Memories of Stonehouse

By John H. Thomson (Aged 94) as told to Robert Campbell

In Stonehouse about the year 1895, five year old children were educated at Greenside School which consisted of 2 rooms, and since both teachers were ladies it became known as the Ladies school. The children were taught reading, writing and arithmetic, but when they were a little older they were transferred to Cambusnethan Street School or Townhead School, and additional subjects taught there were History and Geography.

In those days Stonehouse children were much poorer than the children of today. Often the families were large, and the boys seldom had more than one suit, and this was worn until it was really tattered. The girls wore long dresses, usually made of cotton, woollen stockings, and, like the boys, they wore boots.

Today in schools great care is taken of children's health, and they are examined regularly by dentists and doctors. Long ago there were no visits from doctors and dentists and diseases like scarlet fever and measles, which are easily treated today, were very serious diseases indeed.

There were of course no cinemas, transistors, T.V., tennis courts, nor any of the things we take for granted today, but those children were usually quite happy. They played football, rounders, hide and seek, but the main game for boys was marbles, and some of the boys were expert. The girls, as might be expected, played at peever and with skipping ropes.

Many of the games were played in the roadway, but it must not be thought that the roads were as smooth as they are today. They were made with a mixture of earth and stones and everywhere there were large potholes. In wet weather, these filled up with rain and became sheets of water, which made walking very difficult. Some effort was made to remedy this, and cart loads of stones were spread on the roads and covered with earth and a steam roller used to flatten this mixture. This was successful for only a short time, and soon rain made the surface as bad as ever.

Much of the land in Stonehouse was owned by Sir Graeme Sinclair Lockhart, who lived in Cambusnethan Castle on the banks of the Clyde. His permission had to be sought before a house could be built.

Weavers had to work very long hours to make a profit. Lighting was by gas or by candle light which added to the difficulties.

Very few houses had inside toilets or running water. This had to be fetched by bucket from wells situated at Green Street, Wellbrae, and Lockhart Street. Later a water pump was installed at the top of Green Street and a washing house, where housewives brought their clothes to be washed in large tubs.

Heavy blankets were difficult to wash, but the housewives stamped hard on them with their bare feet for several minutes, and this seemed to be quite successful.

There were few pavements in the village and the streets were poorly lit by lampposts. At night a lamp lighter, as he was called went along the streets lighting the lamps with a long pole with a flickering flame at one end. The children were fascinated by this, and the lamp lighters usually had a crowd following him around.

And now for a surprise, there were many more shops in the village in those days than there are now. The list includes several grocers, fruit shops, bakers, butchers joiners, dressmakers, five licensed grocers and a chemist. In addition there were five shoemakers and four tailors in the village and they deserved the name because unlike today, they could make those articles in their own shops. Once every week a carrier left Stonehouse with his horse and cart to go to the markets in Glasgow. There he bought goods which were supplied to the Stonehouse shopkeepers. There were two blacksmiths in the village, and a tinsmith who made pots, pans, pails and sold these in his ironmongers shop.

Most of these shops were open for very long hours and on week days they closed at 8 o'clock in the evening. On Saturdays one grocer closed early at ten o'clock, and the remainder closed at midnight. It is

very difficult to understand why shopkeepers did not agree between themselves to close much earlier in the evening, after all, Stonehouse was a very small village then and it would have been extremely simple to tell the housewives that all shops would close at 6 o'clock. Shopkeepers would then have had a more pleasant life than they had.

A gas works was situated in Union Street and near it a Tileworks, on the site of the present football ground. Clay was dug there and made into tiles which were dried in sheds. It is small wonder that the present pitch floods so easily in wet weather, because there is still plenty of clay underneath it.

There were many farms in the surrounding district and farmers worked very long hours too. Corn and hay were cut by horse drawn machines, and later, threshing machines, owned by a Mr Riddell of Lockhart Street, went from farm to farm to thresh corn. These were very large machines and they were steam driven and could only travel at 3 miles an hour, but by law a man carrying a red flag had to walk in front of them to warn people of their approach and to ensure that cart horses were not frightened by the noise. After threshing, the grain was taken to Cander Mill to be ground, coarsely or finely, according to the farmers' requirements.

The milk cart was a common sight in the village, and housewives brought jugs which were filled from large churns. Buttermilk, butter and eggs were also sold from the cart.

It was only occasionally that a horse and cart passed slowly through the village and of course there were no buses. There was however a railway station, and trains came to Stonehouse over a large bridge which has now been demolished. The present viaduct had not been built at the time.

Another surprising fact is that Stonehouse had a golf course and this was situated at Holm Farm. There was also a pond which, when frozen, was used for skating and curling. Other games played by the grown ups were quoits, ninepins and bowling.

Occasionally there was some excitement in the village when Lord Newland, a wealthy landowner who lived in Mauldslie Castle on the Clyde, drove through the village in a coach drawn by four horses. So that the coachman could easily follow the route to be travelled, one of the servants had previously chalked signs on the roadway.

Major Aikman, another wealthy landowner who lived near Hamilton, often hunted foxes and hares near Stonehouse and his pack of foxhound were often seen near Holm Farm and Kittiemuir Farm. The huntsmen were very colourful in their white breeches and scarlet coats. The boys from the village were not interested in their attire but they did enjoy following behind the dogs.

The one really memorable day in the village was the Cattle Show which was always held on the third Wednesday of May. This was always a public holiday and parents and children always dressed in their best clothes. The houses had their front doorsteps whitened, and many of the houses had a fresh coat of whitewash. People came from miles around, and the children naturally had a fine time on the swings and roundabouts and all tried to win coconuts at the various sideshows !

There were several churches and these were well attended every Sunday. The Parish Church, now situated in Vicars Road, was at that time in the building where ice-cream is now manufactured at The Cross. The Free Church in Green Street, has now been demolished but the United Free Church and the Congregational Church still remain. In addition there was a Baptist Hall and a Salvation Army Hall.

