

## ANN HILL RESEARCH

Interview with Mrs. Helen Wield (m.s. Anderson)

14th February, 1987

Mrs. Wield, aged 74, has lived virtually all her life at Birkshawhead, and therefore has outstanding knowledge of the Irvington area. Her father took the farm, which was originally on the Cove estate, in the early years of the century. Later, her husband bought the farm probably in 1942. Her sister, Mrs. Johnston, lives in the village, and is a few years older, and some of Mrs. Wield's information was what her sister had told her. Mrs. Wield still helps on the farm, looking after the calves. As an informant she was able to give a lot of information, and was particularly valuable because of the care she took to try to be accurate: if she wasn't sure, she said so. Her son was in for part of the time and contributed a lot too. Her daughter teaches Geography at Annan Academy.

Features of the house include 5 cats - who sleep in the fire-side oven, or on your knee, at least 3 dogs - and 2 grandfather clocks.

### School

She could just remember Mr. Christie, the temporary headmaster. She remembered him giving a good hiding to a boy Johnston from the Hamper who had tried to play truant but had been chased and caught at Fauldingcleugh Loaning by his mother. Then McKerchar came back, and soon after Mr. Rae.

Her first teacher was Miss Crooks, who had to take two classes in the one room, the older ones on one side, younger at the other. She thought the classrooms had always been flat, not tiered, heated by boiler and pipes. The young pupils had their own small blackboards and chalk. (I had meant to ask about playground facilities, shelters and so on, but forgot to). Miss Crooks always taught the infants.

Her later teachers were Miss Brown, Miss Anderson and Mr. Rae, all of whom - especially Miss Anderson, were fairly strict.

Mrs. Wield was quite clever, and was more than once a prize-winner, although Elma Rae (teacher's daughter) probably won the Dr. Carruthers medal. She married Henry Roddick, the auctioneer's son and died about two years ago. There were perhaps four girls and four or five boys who went to Lockerbie Academy - most of whom would sit the bursary, although some quite clever children didn't sit it because they'd no desire to go. Among the Lockerbie group were Lily MacDonald, Sam McLellan, Anne Hind and (younger) Margaret Notman. Mr. McDonald was the gamekeeper at Mossknow, and lived in a

funny shaped house, having earlier been at Castlemilk. The McLellans lived about Ecclefechan. Anne Hind, now Mrs. Carruthers, lives in Annan (and has a daughter, Nancy). Mrs. Wield went in the first year of buses to Lockerbie - put on by, she thought, Gideon Bell at Ecclefechan station, although she wasn't sure.

Mr. Rae was a great one for concerts - every year in the Public Hall. Mrs. Wield was no singer but enjoyed acting and took part in the sketches. Misses Brown and Anderson were great for making costumes. She thought Miss Brown lodged at the Manse, Miss Anderson with Georgie Ritchie's, whom she later married.

I asked who were the live wires, but she couldn't pick any one pupil out.

She enjoyed the soup-kitchen. As well as the farmers giving tatties and turnips, Sanderson, the Irvington dealer, gave salt. At playtime she always ran up to see what Mrs. Turnbull was making - broth, tattie or lentil soup, and hoped it was lentil, and that it wasn't broth. You paid your penny and got your ticket which entitled you to one bowl of soup - but you might get second helpings if you were lucky. Sometimes you'd see Mrs. Walker ~~or~~ Mrs. Graham of Mossknow, (or presumably, Mrs. Davidson, the coal merchant's wife) going home with cans of leftover soup. These three helped Mrs. Turnbull to serve.

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The soup kitchen - where Moffat's car pumps are - looked as if it had been an old smiddy. It had stalls in it. You sat on forms and trestle tables, or on a nice day you could sit outside.

Children from the Poor House attended the school. So far as she could remember they were treated just the same as anyone else.

School outings might be to the Holm (at Mossknow), and she remembered one to Woodhouse (Mr. Fleming's) travelling in carts. Another was by private transport to Wetherall, when she was in the car of Mr. Martindale (see Woodhouse). Another time they went by Charabanc (horse drawn, I think) to Moffat. And by the time she left school the trips were by bus.

She left Lockerbie Academy at school leaving age and - after a spell at home - worked in service for a time until she came back to help in the house when her sister married.

Her daughter, Margaret, went to Annan, the first year they went there, Little having put on a mini-bus about

1960.

Church

I asked about services at Irvington, and she said her sister, Chris, had mentioned 'preachings' in a cottage in the village by Jacob Smith, who was a member of Pincod Church.

She went to Kirkpatrick Fleming Sunday School and Church. Quite a lot of them used to walk together - children from Blackyett, Robgill, Irvington and Fairy-raw. At the Sunday School Bessie Graham seemed to have a position of authority. Another teacher was Jim Finlay, a step-son of Mr. Lamont, who in turn was a great churchman. The Sunday School was divided up into classes, one taken by the Minister. Sunday School outings went to Mossknow, Shawrig, and the like - tea, races and a bag of buns. She didn't go to Bible Class.

Mr. Walker was a good Minister - a plain man who used to go to help threshing and so on, went around in clogs, had a cow and perhaps a stirk, with a man to help him, and, of course, played the fiddle.

Mrs. Wield's first job after leaving school was with Mr. Stafford, who was killed in the Gretna bombing.

Mr. Fyffe she saw as a nice man, homely, easy to talk to in your house, perhaps too much inclined to defer to his sister, lacking judgement himself (an opinion others have also given).

Of all the Ministers she liked Mr. Mackenzie best. He came round by bike until he got a moped. She remembered him saying something like 'Do you think I would have it if somebody hadn't given me it'. Mackenzie was a good preacher and you could say anything to him. She remembered the fuss over selling the glebe but thought the Minister had been in the right that a meeting had been called to which the objectors hadn't gone.

Mrs. Wield said something that others have suggested too, that you couldn't get a Minister who suited them all. If he suited the more upper class/middle class part of the community, he wouldn't suit the common people, and vice versa. Mr. Mackenzie was one whom the common people liked, and perhaps the same might apply to some extent to Mr. Cartwright - at any rate, she liked him. Mr. Wield chipped in with a remark about chestnuts. I think he and other youngsters had probably been gathering chestnuts, illegally, at the Manse when he came across them and invited them into the Manse.



