



**LANARKSHIRE
Family History
Society**



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Society Aim

To encourage interest in family history and to provide the means whereby knowledge and information may be freely exchanged.

Research Centre

122-124 Merry Street Motherwell ML1 NA

(No Mail to this address)

The Centre is across the road from the Woodcutter Pub.

Entry is from the car park at the rear of the building (off Dalziel Street)

Normal Opening Hours

Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays 12 – 3pm

Thursdays 7 – 9pm

Tuesday is reserved for military research and will be strictly by appointment only.

Please use appointments.lanarkshirefhs@gmail.com

Contact Us

Address for Correspondence:

Lanarkshire Family History Society (The Secretary)

C/o North Lanarkshire Heritage Centre

Local History Room

High Road, Motherwell. ML1 3HU

Currently we are now able to collect our mail from the Heritage Centre.

Website: www.lanarkshirefhs.org.uk

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Cover Photographs

Motherwell Station

Front- about 1963 Back -2023

Credits SRT and Scotrail

Committee Report

The work is completed in the centre and we are delighted with the new kitchen where members and visitors can enjoy a break from research etc. and exchange news and views over a cup of tea or coffee (and biscuits)

Staffing arrangements have also been completed and the centre will be open to visitors from 16th October as follows-

***Mondays, Wednesdays and
Saturdays***

12 - 3pm

Thursdays 7 - 9pm

***Tuesday is reserved for military
research and will be strictly by
appointment only.***



Please use appointments.lanarkshirefhs@gmail.com



The Library has also had a facelift and our vast collection of books is readily available for reference and browsing. Visitors can also consult our range of OS maps or even catch up on the latest news in the old Motherwell Times newspapers.

For those who are unable to visit the centre the news is that new website is progressing at a steady pace.

Anne Marie McKenna(Chairperson)

More about 'From Lanarkshire To Lanark County Ontario'

Thanks to Christine Woodcock for an excellent account of the early 19th century Scottish immigrants to Canada. My GGGranduncle came to Canada in 1820 on the Prompt with the Lesmahagow Emigration Society, a Society formed to provide an escape from the poverty faced by unemployed Scottish weavers.

Ten years later my GGGrandfather also came to Canada. I'd like to add to the references provided by Ms. Woodcock by mentioning two books:

A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark by Jean S. McGill, and The Lanark Society Settlers by Carol Bennett, both of which I have and can do lookups. (fforrest@cogeco.ca)

I published a book on my Forrest ancestors (a lot of Forrests around Carluke and Lanark); copies of which are in the Lanark library and the National Library of Scotland.

Fraser Forrest, Canada

An Awful Warning of the Consequences of Copying from Others' Trees Without Checking Things Out.

Family Tree Magazine reader David Martin has written a letter to the magazine on his experiences of seeing people's Ancestry family trees with entries that are clearly incorrect. I think it is worth reproducing in part here.

"I enjoyed reading Malcolm Newport's article on Ancestry public member trees (FT June) Rightly, he warned us about errors they may contain, which are then propagated by being copied by others.

I think, however, that the depth and frequency of this problem needs further emphasis. Ancestry public trees can be useful, but many are

misleading, as Malcolm's example shows. And, inherently, the problem is getting worse. The more people copy an error, the more other people think it must be correct!

Through long experience and looking at many different trees I believe that at least 70% of Ancestry trees contain significant errors. Such a high figure arises mainly because trees, or rather parts of trees, are copied by others. I have seen hundreds of examples where up to 100 people have A related to B but they are all clearly wrong. In one case, there were 200!

This is not merely analytical disagreement. The errors are usually simple and obvious. Typically, they arise because someone was looking for Fred Bloggs – father, husband or son of Mary, say – and they find one roughly in the right time and place. Yet they fail to establish that there was another Fred Bloggs nearby who actually fits the bill better or unambiguously.

Surprisingly perhaps, trees with sources attached don't fare better than those without sourcing. Most sources on Ancestry are easy to attach, being links in the Ancestry database. But having an original census or parish record of the wrong Fred Bloggs doesn't make it the right one.

I'll still look at Ancestry trees occasionally. Despite the errors, there is still inspiration to be had when faced with a conundrum or a brick wall. User beware!

Did Granny get it right?