It might be thought that the children in those far off days had very little entertainment, and this is quite correct. They were however, generally very happy and they looked forward to many weeks of Sunday School soirees and the Cattle Show. In addition, they spent many happy days playing around the countryside and on the banks of the river. In spite of the poverty in the village and the fact that there was usually one half penny per week (around one fifth of a new penny), they were probably every bit as happy as children of the present day.

Memories of a Coalman

Recollections of Stonehouse by Harry McFarlane

My first recollection of Stonehouse is about sixty years ago. Stonehouse Sanatorium was the main building with the Old Pavilions for Tuberculosis patients. Dr. Sutherland was the head doctor. John Ferrie of Stonehouse was allowed into the grounds to serve the patients with ice cream. I was the driver and Mrs. Ferrie served the ice cream, this was before the trolley service that now goes round the wards. There were only two entrances to the hospital, the main one at Tofts, where Mrs. Shields the caretaker lived with her family. The top entrance on the West Side was used for services to the old boiler house, the kitchens. Refuse was also taken out by this entrance, two days per week, to the County Depot by local contractors using a horse and cart. I think probably the status as Stonehouse Hospital was named sometime during World War II. There were Canadian soldiers billeted in Stonehouse and the new wards were built about this time. I know this because I brought the building materials for the builders. There was no modern heating system as we know now. Therc was just a round stove in the middle of each ward. The modernisation began in Dr. Smith's time after the war and continued under Dr. Pettigrew's time. Before the Canteen was built the visitors used the Tea Room, "The Wee Hut," across the road from the hospital. Dr. A.H. McLean's wife owned the Tea Room. On the grounds running parallel with Strathaven Road, above Tofts entrance. was the old SlaughterHouse, which served the local butchers with meat. When it closed the hospital took it over as storerooms. As far as I know, the grounds of the hospital were part of the land of East Mains Farm with the landowner General Lockhart being the Feu Duty Collector. At one time there was a Garden Fete held annually and was well attended by the village people. There was a very important event held in the hospital for long term children patients when Bishop Douglas of Motherwell conferred Confirmation on them. Sister Sloan and myself were sponsors. The early staff of workers were Mr Andrew Liddle who was a "Jack of all trades." Alex McLuckie was the Boiler House Man at the Old Furnace and Ian Cochrane was the Charge Hand of the Ground Staff. David Stewart was in charge of the New Heating Plant.

Coalmen

Daniel Fleming lived at New Street, Stonehouse. Entry to his coal yard was from Kirk Street. His sons in law names were Hawthorne who married two of the Fleming girls. Thomas Hutchison in later years ran it as a one-man coal business at the foot of Kirk Street at the entry to Loch Park. Neil Collison then carried on as a one-man coal business. He also had a glasshouse where he grew tomatoes. The Murdoch brothers had their coal depot at the foot of Union Street on the site of the Old Gas Works. They later bought the United Free Church in Millar Street with the intention to convert it into a coal yard. George Wilson (Joiner) made a deal with them to purchase the church because he did not fancy a coal yard opposite his house. He then built them premises at the foot of Kirk Street. Later he (George Wilson) demolished the Church and built a bungalow, which still stands on the site today. The Murdoch brothers were named Jim, Tom, Willie, Johnstone and John. They delivered mainly in Ayrshire. David Aitken was one of their workers. W & J. Summers first depot was situated in Green Street at the back of the house part of Loch Park.

Most of the bagging was carried out at the railway station goods yard. John Summers was the senior partner assisted by his brother Bertie. Their offices were in New Street and their depot was across the road. Their fleet of lorries consisted of 10 trucks - 5 tippers and 5 coal delivery trucks. Their coal customers were mainly in the Strathaven area. John Summers, Boghall Street, was the son of Thomas Summers, Kirk Street, who was also in the coal business in a small way. The main business was in Stonehouse. Tom Millar was his main man at first. Harry McFarlane and Archie Millar took over the business as partners when John died. Two of the senior workers were Pat McCluskey and Thomas McFarlane, brother of Harry. When Archie married, he emigrated to Australia, and Harry became the sole owner. Harry still traded under the name of John Summers of Boghall Street. A Pug brought down the coal supply from Broomfield Colliery to the sidings at Canderside Toll. At that time there was a choice of coal suppliers - Swinhill Colliery, Woodside and other pits in the area. Across the road from Townhead public School, where Alex Dick had built a house, John Fleming carried on a coal business but he moved away to farm in the Drumclog area and his brother in law Bob Percy took over. His wife Jessie took over the coal bagging. Jessie was better known for her work in the Salvation Army.

Tales and Incidents of Family History; heard round the fireside when a boy by James Cuthbertson

Note: According to the 1891 Census of Stonehouse, James (5) lived at 38 Townhead Street with his father James (37), mother Elizabeth (31), brother John (8), sister Isabella (3) and grandfather John (84).

Commonplace as those tales are, they are true, and I hope they give pleasure to some of the family and relations who have never heard them.

I will start on my mother's side. My mother's grandfather, John Brown, came from Lesmahagow way and lived with my great grandmother, Isabelle Patterson, in Townhead Street where Kirkland's joiner shop now stands. Isabelle Patterson, his wife, had a pet name, usual to a lot of Scotch names, she was widely known as Tibbie Patterson. She came from farmer stock, or maybe I should say crofter's stock. The Patterson's stayed at Dykehead. This must have been a croft near Dykehead Farm before the farm was built. One day I was talking to Mr William Gilfillan, the owner of Dykehead Farm. I asked him if he knew anyone by the name of Patterson who had ever tenanted this farm. He told me there were no Patterson's named on his title deeds, but there used to be a small croft near here and they may have lived there. So I think the croft was near what is called the Blaeberry plantin'.

There were thick woods around here at that time. One day the Pattersons saw a strange man who seemed to be living in the woods. He wore grey clothes and he was very shy, but eventually they got talking to him and he proved to be a deserter from the soldiers. They took pity on him and took him in for a time and gave him food and other clothes.

