

ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Robin Irving, aged 82
Lauderdale, Canonbie
Formerly of Sarkside 1932-43
Nutmerry 1943-68?

6th February, 1987

Robin Irving is the widower of Agnes Burnett (sister of Jack), who died two years ago. Framed on the wall is a Church of Scotland long service certificate for his eldership to 1974. My first impression was of a man shrivelled by old age, although his hearing and eyesight seemed quite good. At first I thought the interview was going to be my first flop, for his answers tended to be brief and generalised, and in order to get a response I found myself asking for more leading questions than I like. Fortunately there then appeared a visitor, David Paterson, who lives both at Woodhouse and Eaglesfield. Not only was Mr. Paterson himself something of a raconteur, but also he had a stimulating effect on Mr. Irving.

Although not a 'natural', Mr. Irving seemed pleased to see me. He remarked that when you live alone over 80 you get quite lonesome. He did not wish to see this for correction.

School

He went to Glenzier school, still, as then, 2 teachers. During World War 1 the teachers were pretty poor, he'd 11 or 13 different ones in his time, despite leaving at 14 - and it was only a 2 teacher school (so he said). Some hardly knew the lessons themselves. The headmaster, dreadfully strict, would strap you almost as soon as you looked round. Others were strap-happy too. Mr Jarvie was killed in World War 1. In Robin Irving's last year he was seldom there, worked at home instead.

W K.F.

He mentioned knowing more recent teachers - Miss Murray, who died recently, and one who lived in Lockerbie, still there, married a coachman, has girl in Brockbanks, accountants.

Church

Robin Irving is now an elder of the United Free Church, which he joined when he came to Canonbie because of its proximity and family connections. As a boy he went to the Chapelknowe Free Church, but at Kirkpatrick Fleming he was always in the parish church. At Chapelknowe they had 'all the Kirkpatrick Fleming farmers' - the Mackies of Calvertsholm, Redhouse and of Hillhead, Davidsons of Hayfield, Farish of Newton as well as

Johnston of Stoneylea, Johnston of Loganhouse and Loganlea.' Charles Armstrong of Riggheads, though, went to Kirkpatrick. The minister was Mr Eaglesham, 'a nice old man' with two children, both probably still alive. One a lecturer at Durham University, has retired either to Scotby or Wetherall (his son killed himself, jumping 'into a bridge'). The other son, Jim, taught/teaches at Duns, and married a sister of Rev James Barr.

His wife was active in the Guild.

At Kirkpatrick Fleming his first minister was Mr Fyffe - 'awfy nice', who died by taking lycil, he didn't know why. He agreed that he had a speech impediment which might have occasioned people laughing at him, but this was mainly repeating what Mr Davidson said.

He became an elder under Mr Duncan, whose daughter married a Frenchman from Brittany and used to come to Nutberry for holidays.

Sheena Beattie kept up with Mary Fyffe, may still do so. Mary Fyffe was a more positive person than her brother (Again. leading question). Fyffe was quite nice to speak to, not a great mixer. He didn't know Fyffe's interests, but he was a clever fellow. At time of his death he was 'in hands wi another church' - i.e. he was probably going to leave. At this time it was a thriving church.

Andra Burnett and Robin Irving became elders together. The leading elders were Tom Beattie and Jim Irving, who missed his vocation, he should have been on the stage, and wasn't really interested in farming (mentioned his acts with Jim Mitchell). He also mentioned Jim's daughter, Kathleen, who is mentioned elsewhere. She was head physiotherapist at Carlisle Infirmary.

On his wall were the wedding photographs of Mary and of Jennifer Beattie, so not surprisingly he turned out to have great admiration for Tom Beattie - both in church and council - 'By jove, he could speak his mind'. He claimed not to be able to remember much of his row with Mr McKenzie over the sale of the Glebe. He described McKenzie as 'a big quiet chap', but it was the one before (sic) that Tom Beattie couldn't get on with, Cartwright. Jim Irving (a lively fellow) didn't get on with Cartwright either - nor for that matter did Robin Irving, or any of them. He was a 'right tinker'.