A favourite way of getting people started on research is to suggest talking to older family members but we should still be aware that some of these tales get twisted in the telling. Granny may well be telling you the truth as she knows it but was she told the whole truth in the first place? Did someone alter the story to save face or protect someone else? It's always worth checking records

A Memory of Airdrie Academy

In a fifth year English class in 1961 our teacher, Miss Tate announced that we would be studying a poem by Wilfred Gibson entitled "Flannan Isle". At the time I had never heard of Flannan Isle and wondered if it was a real place or a made up name invented by the poet.

As Miss Tate read through the poem, a story of the mysterious disappearance of the three men who manned the lighthouse on Flannan Isle unfolded. A ship that had crossed the Atlantic had reported the light was out-an event almost unheard of in the lighthouse service. A ship was then sent from the mainland to investigate and landed three men on the island. Although they searched the lighthouse and the small island on which it stood "Of the three men's fate we found no trace of any kind in any place"

I was rather confused. Was this poem about a real event or was it a fictional story invented by the poet? The poem seemed to have a lot in common with the Mary Celeste mystery when a ship was found sailing along in mid ocean with no-one aboard. Had the poet adapted the Mary Celeste story and substituted a lighthouse in place of the ship? I'm sure that most of my classmates were as confused as I was.

As Miss Tate read the final lines of the poem, the doubts we had were about to be settled in a completely unexpected manner.

A fellow pupil raised his hand; Donald McSween had something to say. On being invited to speak, Donald said, "I just wanted to say that one of the lighthouse keepers who disappeared was my grandfather."

There was a stunned silence. We now had no doubt that the poem was about a real event.

The disappearance of the three lighthouse keepers took place in 1900. No trace of them was ever found. Donald's statement was one of the most dramatic moments I remember from my time at Airdrie Academy..

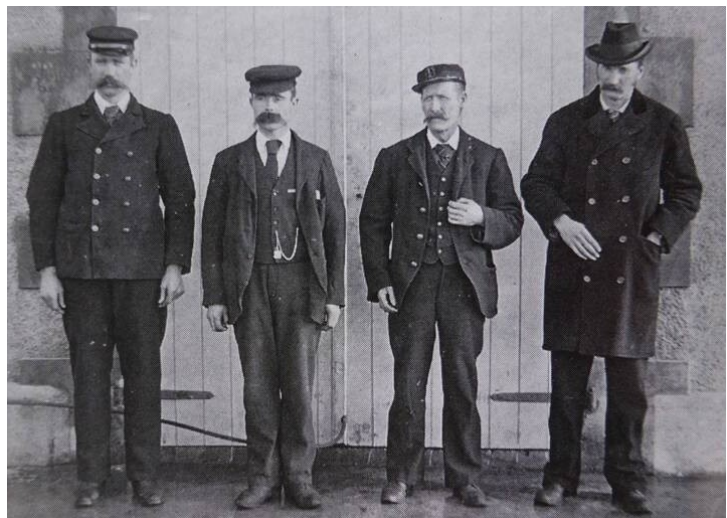
John Russell (Member no. 1452)

Reading this article brought back memories of sitting in another English class listening to the same poem and being just as bemused by the story. I wonder how many other members remember the tale. Was it for real or a work of fiction? As John explained in his article the story was about a real event and the fate of the lighthouse keepers remains a mystery.

For those who have never heard the story, Wikipedia provides the following information

"Flannan Isles Lighthouse is a lighthouse near the highest point on Eilean Mòr, one of the Flannan Isles in the Outer Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland. It is best known for the mysterious disappearance of its keepers in 1900."

The three lighthouse keepers who went missing from left to right: Thomas Marshall, James Ducat, and Donald MacArthur. The man on the far right is the lighthouse board superintendent Robert Muirhead, who recruited the men who went missing. On 29 December 1900, Robert Muirhead arrived to conduct the official investigation into the incident. His report stated



"From evidence which I was able to procure I was satisfied that the men had been on duty up till dinner

time on Saturday the 15th of December, that they had gone down to secure a box in which the mooring ropes, landing ropes etc. were kept, and which was secured in a crevice in the rock about 110 feet [34 meters] above sea level, and that an extra large sea had rushed up the face of the rock, had gone above them, and coming down with immense force, had swept them completely away"

Whether this explanation brought any comfort to the families of the lost keepers (Ducat left a wife and four children; McArthur, a wife and two children) is unknown.

The Wilson Family of Parkhead, Kype, Avondale.

My paternal grandmother was Jessie Wilson, born in 1872, married to Thomas Park in 1897 and with good health and all her faculties survived until age 88. In her lifetime she recounted to me tales of her early years, including how she had been told that her father had the experience of returning home from the burial of an infant child to find another child dying or dead.