The Pattersons were related to George Hamilton, the man who built Glenburn, his wife's name was Marion Patterson. The Hamilton's of Greenburn at the present time are related to George Hamilton.

How long the Pattersons stayed at Dykehead I do not know, but next we find them at Cander Mains and from Cander Mains Tibbie Patterson gets married and comes to Townhead Street to live. Her husband, John Brown, is a miner and there seems to be not many pits in this district at the time, for he works away from here and stays in lodgings. He works at a pit in Jerviston near Lanark and every fortnight or so she goes on foot to meet him, to get his dirty clothes and his pay. The miners are paid every month at this pit.

One night as she was coming home alone in the dark, she took off her shoes, her feet being sore with walking, and went in her stocking feet, and well for her that she did so. Walking past Jellows Bits field, that is the field below the Farrel o' Cake plantin' on the same side, she heard men's voices and they were quarrelling among themselves. She was very frightened for she had her husband's months pay, but she walked in her stocking soles on the grass and so escaped detection. When she came into Stonehouse, it was in an uproar, as old pedlar with a lot of money had been waylaid and robbed.

As far as I know, they had two of a family, Isabella and Betsy. Isabella, my grandmother, got married to James Carruthers and Betsy got married to William Hughes and lived across the street to where No.11 is now.

James Carruthers was also a miner and often worked far from home. In fact, I have read a letter of his to his wife, which my mother had and he says he is working at a pit in England. But James Carruthers had a failing, he had a passion for poaching and would go away for long spells with dogs and gun without caring much for his wife and then young family of four, three girls and a boy, their names being Bella, Jeanie, Elizabeth, my mother and John. This caused great hardship for them all. He went far and wide with his poaching, sometimes away to England and France. It is thought that he was one of a poaching gang. Well one day he went away and never returned. There were several theories of what must have happened and one was that he had been shot or killed in a fight with a gamekeeper.

This caused greater hardship on Tibbie Patterson, now herself a widow. John Brown died with miner's trouble, commonly called ' a feed o' damp'. He tried to eke out a living with buying a horse and fruit cart, but he was not fit and passed away after being nine years in trouble. My mother was eight years old when her mother died, the result of hardship and malnutrition.

At the schools at this time, the scholars had to pay fees. Of course my mother couldn't pay them and she told me the time she dreaded was ' the paying of the fees'. The Dominie or Schoolmaster Mr Wotherspoon, would shout out in a loud and sneering voice - "Come out you paupers" and she and the rest who were poor had to go out to the floor and stand and face the class and her comment to me was "Wotherspoon was not a nice man".

Time goes on and Tibbie Patterson falls ill, she was a thrifty soul and with her house and money she had saved several hundreds of pounds, but she made no will. Betsy going out and in told her never to bother, she would see justice done. Well that was all the justice that they got, Betsy took the lot. Possibly my mother and sisters were too young to realize what had happened, but they were not left long in doubt. As they got married, there never was an 'outputtin' for any of them. An 'outputtin' is an old custom of the parents giving a start in life to their family when they marry, buying furniture, beds, clothes, crockery, etc. When Betsy's family got married, she had four, they all got good 'outputtins'. Nevertheless, they remained friendly until old Betsy died, then my mother and her sisters demanded their fair share of their grandmother's money. Getting no satisfaction, they raised a law suit and received the house at No.11 Townhead Street, valued then at forty five pounds.

At the same time as the law suit is going on, a tragedy is being enacted in Townhead Street. Betsy's daughter, Bella, was married to Mr John Thomson. They had lived away from Stonehouse for a long time, but had come back because of ill health of Mr Thomson. With Bella working at the weaving and a pension and insurance, they managed to live and save a little money, but he wanted to be rich quick for he started gambling on the Stock Exchange and lost all their life savings. Whether they quarrelled I know not, but Bella went with a very solemn and strained face then. However, one very stormy night with wind and rain, Thomson shot his wife then shot himself.

Now I come to my fathers side. My grandfather, John Cuthbertson, built this house and came to live with his wife Rachel Ballantyne at 46 Townhead Street. He wrought to the farmers as a spadesman, he also was a weaver. The farmers in those days employed spadesmen to dig the ground that the plough couldn't take - corners, next to fences, margins, etc. He was employed with one William Letham of East Mains Farm and about this farm there is a story.

One of the Lethams, possibly the father of William Letham, was a very notorious character and when he died there was a storm of wind so awful that it became known as Letham's Wind. When the seasons came round to about the time of his death, the old folk of Stonehouse used to whisper to one another 'Letham's Wind' if there was a severe storm. To give an idea of the storm that night, the bell of old St. Ninians Church in the graveyard was blown away. It was found by a fisher at the side of the River Avon about a quarter of a mile away. The fisherman who got the bell was Tom Brown, the father of old Tom who stayed at the milestone in Townhead Street.

Either before or after he was married, my grandfather had a job driving a brewer's cart. His district was from Lanark and along Clydeside. At the end of each day he got a cupful of whisky and he used to say "It was just like sweet milk, grand stuff". Whether he was born in Stonehouse, I do not know, but his folks came from the south.

He tells of two uncles who stayed at Biggar. One of them was exceptionally strong, he could lift a laid of meal under each arm and walk away with it. A laid of meal is 2.5 cwts, so he must have been 'pretty hefty' to carry 5 cwts.

Over most parts of Scotland in those days there roamed bands of tinkers and vagrants, who stole and plundered from the villages and many were the fights between the villagers and the band and it is told that these uncles did great work at the fights between them at Biggar.

The time of those aforesaid happenings would be the latter part of the 18th century, somewhere about 1770-80. My grandfather was born in the year 1807 or 1808 and my grandmother in the year 1809. He was a great reader and used to sit with a candle to the small hours of the morning. When I was a boy, I used to go up to the loft where his old books were kept. There was a cart load of them, among them being Wilson's Tales of the Borders, Scotch Worthies, Sermons and a lot of religious books. However, they were all musty by this time and they were gradually cleared out and burned.