The minister he liked best was John Grimson, recently retired, whose name he used to see regularly in the 'Glasgow Herald'. Very nice, good both as preacher and

a good visitor. Duncan very good too. McKenzie (?) Fair - never did anyone any harm, never asked for anything, easy to get on with.

They had plenty sales of work. I asked about church highlights. He mentioned collecting for a new electric organ, organised by Tom Beattie, Jim Irving and himself. A mouse had holed the bellows in the old one. Another thing was putting in oil heating.

He thought the old session books had been about. Session Clerks were Tom Beattie, David Mitchell (now Langholm), then school teacher, then another teacher whose wife also taught and lives at Kirtlebridge, leaving soon. He thinks his name was Ferguson. He was probably the last Session Clerk.

Gregory was 'ordinary', not good.

Dr Horsburgh was very good - something 'extra'.

His wife did not teach Sunday School after their marriage.

For Willie Rogerson and Jimmy Elliot see farming.

He used to visit the Beatties at Wicketthorn, Mrs Beattie died there, Tom Beattie at the 'Oaks' - suddenly one Sunday after church. Cartwright, a very strong minded man repeatedly clashed with Tom Beattie and blamed him for anything. He even got on to him for chinking his car keys in his pocket during service.

John Graham, a good churchman, may also have been Session Clerk for a time. He fell off his chair and died of a heart attack at a church meeting in the manse.

Pincod church stopped, he thought, about 30 years ago.

Sport and
Entertainment

He said very little. Before marriage he played a little badminton, but not afterwards. He never went to the carpet bowling club.

Mr Paterson showed me some photographs of Woodhouse, and mentioned, incidentally, the tennis court.

(D.P.)
He had been a member of Springkell scouts under Brian Johnson-Ferguson, which was a good troop. Talking of Johnson-Ferguson being adventurous, or not afraid of taking risks, he mentioned him taking them to Ullswater in a Bedford shooting brake for camping. They were let

loose until 'I'll call you at 9' - but in fact he called them at 11.55 p.m.! They got soaked to the skin and went home the next day instead of staying the weekend. Brian was Scout Master for years. Also in the troop were Rae (Sculptor) and Jardine.

They also had some memories of Eaglesfield Shows.

Occasionally by good luck he won whist drive prizes. His next door neighbour - Fiddler (!) goes to 3 or 4 whist drives a week and won a lot of prizes last year.

Economic

Beltenmont was still open when Robert Irving went to Sarkside. He called Fraser a 'mystery man' who made all sorts of things, including candle sticks. But clever, I asked him about Bill Cormack's story that he tried to make an aeroplane, but he's never heard of it.

I asked him about the British Hondurans. He said there were 'a' kinds' - some would work, some not too good. How did the people react? Here we had one of his few shafts of humour - some reacted 'too well' - there were a few black bairns. He said that for some reason these were sent to Newcastle to be looked after. One woman, who still lives in the village, had two black babies - and, I rather gathered, other white children to miscellaneous fathers. She's married now (Bill Cormack had a story of how when they visited a client his wife, sitting in the car, saw a black man emerge from back door and make through the fields while Bill waited at the front).

He had both Italian and German P.O.W.'s, but the Italian was not from the Hollee camp. Once when they were lifting potatoes the Italian said 'Italy - plenty fruit. Scotland - turnips and tatties'. The camp (which?) where Tomy Kirkpatrick lives. Two houses were built 'further up' at one of which Jim Irving died (on the British Hondurans site). The British Hondurans were not very popular, but (see Jack Burnett) he didn't remember a U.S. camp. The British Italians cut Hollee Wood.

When he went (especially to Nutberry) there were a lot of foxes and rabbits. He used to see 2 or 3 foxes a week, and they did a lot of damage. He often saw fox tracks close to the house, and a hen daren't be left out at night. From time to time fox shoots were organised, and quite a few caught, although he himself seldom shot. The foxes lived in the Hollee wood and in the moss - they'd cross from the one to the other, but