My researches have shown the accuracy of such a recollection and disclosed how society has changed since the late 19th century.



The Wilson family home for over forty years was at Parkhead, a small farm of about 30 acres of rather poor productive grazing land lying about 950 feet above sea level about four miles from the town on a remote hillside on Kype's Rig. The dwelling was thatched and would have included a small byre as well as the dwelling house.

The first name on the family Gravestone dated 1810 in Strathaven Old Cemetery is Gavin Wilson, "Portioner of Dikes" ("Portioner" indicating the owner of a small area of land) and there is also recorded Robert Wilson and wife Christina McColl - my grandmother's father and mother. Robert was born in 1829 and died in 1885 and Christina was born in 1835 and died in 1914. They were married on 9th December 1859.



Robert and Christina had five children (including twin sons) in 1868 the year of the tragic deaths of three infants. The first born, twin sons, aged 8, apparently survived the outbreak of Scarlet Fever which was the cause of the deaths of the three young sisters. Mary, aged two, died on 16th October, Christina aged four died on 5th November and two days later Janet died aged six.

The following year saw the birth of another daughter, Jeanie, at Parkhead but it is not surprising that, when the opportunity arose, the family moved to a better smallholding with less congested accommodation. When my grandmother was born in 1872 the family were at Sidehill, a small farm on Newton Road close to the town with better premises and a larger acreage of more productive land. Two more children were born there- Nellie in 1875 and Gavin in 1877.

My grandmother related that after her older brother Robert died in 1883 age 22, she had to leave school age 12 to help on the farm and carried milk from the farm to sell to customers in the town.

Her father died two years later and Christina was left to run the farm and be responsible for the four children Jeanie age 16, Jessie age 13, Nellie age 10 and Gavin age 8.

W. W. Park.(Strathaven)

Peter Scullion from Larkhall

Journal readers will be aware of my interest in the Lanarkshire Yeomanry and no man better represented the ethos and esprit de corps of the Regiment than the late Peter Scullion from Larkhall. His story caught my imagination.

Peter Scullion was born at Mossend, Holytown in 1892, the first child of James and Mary Scullion. The family moved to Netherburn, near Larkhall, when Peter was still young and on leaving school he, like nearly all his contemporaries, went to work in the local pits where he remained until war broke out in 1914.

During the war he served with the Army Service Corps on the Western Front and when war ended in 1918 he held the rank of Sergeant Major and had been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

From 1916 this award had been made to sergeants and other NCO's for valuable and meritorious service and in 1917 the conditions were changed to cover warrant officers, NCO's and men recommended for the award in respect of gallant conduct in the performance of military duty other than in action against the enemy, or in saving or attempting to save the life of an officer or soldiers, or for devotion to duty under war conditions.

Unfortunately the circumstances of the award to Peter Scullion are not known as citations for this, and many other decorations awarded during the Great War, were lost or not retained.



Peter Scullion in WW1

However, it was an award not frequently made and, unusually, carried an annuity not exceeding £20 paid for life to NCO's of the rank of sergeant and above.

After the war, he returned to work in the pits where he trained as a fireman and received the following certificate and authority

Prescribed Form of Certificate of Qualification of Fireman, Examiner or Deputy under Section 15[1] of the Coal Mines Act 1911.

1] That he is able to make accurate tests [so far as practicable with a safety lamp] for flammable gas

2] That he is able to measure the quantity of air in an air current.

3] That his hearing is such as to enable him to carry out efficiently the duties of Fireman, Examiner or Deputy

Historically, the Fireman had one of the most dangerous jobs in the pit. In earlier times he walked down the roads or tunnels in the mine with a candle at the end of a long stick and ignited any accumulated flammable gases which he encountered. Very often the fireman was killed during the operation of igniting the gas.

However, the General Strike of 1926 brought Peter's work to a halt and he, like his fellow miners, was out on strike. He became well known in the local mining community for the soup kitchens he set up for the miners and their families.

His voluntary work did not endear him to the pit owners and Peter left mine work behind him and became a bus driver on the Lanark - Hamilton route. As well as picking up passengers, Peter continued his community work and would uplift and deliver parcels along his route at no charge.

In June 1930, he married Helen Hinshelwood of Hamilton Road, Larkhall, and they set up home at 13 Sunnyside Street, Larkhall, where they would live for the rest of their lives. Their only child, Elizabeth, always known as Betty, was born two years later.