When working at the weaving, he had to go to Glasgow for webs and material. There were no railways or buses to Stonehouse in those days, so he set off on foot to Glasgow and often carried a web on his back - 40 miles - some walk.

At this time criminals were hanged in public. Pritchard was to be hanged in Glasgow and thousands of people thronged there, among them my grandfather. He watched the hanging and said he never saw so many people in his life.

This was also the time of the body-snatchers, Burke and Hare. The townsfolk had to organise patrols to watch the graveyard after someone was newly buried in case they got lifted. Grandfather was sometimes on these patrols. He said they walked round the graveyard with guns the whole night. The method the snatchers used was this: they had spies to visit the graveyards in the day time and report if there was any newly upturned earth. There must have been a lot more than Burke and Hare in this business, for after a certain number of days, the grave was unmolested, the body having decomposed and was unfit for medical research. There is no record of any 'liftings' from Stonehouse graveyard. An attempt was made one night, but they were spotted by the patrol. The snatchers scattered in the dark, but one was followed and he was caught in a drain or culvert that crosses the road near the Geordie-flight hill. Some man was looking in this drain, thinking someone might be there, when he heard a click and in the drain he was. The click was the closing of his tobacco box. He had opened his box and taken out a chew of tobacco.

Rachel Ballantyne, my grandmother was a very well living and religious woman. When she was a young girl, 10 or 11 years old, she was employed by a farmer's wife hereabouts as a nursemaid. She told of a great snowstorm then. They awakened one morning but they were snowed up. The snow reached the eaves of the houses, so they managed to get a door open and took a blanket and pressed the snow back. When they got out, a calf-house near the farm was completely covered and everyone thought that the calves would be smothered, but they took the blanket and fell on it and pressed the snow down till a track was made to the calf-house. The calves were all alive and none the worse for their burial.

Work got scarce for the weavers in Stonehouse and many families faced starvation, among them my grandmother's family, by this time a big one. The Authorities had a meeting and it was settled that the weavers, both men and women get 1/- per day for reclaiming Lag's Moor. This Moor was at the far side of Dykehead Farm just opposite the Blaeberry Plantin'.

Another incident in the life of Rachel was when work being slack one day she hadn't a bit of food or a penny in the house. She had no prospects, but something urged her to put on the kail pot with water. She went for the pot and while cleaning it out, she found a shilling in the bottom of it. She always maintained that God had put it there or caused it.

George was the oldest son, It was he who planted the plane tree at the top of the garden at No.46. He was a quiet unassuming man and after getting married he went to live in Green Street. At the side of Green Street is the Common Green, used by the people for washing, bleaching, drying, etc. how it was I do not know, but the Green had to be fenced in and a barricade made with railway sleepers placed along the side of the street. Naturally this made the people angry and, headed by Uncle George, they tore down the barricade and fence during the night which had been erected in the day time. This went on for a time and was then abandoned. The Common Green was left to the people of Stonehouse.

That George had courage there is not doubt, for although not an elected member, he walked into a Parish Council meeting and sat down. When asked what he wanted, he said he was there to hear the meeting. For this he was summoned to Hamilton by the Council. The judge who tried him gave the Council 'over the coals' and said "The man has a perfect right as a ratepayer to enter and hear the Council". These things probably made him popular, for he stood as a Councillor later and topped the poll.

Now this history has mostly been of my ancient forebears and relations. Finally, I'll make a change and go to the other extreme in the person of Doreen Thomson. She is my niece's one year and nine months old daughter. She sits and plays on the rug at my feet and talks to me in her delightful baby's prattle. If you ask her name she says "Dodo Toe", but she can say hundreds of words clearly. She gets into all kinds of

mischief and when I speak to her she just laughs. Well Doreen's mother's grandmother's grandmother was Tibbie Patterson.....such is life.

Email

I am amazed that all this information is recorded! I have read tales heard around the fireside by James Cuthbertson (b May 9, 1885). I saw the original document which was a small note book and was in the possession of my Aunt Doris Thomson who has since passed away. Doris was the daughter of Elizabeth Cuthbertson (b. August 30, 1900). Elizabeth was James Cuthbertson's (b.1885) sister. My grandmother is Rachel Cuthbertson (b. Feb 28, 1899) and her sister Isabella (Isa) was born December 1, 1887 and died at age 100. My mother attended my Aunt Isa's 100th birthday in New Port Richey, Florida. Doreen, who is mentioned as playing at James' feet at the end of the story is now 60 years old and lives in England with her husband. Doreen is the daughter of my Aunt Doris. Doreen has been to my house here in Florida and my family has been to the UK to see her.

Cuthbertson family:
James Cuthbertson (bJan 13, 1854)
Elizabeth Carruthers (bApril 9, 1859)

Children:
John (b. Feb 9, 1883)
James (Jimmy) (b. May 9, 1885)
Isabella (Isa) (b. Dec 1, 1887)
Robert (b. June 29, 1892) died WWII
George (b. Oct 3, 1895)
Rachel (Retta) (b. Feb 28, 1899) (My Grandmother and was named after her grandmother Rachel Ballantyne)
Elizabeth (b. Aug 30, 1900) (died in Stonehouse 1996 while living on St. Ninians Street)

Thanks so much for a copy "Tales heard round the fireside' !! It is great reading!!!!

Larry Harbach
Jensen Beach, Florida

Memories of Tom Sorbie

I was talking to a former Stonehouse man, Alex Millar, 89 who worked on the railways. He was telling me that in WWII when the Army blew up the old bridge at the Cander he remembered that the village was warned to try and cover up their windows. The only window that seemed to be damaged was the Cooperative at the Cross, which I think is now a chip shop. I wonder if they are still brushing up "chips" of glass.

