

ANN HILL BEQUEST

Interview with Bill McArthur,
4 Todholes

12th November, 1986

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William McArthur, born 1911, still farms. Brought up Beltenmont Mill, then Beltenmont itself in the cottage which is being demolished ("and should have been away years ago - I've seen vans against the walls"). They then moved, 1930, to Todholes, his daughter in law was present for the first hour or so, and at first he was a little guarded in what he said.

Sport and Entertainment Not really his thing. Not in the Social Club. Notman had a band, and - earlier - the station master's son and daughter (Dave and Mabel Richardson).

Fetes held at Mossknow (but not, I think, Flower Shows). Fergus Graham ran Scouts.

No football team - hadn't heard of Mossknow Rovers. Children's outings - on back of coal lorry, cleaned for occasions. He didn't go to tennis courts at Toppinghead, because that's where the teachers went.

not Carpet bowling - in hall. Quoits? Could ^{not} recall whether behind soup kitchen or at Hamper. The men used to go, not boys.

He didn't go to whist drives, nor his parents much.

Hardie Wright at Watchill paid his parents to look after 2 greyhounds. They got milk from their cow, and ate a lot of eels which they used to catch by the caul. Eventually the dogs learned how to catch the eels themselves. One of the dogs won the Waterloo Cup. See later for story involving dogs and a flood.

See Mrs. Moir - Cove.

He vaguely recalled a curling pond being made at Calvertsholm but he didn't think it was successful.

School He didn't like school. He quite liked Jimmy Rae, a quite nice young man, good schoolmaster. Miss Anderson - a right tartar - married a local grocer who died 6 weeks later. He mentioned Crooks and Brown and their marriages. He thought them good. The name Bone wrang a bell, but no more. Miss Jardine, he volunteered - whose brother was a Police Sergeant in Annan. Christie

was an old tyrant.

There was a soup kitchen at the school for those who didn't go home for lunch. He liked when he had a penny so that he could get the soup and join the lunch group - but usually went home.

He left school effectively at 12. He had bald patches which they thought - wrongly - was ringworm. By the time he could go back he was nearly 14. Never any school but Kirkpatrick Fleming.

See Sport & Entertainment, tennis.

Church

Johnny Walker - grand fellow - 2 sons and daughter. Everyone liked him.

He mentioned various people as Churchy. See later. An old man, J. Lamont was the grave digger and caretaker.

Mrs. Walker was nice too.

Economic (non farming)

Beltenmont Mill. Taken after his father by Fraser, who wore a lum hat and thought of himself as an inventor. Always making machines, taking to London without success, so far as he knows. Neglected the Mill, didn't really work it. But corn mills were in decline anyway. Farmers used to bring corn - nothing else - for oatmeal (or for pig feed). More and more were buying their own corn crushers.

The miller before his father was Beattie, who went to Dornock Mill. His father came down from Edinburgh, but had been born in Kirkconnel (Nithsdale).

He had never heard the name Steel (given as proprietor in the 1929-30 Valuation Roll.) He thought it had been a Carlisle woman, Mrs. Storey.

He is told that some of the grinding stones are still there, but that's all. He can't say when the building was taken down.

It was an undershot Mill, water from the Kirtle via a Mill lade, controlled by a sluice at the caul. They used to keep a couple of cows, had a grand piggery, and had a boiler house at the end of the mill. The local blacksmith, Jim Currie, used to kill the pigs.

They also had a small saw mill of their own. Water driven.

About once a year the Kirtle used to flood (which it doesn't now that the caul has been taken away). The water went into the house, filling up the coal cellar, up the staircase and into the living room and out. On one occasion the two greyhounds were nearly drowned (in the kiln, I think) - his mother went to rescue them and nearly got swept over by the power of the water, but was able to hold on to a post.

There certainly was a kiln, fired by coke. This made the place a great attraction for tramps, who got a free heat and could use the sacks as blankets. So far as he knows nothing was ever stolen.

The caul was a great place for catching eels. There was a fish ladder there too.

They gave the Mill up about 1925.

Although the Quarry had stopped working, a widow from Woodhousehill took it over and allowed people to use it at so much a time. She did very well, for it provided stone for making roads.

When he was young all the roads were metalled with stone chips, broken at the road side and then flattened. There was a sort of grey powder always at the roadside which as boys they used to run on, bare footed, in Summer.

The two coal merchants, John Davidson and Henry Graham were great enemies, fought like cat and dog. Davidson a gay lad, Church elder (and told again the Carlisle story, slightly varied). Graham was in his youth the main haulage contractor, but Davidson did some too. Doad Graham, his son, now retired is still there.

Doodly the clogger with his wooden hut at Toppinghead bridge was mentioned - as usual. He reckoned the hut was held together with tar.

'Currie old men - broke stones on road side'. They would cart the stones and get paid for breaking them by piece rates.

Collinge, painter, Fairy Row, mentioned.

There was a water pump outside the Hamper.

Certainly no electricity till 1930, but at the Mill they always had a tap. No wells.

A man used to come round with a home made barrow - Chairlie Neil. He would gather rabbit skins and sort bikes and do handy work. His barrow was made from two bicycle wheels.

The first butcher's cart to come round was Jock (?) Irvings. One year there had been a lot of sheep died - perhaps something to do with diseased turnips - but they were all right to eat if sold quickly. I think he said it was Mackie of Calvertsholm's sheep.

Anyway, Irving bought them, got them into baskets and started selling them round the houses. It was so successful that he soon got a cart, and then a van. Later he bought the 1st prize bullock at Annan for what seemed a terrible price in these days, but - as usual - it paid off.

Irving had two sons, one of whom did well, the other not, but he wasn't sure which name was which. Try John Irving, formerly (?) motor business in the Sands, Dumfries. Or possibly Tom.

See also Graham of Mossknow.
Mackie in Redhouse
Coltart

Farms and Farming and Farmers

Beltenmont (McArthur). After leaving the mill they took 9 acres across the road. Mainly grass, but they kept everything. They used to buy poultry to sell, and dead rabbits, which they sold to Sheffield. They also sold a lot of plovers' eggs which were highly esteemed in London hotels. One of the less pleasant jobs he had was to go to the Moss to pull moss for boxes for transporting the eggs. His father had served his time as a cobbler.

Broathill (Glendinning). Glendinning was a great old character, used to whistle to the birds (I've a feeling he said he was wee). He had a son Eddie and 2 girls. (The Abel Mitchell calf story was at Broathill, see over).

North Angle - at Irvington - just a house - ruined.

Hillhead (Elliot) - Jimmy Elliot, great churchman, quiet, nice, 2 daughters who both married Bobby Graham (Scales). Try Surrone, Gretna, where she may still live - see Calvertsholm.