It was about this time that he volunteered for the local territorial Lanarkshire Yeomanry, partly through his experience with horses acquired both during WW1 and in his time in the pits. He was attached to 'A' Squadron based at Lanark and by the mid 1930's had become Squadron Sergeant Major, the Senior NCO in the Squadron.



Peter and his mount
at St. Mary's School, Lanark

He was selected to represent the Regiment in London for the Coronation of King George VI in 1936 and was awarded the Coronation Medal to wear alongside his Meritorious Service Medal, Victory Medal and War Medal gained in WW1.

By the end of the decade, relations between Britain and Germany were in a perilous state and all Territorial Army units had been put on a state of readiness and training had been intensified.

Peter's daughter, Betty, later recalled how as a young girl she had been sitting outside the family home on the morning of 3rd September 1939. Her parents were nearby at a neighbour's home listening to Neville Chamberlain's speech on the radio announcing that Britain was at war with Germany.

A car stopped on the roadway and two men got out and walked up the path to where she was sitting and asked for her father. She explained that he was at a neighbour's home but would be home shortly and invited both men into the house where she made them a cup of tea.

She later learned from her father that they were Lord Dunglass [later better known as Sir Alex Douglas - Home, a future Prime Minister, and

Lt R.C.M Monteith, [later Lt Colonel of the 156th [Lanarkshire Yeomanry] Field Regiment RA] both then officers in the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. They had called to have her father mobilise the Regiment in preparation for War.

Within twenty four hours the men of the Regiment were either at their base in Lanark or en route from Dumfriesshire where the men of D Squadron were based. The months leading up to Christmas and the New Year were quiet and it wasn't until April 1940 when the territorial cavalry regiment was re - designated as a Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery and had to give up their beloved horses, that real change began.

Peter became Regimental Sergeant Major and with the transfer into their ranks of experienced artillerymen, the former horsemen became skilled Gunners of the Royal Artillery.

In March 1941 they set sail for India where they were to be acclimatised before facing Rommel's Army in the deserts of North Africa. Prior to leaving, Peter Scullion, the most senior Warrant Officer and arguably the most important member of the Regiment, was advised that owing to his age he could remain at home but he dismissed the offer as he was determined to go with 'his boys'.

However, with the increasing belligerence of the Japanese in the Far East, the move to North Africa was cancelled and in September 1941 while in India their sand coloured guns and vehicles were repainted jungle green and they were sent to bolster defences in the north of Malaya close to the border with Thailand.

In December 1941 the Japanese attacked Malaya through Thailand and the Gunners of the 155th [Lanarkshire Yeomanry] Field Regiment were immediately in action.

From the north of Malaya they fought bravely against the ruthless and battle experienced Japanese Imperial Army. However, whenever their field guns were set up close to the few roads in Malaya which could take them and their heavy towing vehicles, the Japanese simply took to the jungle, bypassed them, and came at them from the rear.

This was the situation all the way down through Malaya and onto Singapore Island where on 15th February, 1942, the Island was surrendered to the Japanese.

That was a fateful day for the Regiment.

As the stunned Gunners stood around in Farrer Park in the centre of Singapore City, the final position of their Field Guns, an attempt was made to form them up into formal ranks but RSM Scullion stopped this and said that as the men had joined as friends they might as well remain with their friends as they went into captivity. He suggested to them that they remove all badges and insignia which identified them as the 155th Field Regiment as intelligence had suggested that owing to the damage which their field guns had inflicted on the Japanese, they were going to suffer.

Their first experience of their captors was when a large group of Japanese soldiers appeared and began searching them for watches and other valuables. As their property began to disappear rapidly into the pockets of the Japanese, some of Gunners protested but as the mood quickly became ugly, the RSM advised them that to resist would be very dangerous.

He was also the subject of particular attention from the Japanese NCO in charge of the group. The Japanese soldier snatched at the 'swagger stick' which the RSM was holding, a symbol of his authority and part of his badge of rank, snapped it in two and threw the pieces into Peter Scullion's face.

A growl of anger came from the Gunners but once again the RSM warned them of the likely consequences of dissent.