It was the Victualing Co-op and was where the Indian's take away is. I thought it was a chip shop or maybe it was and has changed. It was the last shop on the right when you come down King Street. Doctor Murray's surgery was next door, shown red on the attached plan. I can Picture the Co-op. The bread was thrown in your basket, no wrappings then. I am almost certain it had sawdust on the floor as other grocery shops. When I was 14 I worked in McKenzie's every morning before School and a Saturdays - now the Bank next to the present Post Office. Cleaning the cheese was one of my duties which meant unwrapping the muslin cover on a cheese which would be about 14 inches diameter and about 6 inches high, then it had to be scraped removing the skin. I stunk when I went to school!!! I delivered groceries in a black painted bike with a large basket in the front. Another job was to pluck chickens, some of them living with mites. Next to McKenzies was a Pend Close which led to an outbuilding where I understand Jock the Jingler slept. (A. Sorbie), a harmless but not the full shilling man. Jessie Logan a dancer lived above the close and opposite the Pend Close on the other side of the road was Nellie Haston's shop. (Her sister still lives in Millar Street). Round the back of this shop Jessie Logan set up a stage and gave shows for WWII War Effort money.

Townhead School 1948

When you check the group who are still alive that is when you know you are getting old. I recently heard that another in the Group has passed away. Wee Geordie Brown (Broon). He is bottom row second from the right. I recall going round to see him when we were boys. He had to get washed "outside" at the spigot (Spicket) sink at the back of his house which was in Crawford the Plasterers yard. His house was on the corner of the lane and Cam'nethan Street, directly opposite Boghall Street. I can put a name to a good number, if required. I am second from the left, front row (Tom Sorbie) with the smug smile.

I was talking to Andy Potts about the river Avon when I was a boy, in particular around the Linthaugh area. What I was talking about was the time we spent playing at the side of the river snibing Beardies. There is a yellow flowering plant that grows on the banks and if you pulled it up, the roots are long and with your nails the root can be thinned down until it could be formed into a lasso. Sitting on a large rock banging on the rock with a stone brought the Beardie (stickleback) out and we then lassoed it. I had a Gird and Cleek. The kids don't know what I am talking about. We also made (Dragons) Kites from barrel hoops, brown paper, a cane and string. Tying opposite doors together with string and knocking both doors.

Sketch plan of a Weavers Cottage

The ladder up was normally fixed in the one position but could be taken down, was very heavy. It was treads only, no risers, took you up to the loft which could be a bedroom. the only ventilation and daylight was a small skylight. Walls and ceiling were papered using flour paste as the adhesive. The sink could be at the back window of the living room or in the Scullery and would be a jaw-box type, which is a square deep sink. The Set-in-Bed had a 6 inch wooden facing surround which held the heavy curtain. The bed was made of timber bed boards with a mattress on top. A chair was needed to climb into the bed. Small curtains hung below the bed covering the household goods, normally in a big kist (Chest). Ceilings were around 10 feet (3.04m) in height. The fireplaces were painted stone mullions and high mantelpiece, with the gas mantle above. The fireplace would be a metal range with ovens either side, hobs on front of the fire with the ash pan below. Wives had to black lead the fireplaces frequently. Soot from the chimney was normally dumped in the garden, a good fertiliser. Garden produce supplemented the family income. The floor could be flag stones or timber tongue and grooved flooring covered with "Wax cloth" linoleum. Windows in the house were sash and case (vertical sliding) with around eight panes glass was expensive to replace. Water was carried in from the many Wells in the village before water in lead pipes was plumbed in. Sanitation was a garden dry closet.

Email extracts

I was talking to a lady who now lives in Larkhall, I think she attends St.Ninian's, I don't know her married name I knew her as Peggy Mackie who lived in Lawrie Street in the last house on the left before you go through the bridge. She was confirming what I remember in 1940 troops in the road from Lawrie Street up to the station, I remember they were English. She said that they were frequent troop visits and the occupiers of Lawrie Street took them in for a cup of tea. Peggy remembers getting oranges from the troops which kids didn't get during the War.

The Scout Hall was used to give them a meal, later a hut was built adjacent to the railway embankment and used as a kitchen, a few years after this it was used as a Cadet Hall.

Peggy's Mother told her that the houses near the railway line had thatched roofs and frequently caught fire from sparks from the trains, the houses on the right at the bridge went on fire and was put out by buckets of water. Two families of Jackson's lived in these houses. Due to the frequent fires to houses near the line they were quickly slated.

I remember the early train coming in and the Paper Boys collecting the bundles of papers throwing them into a bike with a front basket, cycling to the paper shops, in my case it was Wiseman's half way down Cam'nethan Street.

The station yard on some Saturday's saw the liberation of Pigeons and I spent some time with my father watching the liberation, thereafter collected the eggs left in the baskets.

I think I mentioned to you before Charlie Dayburn, who has lived in Stonehouse for years he lives in Lawrie Street think two up from the Scout Hall. Charlie was awarded for taking part in the Saint-Nazaire raid when Navy and commandos ran a British camouflaged boat into the dock at Saint-Nazaire which blew up later putting the docks out of action. Charlie was in a plane which was to bomb the German installations to disguise the main attack, unfortunately there was cloud and Charlie's and other planes couldn't see there target, they radioed back and was told to keep flying around which would draw the fire away from the ship. A film was made of the raid.

The black car was owned by Gordon Symington's father who was a baker, the shop was the Grandfather's, Findlay the Baker and was just where the car is at the sun shade.

Jimmy Sorbie is my grandfathers brother who lived in Lockhart Street just past the road into Kirk Street on the slight bend. He was called Kyle as a nick name (no doubt he played Kyles) his son Jimmy was married to Hilda the German Lady until recently lived in Udston Mill Road Old Jimmy showed Dutch Rabbits as did my Grandfather. The boy in the photo is Robert Jimmy's brother who went to Australia.

13 Green Street is taken out the back and shows my grandparents and three daughters. I think early 1900's. Jean, Marion, Minnie, shows my two Aunt's and grandmother, with my late Sister Minnie (Mrs Paterson) married Jimmy Paterson, they lived in Linthaugh Gardens until their death. Photo taken out back of 32 New Street.

The Albert was won by my Grandfather Thomas Sorbie, given by the Perthshire Club dated 1927.

