather's parents were weavers (I think in the village).

Shawrigg. James Irving of - see Miss Cooks -. His nephew, Peter Rae got the farm, and sold it to George White.

Kirkpatrick House. James Rae ('the laird' - hump) at pub door 11.00 a.m. every day. His father was in Newton Farm, the home farm, and was also a drinker. His grandfather and pals used to like, as children, to go to the pub door at closing time, just to see the fun when Rae and the like came out.

Cove. Moir had it - then Ritchie.

Mossknow. Didn't see Fergus Graham much, although neighbour. Little bit reclusive. Hearsay suggested that the sales were induced by the failure of Chinese investments - perhaps connected with Jardine Matheson.

Gass. Hard, honest, very old-fashioned. Used to have 2/3 workmen sleeping in the bothy, fed in house.

Before that, Heron Maxwells had it - Doctor Maxwell's name (?) and the date 1750 is above the door of the original Raeburnhead house. The present house was built about 1890. Howgillside was also a Gass farm.

Broats. Bell. Family died but young George is a nephew, - Lou Bell mentioned. There were tales in the old days of conflicts between Bell and the Major General.

Grahamshill. Broatch, about 66 years ago - David, Jim, Grace.

Nutberry. Abel Mitchell, well respected, elder under Walker. His son Jim was one of the first to have a car. There were only 3 - Doctor Carlyle (Oaks), Jim Mitchell and Joe Wright. He thinks they were all Tin Lizzies. Before that Joe Wright and George Davidson has Excelsior motor bikes.

Lamont of Broathill, went to Howgillside, different family from Tom Lamont. Descendants in Annan (Prestonfield/Prestondam).

Jim Graham (blacksmith) - c 1910/1912 - early motor bike - son in Calvertsholm. Boys used to watch him hammering. Then he'd suddenly stop, jump on his motor bike, and drive to Redhouse, which was a mile, to see how quickly he could do it.

John Lamont. Jim Johnstone couldn't understand how he made ends meet. He helped John Walker cast peats, and had a field behind the cafe.

Miss Grahams - sisters of blacksmith had a wealth of knowledge about the area. Nephew in Riggheads, and William Graham, pilot Annan.

Mr Carruthers. Last (?) policeman - story about his critical comment about ministers in Fyffe's time. Transferred to Gretna.

Grahams continued. Leslie (Riggheads), Iain (Calvertsholm) and William were brothers. Their father and grandfathers were successive blacksmiths.

Doctor Carruthers. Remembers with horse and trap when a boy - came to Jim Johnstone when he had whooping cough (off for 11 weeks - whooping cough very serious in these days). Also recalls his horse etc. being sold off at Woodhouse when he died. The story was (said his grandmother) that he had found a cure for outside cancer, which he took with him to the grave. Jim Johnstone's aunt also said so).

John Lesley. Registrar - Parish Council - said to have drawn plans for Raeburnhead. Son Tom died youngish - paralysis. He had a daughter Annie, who was perhaps the best scholar in Jim Johnstone's class. She went to Carlisle. Tom's wife worked as a laundry maid at Mossknow.

Harry Noon was the other particularly bright scholar. Parents had the sweetie shop opposite the hotel, used by the local children. Their daughter Peggy gave up.

Doctor Carlyle was the parish doctor - lived at the 'Oaks' moved to Gretna.

Duffs - died young.

Davie Mitchell and he sat together for 10 years at school. Now retired banker, Annan. Son of Abel.

George Moffat, senior - had shop in same place as now - but no garage, just a boot and shoe shop. Still in family.

Jane Graham (born 1910). He recalls Jane McTurk, her mother. A daughter married Robert Wilson, lives at Hollee, one of the oldest inhabitants, but he thought her name was Margaret.

Gibson and Springkell. Gibson wasn't on too good terms with Turnbull and McGregor, who refused to mend a march fence. But Jim Johnstone went to see them and - to Gibson's surprise - they agreed to go halfers with him. Gibson said 'They'll put it on the rent bill at the end of the year, but I'll just stroke it off and not pay'.