For the next three and a half years, Peter Scullion and the rest of the Regiment were to suffer at the hands of the Japanese. More men of the Regiment died as POWs than fell in action. Peter Scullion was



Peter Scullion
with that stick

among those unfortunates to be sent to the notorious camp at Kinkaseki in Taiwan. There they were beaten, starved and many worked to death. He was fortunate as the Gunners whom he had once looked after, now looked after him. He was now in his early fifties and unfit for the intense labour which the Japanese demanded of them but the younger and fitter took every opportunity to lighten his load and he survived.

On learning of the end of the war in August 1945, some POWs went out into the surrounding jungle and cut a short length of bamboo which they presented to their respected RSM as a temporary swagger stick, a symbol of his regained authority.

This was to become one of his most treasured possession and, some years ago, it was donated to the Lanarkshire Yeomanry Group by his daughter, Betty.

One of the first things he did on arriving home to Larkhall was to get the bus to Hazelbank and then walk the three miles to Auchenheth to tell the parents of Tom Gordon, one of 'his boys', what had happened to their son. Tom had also been at Kinkaseki where his health was ruined. He died of cerebral malaria on 20th August 1945, five days after the end of the war. He was only 25 years of age.

Peter returned to work on the buses as an Inspector where one of his duties was to check the tickets of passengers to ensure that they had paid the correct fare.

On occasions he would find a passenger who had failed to pay the fare, and on recognising him as a former Lanarkshire Yeomanry soldier, would give him a ticking off in his finest RSM's voice while, to the bemusement of the other passengers, the unfortunate former soldier would stand rigidly to attention!



Peter Scullion
in retirement

When steps were taken after the war to re-establish the Lanarkshire Yeomanry, he was approached and asked to resume his former position as Regimental Sergeant Major.

Despite repeated entreaties, he refused, saying that he had seen too many young men die needlessly during the war.

He was a man not to be forgotten.

Campbell Thomson

The Search

I went searching for an ancestor, I cannot find him still.
He moved around from place to place and did not leave a will.
He married where a courthouse burned, he mended all his fences.
He avoided any man who came to take the Census.

He always kept his luggage packed, this man who had no fame,
And every twenty years or so, this rascal changed his name.
His parents came from Europe. They should be on some list
of passengers to the USA, but somehow they got missed.

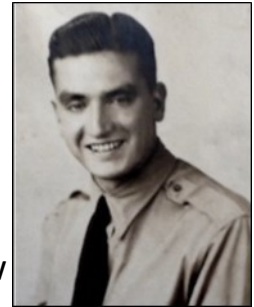
And no one else in this world is searching for this man.
So I play *geneasolitare* to find him if I can.
I'm told he's buried in a plot, with tombstone he was blessed;
but the weather took engraving, and some vandals took the rest.

He died before the county clerks decided to keep records.
No family Bible has emerged, in spite of all my efforts.
To top it off this ancestor, who caused me many groans,
Just to give me one more pain, betrothed a girl named JONES!

Author unknown

**James Brownlie Corbett –
Sergeant Navigator 1553400 – Royal Air Force 9th Squadron.**

James was born in Cambusnethan in 1922, the son of Matthew. He was educated at St. John's Grammar School, Hamilton, and Bellshill Academy. The family had moved from Cambusnethan to Rowanden Avenue, North Road, Bellshill. James was employed by Clyde Alloy Steel Co. Ltd. and was attending Coatbridge Technical College with a view to qualifying as a metallurgical chemist.



Sergeant Corbett volunteered for the RAF in the early part of 1941 and undertook the majority of his training in Miami, Florida. Lancaster ED834 was part of Operation Dusseldorf and took off at 23:19 hours on the 25th of May 1943 from RAF Bardney, Lincolnshire, England, along with 15 other aircraft from the squadron. In total 323 Lancasters, 169 Halifax's, 142 Wellingtons, 113 Stirling's were to bomb Dusseldorf that night. The weather on leaving England was fine with showers, over the Dutch coast broken cloud, which increased as the target was approached. Dusseldorf was covered in 10/10 clouds at various heights.

Despite the huge bomber force the raid was classed as a failure with bombing scattered over a wide area. Between 50-100 buildings were destroyed with some 50 people killed on the ground. It is understood that the Germans lit various fires and also placed decoy markers to fool the Allies.

Lancaster ED834 was shot down by Lieutenant Werner Hopf at 03:22hrs on the 26th of May 1943 and crashed into the Schelde River, roughly 2 km south of the Dutch port of Vlissingen. The crew had only been together for two operational flights, the 13th of May 1943 operation to Pilsen and the 23rd of May operation to Dortmund.