Watching the Discovery Channel, there was mention of a Gas Engine, it brought back memories of my father when he was 14 (1914) he had to go round to Wilson's Old Shop and get the Gas Combustion Engine working which powered the equipment using overhead belts. I built an extension to the Old Shop by taking in the house that sat on the corner with the lane.

Opposite Galloway and McLeod's office in Kirk Street was the Old Church (Mill) this had a loading area which ran from the building nearly down to the kerb at Kirk Street. I collected corn spillage off the edge of the loading bay, which my father fed to his pigeons, before he had an allocation from the Government for use of the pigeons in message carrying. Further down Kirk Street was a garage door cut into the row of houses which led into Findlay the Bakers yard, and held his bakers van.

Over the fence was Haston the ironmongers yard, during the war Jessie Logan set up a stage and had a concert for the War effort. I was involved in building the new villa at Greenside just before I went to the Army 1955, after the demolition of the Church the basement boiler house was still in situ. Willie Whitelaw myself and a few others set up a chain and hook to lift out the old boiler and as it was being lifted we heard a loud hiss, the gas was still connected to the boiler, Willie Whitelaw sharpen a bit of wood and hammered it into to end of the hissing gas pipe, holding a handkerchief to his nose. Health and Safety, we could have been blown up! The residents in Green Street were out asking question of each other why they had no gas.

I mention to you before that the timber beams that held the Gallery in the Church were taken over to the yard and I set them up on brick pillars to hold the roof of stores that were built backing on to the two storey building in Green Street. By the way in the ground floor house adjacent to the Green was a family called Morrison, William the son became a Professor, and move to California, the other son Tom went to the Metropolitan Police and was high in the ranks. Been emailing Billy Watt's who also became a Professor and now lives in Northern Ireland.

I remember playing in the underground air raid shelter at Greenside which was George Wilson's house, Stuart Wilson, Jim and Gordon Symington and myself played in the shelter which was carpeted. By the way I was on the building of George Wilson's two storey house at Greenside, the facing brick on it were hand made and came wrapped in straw. In 1955 I gave the Heritage Group a photograph taken at the building of the house. I was also on the building of the large Hanger building at the side of the by-pass road, built on what was the Violet pitch, it was used as a garage for Wilson's vehicles.

I was watching a History programme on TV and they showed the German radar being jammed by the use of aluminium foil dropped by our bombers over Germany. The German's also used it after we dropped it and I remember playing with the foil strips which were all over the street, Argyle Street in my case. It was approximately 30 x 1.5 cm.

I was brought up in 13 Argyle Street a rented four in the block, it was known as Bruce's building named after the owner, we were upper floor left until the Cameron's came back from Canada, they were related to the owner, being a larger house we vacated and moved downstairs. (my mother, father and sister Margaret) Room and Kitchen, with two set in beds, there were a ladies and gents toilet at the end of the central close, no heating in the toilets which ran with condensation at times. Alan Pearson and family lived opposite in the close, he was the Gardener in the park, out back of our houses he had a lovely garden, my father had a large pigeon hut, the remaining garden was in a tidy condition. At the back was a shared drying green and washouse. I still remember the wash days, using the mangle etc, four lean-to coalhouses were out back.

Tom Sorbie and family who lost their home in Lockhart Street due to a fire moved in after the Pearsons' left and having the same name as myself we changed our address to 13a Argyle Street, this saved confusion.

We often saw Wull Reid's cattle being driven up to the Cross to his brothers Farm, in fact one cow came in to our living room, you can imagine the mess.

I played out in the street being friendly with Jim and Gordon Symington whose grandfather was Findlay the baker in the Trongate, the Symington's lived above the shop. We also played in part the debris left after the old school in Hill Road burnt down.

My mother and Father were friendly with Hugh McArthur who lived in the tenement building opposite the Paterson Church, and a relation of the McArthur's an old man had a shop on the corner of Hill Road and Lawrie Street. Kids would take empties and get a penny, he put the bottles through into the back yard, the kids jumped the wall in Hill Road lifted the some bottles and got more money.

During the War at The Cross there was a public Air Raid shelter which stood where the bus stop is was, had two entrances and a flat concrete roof, the shelter was damp and horrible when we played in it.

When the war ended, can't remember if it was VE or VJ day a large bonfire was lit on top of the shelter flat roof, as the bonfire got larger suddenly there was a noise and sparks on the road surface as a power cable of some sort was burnt by the bonfire and had split in two. No one was injured. I think it was the

Home Guard or Wardens had a practice outside the yard adjoining the Rex Cinema, the let off some sort of incendiary and using stirrup pumps and buckets of water had the fire under control.

I worked on the alterations to Wilson's old shop which sat on the corner of the lane opposite George Wilson's old single storey house (opposite where George had an underground shelter) and during the alteration we came upon below workshop floor level an old gas engine which powered the machines via overhead belts. This engine was as described to me as a boy by my father that he had to go in early to the workshop and get the gas engine working before the men arrived.

My father worked with George Wilson's grandfather the original owner, they were the funeral undertakers for the village, my father had to carry the 'Stretching Board' to lay the corpse out on for measurements etc. My father when he was carrying it through the streets was asked frequently "Whose deid the day Bob"

One morning when I looked out the window the Street was covered with strips of silver foil, this had been dropped by the Luftwaffe on a raid, the German's called it duple and the British Window, as it fluttered down it upset the radar screens It gave the kids in the Street something to play with.

Most of the roads at the outskirts of the village had large concrete barrel shaped objects which sat at the side of the road, it was intended that if we had been invaded the concrete objects would be rolled out on to the road to cause obstructions.

There was a man who lived in Queen Street in the two storey building next to what was the Smiddy, this man was Welsh, and I guess he was wounded in the First War as he had a wooden leg. Many a night I lay in bed and could hear this man walking up the street Clip, Clop then a noise of a shovel, he collected horse manure as he was a keen gardener, horse and cow manure was common in Argyle Street as the groceries came by horse drawn wagons, and Wull and San Reid's cattle went from the Farm at the Cross to down Linthaugh Brae, I can still smell the fresh milk that we carried in a can to the Cross farm which was filled by Wull Reid's sister (sister or wife from memory).

At the Cross was Burn's the butcher and they owned the adjacent shop was part electrical, car items etc, just where the bus stop is now. When you went into that shop it was split level and Burn's charged up the Accumulators which powered the old fashioned radio's, the required a Grid Bias and HT battery, the accumulator lit up the valves.

I wonder if anyone ever mention Joan [Jo-Ann] and Ina Park two old ladies who lived in Union Street,the last house before the council houses going down the hill.

One sister was much smaller than the other and she carried the groceries in a basket walking behind her sister,while the taller sister was a bit more of a lady she asked for the groceries. Both wore fur stoles and heavy coats etc. summer and winter.

Bobby Hornal or OBBY as he couldn't say Bobby was the son of Mrs Hornal who had the Chip Shop in the three storey Argyle Street building [now reduced to one storey ,I think it is Sherrans Office,

From memory I think Bobby had large boots as he was disabled, Bobby sat outside the chip shop and spoke to everyone who passed, he was a lovely person, last time I saw him was in Bothwell Road Home,Hamilton,before I arranged for its demolition.

Talking about Union Street at the corner of Union Street and The Cross was the dairy for Reid's Farm at the Cross, I went regularly down to the Dairy and can still remember the lovely smell of fresh milk,I think the name of the old lady who served was Maggie Reid she dipped a jug into the milk and poured it into a metal container with a lid that slipped up the handled then pushed down, when carrying it to save spillage

The Cows came up from Wull Reid's farm down the Linthaugh Brae passed our house and through the Cross,leaving the usual mess on the street.

To the left of the Farm gate was Haston and McGhie Joiners they used the same entrance gate.

By the way Wull Richardson was a Milkman who went round the town with a well decorated horse drawn wagon,and again it was the the metal containers. Wull was the late Sheila Symington's Father

Just behind the Bus Stop at the Black Bull was a Shop owned by Burns Garage which was split level, locals took their accumulator [battery]to be recharged,the accumulator was used to light up the filaments in the 2 volt early valve radio's.

Remember during the War listening to Lord Haw Haw on this type of radio.

Thought I would let you know that the the photograph your group has of the 1949 Queen leaving the Bandstand and coming up the path,the attendant you see head only is myself dressed like Cortez complete with tights and feathered hat.

I still have the silver medallion, writing on the back says " Crowning of the Queen CEREMONY Stonehouse 18th June 1949 ATTENDANT Thomas Sorbie

I was talking to Jimmy Aitken in Lawrie Street who I knew as a boy and he confirmed that during the War one morning the Street was covered with aluminium strips which was called Chaff or Window by the British and Dupel by the Germans,

I was just away to ask him about the large concrete barrel shaped blocks that sat at the side of the Railway bridge in Lawrie Street,when he mentioned them saying they were taken down and dumped in the river near the Holm Farm,the idea was to roll the barrels out on to the road as obstructions.

Like me he remembers the low flying German plane which I saw over the Park, he was in the football Park with the Home Guard who shot at it until there was a shout to "Stop it might shoot back " I reckon it was Hess in the plane.

Many a day I rattled along the streets in Stonehouse,my G&C was made in the Smiddy in Queen Street,can still smell the horses being shoed just outside the Smiddy door.

Tom

The Life Story of Charles James Daborn MBE DFM

My life began at 00.30 hours on 7 June 1921 (or did it?). My father subscribed to a mutual or friendly society which paid out benefits for various things, including a bonus if a child was born within two years of marriage. My parents had been married in the manse of Dalserf Church on 6 June 1919, so they were one day out – until one of my uncles worked out that British Summer Time had come into force, so the time of birth was actually 11.30 p.m. on 6 June! Apparently it worked, but when I later claimed two birthdays each year, I was given short shrift. I was born in a flat at 4 Barrack Street in Hamilton occupied by my father's parents — my grandfather being a retired quarter master sergeant from the Cameronians or Scottish Rifles.

He was also called Charles James as was his father, who apparently sent a telegram welcoming the arrival of Charles the Fourth! Both unfortunately died when I was only two or three years only, so I have no direct memory of them. I was told that my grandfather used to take me on his shoulders to the Public Park to listen to the bands playing in the bandstand there — did this create my liking for serious music? I like to think so. Grandfather had been a military bandsman (and tailor) and also played the French horn in local orchestras. I have absolutely no memory of my paternal grandmother who died early from the dreaded tuberculosis just after I was born. She was born in military barracks at an army prison, whereas my grandfather had been born in military barracks in Edinburgh Castle. My father in turn had been born in military barracks in Aldershot, so I have a very mixed nationality problem - I'm Scottish despite the name!

My mother was entirely Scottish, although some people have suggested her surname has Northern Irish origins, but I can find no trace of such connections. The family background was in West Lothian, with the menfolk all being involved in agriculture. She herself was born in Slamannan, but her parents moved in about 1900 to Lanarkshire (presumably because of better money in working in the coalfields) and they settled in the miners' rows at Swinhill, just South of Larkhall. John and Jane Shields went on to have NINE more children in a two-roomed terraced house with a scullery and a single cold water tap — no toilet or bathroom — a "midden" outside served the needs of about ten families. I can still recall the smell when the council men came to empty the contents into their horse-drawn cart.

After my mother there were eight further daughters (of whom seven lived to maturity and marriage) and finally a son, John Shields. Surprisingly all the eight daughters produced offspring (giving me a whole raft of first cousins) but the son was childless. It was customary then to farm out girls when they left school to go into "service" — my mother to the local doctor's and the others in turn to "big houses" ranging from Paisley to Falkirk and Bothwell, This obviously left space for the younger children, but I can recall some hectic Sundays when there were get-togethers.