The four central windows of Bellshill Central Parish Church, Main Street, Bellshill, were gifted by Matthew Corbett, in memory of his son, Sergeant James Brownlie Corbett of the Royal Air Force.

These windows were designed and fitted by the Abbey Studio under the direction of Frank Ryan. They were dedicated on 7 October 1962.

The Allies lost some 29 aircraft on this mission.

James Bennie Reid – Sergeant – Royal Air Force.

James, born in 1924 in Cambusnethan, son of James and Mary, and brother of Helen, resided at Patambo Place, 70 Cambusnethan Street, Wishaw.



Sergeant Reid enlisted with the Royal Air Force and was reported missing, during a night flight, near the end of June 1944. They were engaged in bombing a target in France, and after having completed their task, their plane was shot down. Five members of the crew were killed, but Sergeant Reid and another member of the crew survived. On landing, they were taken into hiding by the French Resistance Movement, who looked after them and fed them while preventing the Germans from capturing them by moving them from one village to another.

How near they were to being discovered this story reveals. About 400 retreating Germans, tired and weary, demanded shelter in a village, and some of them were billeted in the same house, on the ground floor, where the two RAF men were sleeping. Giving the Germans half an hour to fall asleep, the French lowered the two lads, using a ladder, and took them to the next village. To avoid discovery they had to be removed from there to a cave in a wine cellar. Later on, they were taken back to the original hiding place, and although several Germans were still sleeping there, they climbed the ladder and remained in hiding again.

Soon after that they heard a German speaker broadcasting that for three days German convoys would be passing through the village and after that the Americans would follow them. This was great news for

the two men, and sure enough in three days the Americans, who were soon followed by British troops, joined up and the two men were released. The relieving troops received a great welcome, and Sergeant Reid and his friend got a great send-off.

Sergeant Reid had nothing but praise for the way they were treated by the French people. James was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government for his services rendered in air operations, between June and September 1944, directly connected with the liberation of France.

John McConnell

Sergeant Air Gunner – Royal Air Force 550th Squadron

John, born in 1924, son of James and Jessie, brother of Ann and James, resided at 50 Dellburn Street, Motherwell.

Sergeant McConnell was stationed in Scarborough during WW2. He took off at 00:07 hours on the 24th of December 1923, aboard his Lancaster Bomber III ED70 from Grimsby. His plane had climbed to 12,000 feet when it collided in the air with another 550th Squadron Lancaster Bomber (ND327) which was also outbound to Berlin. Both bombers crashed at 00:40 hours near Fulstow, 6 miles North of Louth, Lincolnshire, England.

In 2021, whilst the Esplanade Hotel, Scarborough, England, was being renovated, a collection of letters, ticket stubs, hand written poems, cigarette packets and chocolate bar wrappers were found. One of the letters was written by John McConnell to his sweetheart who remains unknown. These artefacts are now in the safekeeping of the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society.

John is buried in Airbles Cemetery, Motherwell, Section G, G77.7

Alistair Allan

Motherwell Station

The first station in Motherwell was opened by the Wishaw and Coltness Railway on 8 May 1843 and was located at Orbiston. As this station was quite some distance from the rapidly expanding Motherwell town centre, the decision was taken by the Caledonian Railway to build a station at the 'Lesmahagow Junction', the point where the Motherwell Deviation branch of the Caledonian Railway Main Line met the line to Mossend, Hamilton and Lesmahagow. That Motherwell station, opened on 31 July 1885 on a site conveniently in the heart of the town, replaced the original station.

The station, built by British Rail during the 1970s (on the same site) to coincide with the completion of electrification of the West Coast Main Line from Carlisle to Glasgow which was completed in 1974 has served the town till recently when the new station (pictured on the back cover) was completed.



From *Motherwell Times*
12 July 1957



“FAIR” HOLIDAYS
CHEAP RAIL TRAVEL
FROM
Motherwell
Flemington & Holytown

DAY EXCURSIONS

STEVENSTON 6/3	SALTCOATS 6/5
SOUTH BEACH 6/8	WEST KILBRIDE 6/9
† FAIRLIE 6/10	LARGS 7/1

Fares from Flemington 2d more.

Every Saturday
Leave Holytown 10.31 a.m.; Motherwell 10.42 a.m.
Sundays 14th and 28th July
Leave Holytown 10.29 a.m.; Motherwell 10.28 a.m.

Tuesday 16th and Thursday 18th July
Leave Holytown 9.42 a.m.; Motherwell 9.51 a.m.;
Flemington 10.29 a.m.

Monday 22nd and Wednesday 24th July
Leave Holytown 9.21 a.m.; Motherwell 9.30 a.m.
† Not on Saturdays.

The Witch Trial of Bessie Smith in Lesmahagow

Although there are no recorded trials or executions of witches in Stonehouse, the village apparently had an association with witchcraft and all things supernatural as detailed in some local archives as recently as the 1850s.

What some people might not be aware of is that it wasn't until last year (March 2022) that a

public apology and pardon was given for all those convicted under the Witchcraft Act 1563, which remained so in



Scotland until the law was changed in 1736. In fact

the last person executed for witchcraft in Britain was Janet Horne in Dornoch in 1727.

The accused of witchcraft were generally, though not always, women, a capital crime punished by strangulation and burning at the stake. In Scotland five times as many people were executed per capita than anywhere else in Europe. An estimated 3837 people were accused, 2558 of whom were killed, with 84% of the convicted women. Many of these women of course were simply healers within their communities using natural plant based remedies, either passed down the generations, known to cure a range of ailments, some real, others imagined. Alas either through jealousy, personal discourse, superstitions or extreme religious beliefs many were persecuted for their talents as healers or simply caring for the communities in which they resided.

In the course of my guided walks, particularly those involving foraging, I have highlighted a few of the ancient superstitions and natural healing plants that have been used by these women in tending those in need. One plant I have often referred to is 'Greater Plantain'. This plant has a number of healing properties and like so many can be consumed if prepared correctly. It might be noted that although some plants may indeed be eaten it does not mean they are

necessarily of great flavour or sustenance. That said, the leaves of greater plantain can be chopped and eaten in salads (mushroom taste), whilst the seeds can be used in salads, cereal or rolls (late summer to autumn). The plant can also be taken as a tea, whilst the leaves or roots were taken for dysentery, bowel problems and intestinal worms, as well as being used to treat toothache and ear infections.

In America, the native tribes referred to the plant as 'White man's footsteps' on account that the early pilgrim settlers crossing the plains would arrive with the seeds in the shoes before crossing the plains of America leaving a trail of the plants growth behind.

However, in researching the plant I found a short reference to the fact that in 1623, 'Bessie Smythe' (Smith) of Lesmahagow was accused of witchcraft for using it as a 'love charm'.

This reference comes from the local history publication 'The Annals of Lesmahagow' written by J. B. Greenshield in 1864. This passage reads as follows:

"In 1656, the Session agreed upon twenty-one elders and twelve deacons, but unfortunately very few of their designations are given. In 1656, "ordains to cite Andro Showe, suspect of witchrie and charming." In the year 1623, there was a Lesmahagow case before the Presbytery of Lanark, of Besse Smythe, who "confesses her charming of the heart fewers, and that by knelling they socht their health for God's saik, and that she appoyntit the waybourne leaf (plantain) to be eatten nyne mornings." The words of the charm will be found in the Presbytery Records in the subsequent chapter." (pages 128-129)

Further, the author records the following extract from the Presbytery records (page 148) which state:

10 July 1623. "Comperis Besse Smythe in Lesmahego, and confesses hir charming of the heart feawers, and that by knielling they socht thair healthe for Godes saik, and that she appoyntit thame the wayburne leaf to be eaten nyne momingis : the words of the charme are, for Godes saik, for Sanct Spirit, for S Aikit, for the nyne maidens

that died into the buirtrie into the Ledywell Bank, this charme to be beuk and beil to me ; God that sua be. Ordainit to be heir the nixt day."

The author concludes referring to Sir Walter Scott stating he, "took so lively an interest in every Scottish question, remarks of what has been termed "the imaginary crime of witchcraft," that impostors of both sexes were found who deluded credulous persons by pretending intercourse with supernatural powers, and furnished those who consulted than with potions for the purpose of revenging themselves on their enemies, which were in fact poisonous compounds, sure to prove fatal to those who partook of them, and that there were also white witches who employed their spell for the benefit, not the harm of mankind, but still they were

sorceresses. While in various parts of Scotland, many of the unfortunate creatures suspected of witchcraft, suffered persecution and even death, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is to the credit of the ecclesiastical authorities of Lesmahagow, that



Thousands were hanged as witches

such cases are very rare, and that they took a more enlightened view of the question, by treating as impostors such parties as Besse Smyth, and placing them on the "stool of repentance " before the whole congregation."

A slightly earlier account of this case is also detailed in the publication 'Biggar and the House of Fleming'; An Account of the Biggar District, Archaeological, Historical and Biographical by William Hunter (1862), page 379. A more recent reference to the case can be found in 'Witch-hunting in Scotland' by Brian P. Levack (2008).

Since discovering these passages I recently came across two new references to Bessie providing further information. It transpires (Lanark Presbytery Records) that Bessie Smythe was accused of 'Folk healing and Unorthodox religious practice', a case which was investigated (as directed by Presbytery) by Rev. James Hamilton

minister of the church in Lesmahagow. This was his first charge, serving the parish between 1602 and 1631 and known to be a very strict disciplinarian. The trial began on 26th June 1623 and ended nearly five months later on 21st November of that year when she was acquitted of the charges. Bessie was accused of healing using herbs and spoken verse/prayer and 'charming'. This involved the use of 'wayburn leaf' also known as greater plantain which was applied to relieve pain whilst speaking in verse/prayer (charming).



A Visit to the Witch
Edward Frederick Brewtnail 1882

I decided to detail this case as a consequence of a new discovery within national archives whilst researching ancient place- names associated with Stonehouse.

Whilst reading, 'The Commissariat Record of Lanark: Register of Testaments 1595-1800' by Francis J. Grant (1903), I found a reference which I believe may refer to Bessie. The references within the publication are short and pertain to transactions, listing only people, spouses, places and dates associated with the public records. The record states, Bessie Smith, spouse to John Hamilton resided in 'Over-Aughtigemell' in the parish of 'Lesmahago', dated the 8th March 1665. I cannot say for certain this is the same person but in light of the fact that witchcraft was a punishable and capital offence at the time, it is unlikely someone would have been named after another accused of witchcraft in the same community. If correct, we can assume she lived to a decent age and was not as a consequence of her trial persecuted within the community or she would have sought refuge elsewhere. Further local research may uncover further information on the case but such examples highlight the superstitious fears and prejudices of others.

John Young

NEW MEMBERS

2523	Janet	Hackel	SCOTLAND	janethackel244@gmail.com
2522	Denis	Mcelhinney	SCOTLAND	denis54uk@hotmail.co.uk
2525	Brian	Cardie	CANADA	cardie@rogers.com
2526	Michael	Netten	SCOTLAND	nettenmichael@gmail.com
2527	Nora	Solesbury	SCOTLAND	nspwk21@gmail.com
2528	Marion	Fyfe	SCOTLAND	marionfyfe@talktalk.net
2529	Cindy	Chabolla	USA	chabolla@msn.com
2530	Lynn	Janiluinas	USA	lynmjan@outlook.com
2531	James	Oakes	SCOTLAND	james.oakes2@gmail.com
2532	Chris	O'hara	ENGLAND	chrisohara63@gmail.com
2533	Roger	Bowie	USA	PTL247@live.com
2534	Debby	Greenlaw	USA	debbygreenlaw@usa.com
2535	Richard	Gardner	SCOTLAND	richandelaine.gardner@gmail.com
2536	David	Rankin	SCOTLAND	dsrankin58@gmail.com
2537	Donald	Robertson	SCOTLAND	donnyrobertson@btinternet.com
2538	Kay	Smith	SCOTLAND	kate.gibson-smith@hotmail.co.uk
2539	Marcy	Harrison	USA	marcyj44@sbcglobal.net
2540	Elizabeth	Pate	SCOTLAND	epate64@gmail.com
2541	George	Thomson	SCOTLAND	thomson_56@hotmail.com
2542	Grace	Thomson	SCOTLAND	JOINT WITH 2541
2543	Michael	Maciocia	SCOTLAND	michael@maciocia.net
2544	Christine	Dodd	SCOTLAND	chrisandtonyxxx@hotmail.com
2545	Elizabeth	Donnelly	ENGLAND	whinneylane@gmail.com

MEMBERS INTERESTS

Member's Name Chris O'Hara Membership No.2532
 E-mail Address chrisohara63@gmail.com

No.	Surname	Date	Parish/Town	County	Country
1.	O'HARA	1842-1880	GORBALS	LANARKSHIRE	SCOTLAND
2.	O'HARA	1842-1880	CARLUKE	"	"
3.	O'HARA	1880-1940	LARKHALL	"	"

Please contact Chris directly if you are able to help with this search.

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