My parents apparently met up by chance, when both grandfathers got together to discuss some Masonic business, and Grandpa Shields brought his daughter with him to Hamilton. This must have been during the latter stages of the First World War, since I have a photograph of my father in his Cameronian uniform sent to my mother expressing his love. I know he left the Army after the War, having joined as a boy of 14, and got a job as a locomotive cleaner with the Caledonian Railway Company. This was the first stage of progress to becoming an engine driver, but years followed as a cleaner, then a fireman, before being trusted with a steam engine. They were married as I mentioned earlier in 1919, then moved to Stewart Street in Burnbank where my brother John (Jack) was born in 1923, with Duncan following in 1930. Again our accommodation was quite basic — a two room flat with a scullery and a cold water tap and a coal-fired range, plus a lavatory in the staircase shared by three families (queuing sometimes necessary). One advantage was that Glenlee Public School was exactly opposite our house, and we all attended there until the age of 13. I must have been quite brainy then, because I left in 1934 with (a) the boy's dux medal for the year, (b) a free place to the prestigious fee-paying Hamilton Academy, and (c) a bursary from the Burns Society to cover the cost of books for the next three years, the latter because I wrote an essay on the life and times of Robert Burns. What a swot I must have been then — but as usual it didn't last and I left the Academy as a pretty average scholar. But this was 1939 — and the great uncertainty had begun. Further education was now out of the question, apart from the obvious fact that my father couldn't afford university fees. So — I left school, got a job with the City of Glasgow Approved Society at the fantastic wage of 17/6p per week. This still covered my train fare from Glasgow to Burnbank, and a filled roll and glass of milk at lunchtime, and a meagre contribution to my mother (which as all good mothers do) gave it back to me during the week.

Having no bathing or showering facilities at home, we were used as a family of 4 males, to walk on a Sunday morning to the public baths in Almada Street in Hamilton where they had lumps of carbolic soap and plenty of steaming hot water together with a large tub that working men could lie in and be scrubbed clean by their children and a shower to wash the soap off, followed by a dive into the chlorinated water of the swimming pool where the local chimney sweep Geordie Smith, whose back we had scrubbed, taught us boys how to swim. The said Geordie had a motorcycle with a sidecar which carried his brushes and sacks, but he always stopped at the bottom of the brae between Hamilton and Burnbank which was still cobbled to give horses a grip. Geordie then searched for nuts and bolts and anything which might have been shaken off, to add to his collection. We were walking back from our Sunday "Dookers" Club on the morning of 3"' September 1939, when Joe the Pole (who was in fact a Lithuanian immigrant) came out of his bicycle shop to inform us that War had been declared. And so started another change in my life.

My father's immediate reaction was to say "Right - I'll be taking you along to Hamilton Barracks to sign up for the Cameronians Regiment". His intention was obviously to keep up the family tradition, insofar as he himself had bee in that regiment , as had been his father and grandfather. Indeed my grandfather, when he was discharged from the Army, was employed as a recruiting sergeant, standing at the gates of the Barracks and inviting likely young me to "take the King's shilling". The fees he received kept him going at the public house across the road, a practice which brought on his fairly early death in 1925. He was also a relic of the days of the Raj in India and had curry for dinner every day! I was told that in India he used to teach pet parrots belonging to colleagues by suspending them on a rope down a well shaft, and talking to

them until they could repeat his words. Whether they were swear words or Hindi commands I do not know. I had no intention of joining the Army, favouring the Royal Air Force. When I was young I used to make model aircraft from Meccano bits and pieces, and I had an unforgettable day in about 1936 when I walked miles to Dungavel Castle to see Sir Alan Cobham;s Flying Circus with his stunt pilots and variety of machines. Needless to say I couldn't afford the five shilling fee for a "flip in the air".

Within weeks of the outbreak of war, one of my colleagues in the office , who must have been a reservist, came back in his uniform, and his enthusiasm for the RAF rubbed off on me — so off I went to the Recruiting Office in Glasgow despite my father's antagonism — only to be told to go home as the professionals would have the war over in a few months! Several months later the position had changed with Hitler now in control of a lot of Europe — so back I went — to be accepted this time as a trainee ground wireless operator. I had no crazy ambitions about being a flying type, wearing glasses all the time and not being very robust. So, in mid-1940 I was given a travel warrant and told to get on to a train from Glasgow Central to Warrington in Lancashire, where I climbed into a big truck along with some other Scots lads and taken to RAF Padgate where we were given huge platefuls of baked beans on toast accompanied by large mugs of strong sweet tea. I don't recall anything else about that place, although I assume we were kitted out with uniforms and boots, a set of "irons" (knife, fork and spoon) and a "housewife" (comprising needles, thread and wool) for DIY repairs —- no mothers now! And that started my career of over 7 years in the Royal Air Force.

Next stop was Blackpool where we were billeted in a boarding house run by two dear old Salvation Army ladies. We marched up and down the streets of the town, learning "square-bashing" and how to kill a German with a bayonet! The more practical training in wireless telegraphy took place in the old tram sheds in South Blackpool and this entailed marching in columns all along the promenade in all weathers, with one man at the front carrying a white lantern and another at the rear with a red lantern, to avoid being hit by trams in the blackout. From there to Yatesbury in Wiltshire — a bleak, miserable place, sleeping in wooden huts, with a coke-burning stove in the middle and a linoleum floor covering which had to be polished like mad every day. We were also badly bullied by sadistic corporals and sergeants. I hadn't been there long when a call came out for volunteers for aircrew duties and I was quite interested, although expected to be turned down on medical grounds (my glasses again). A wee Scottish doctor examined me, then took my glasses, held them up to the light and said "Well, laddie, you can just fold these up and put them away for the duration. You're fit enough for aircrew". And he was right — I didn't wear glasses again until about 1960!

The training now changed, and within days I went on my first flight. This was in a wood and canvas biplane , a De Havilland Dominie with two small engines, a civilian pilot complete with bowler hat and rolled umbrella, no separate cockpit, five canvas seats for pupils and one obsolescent wireless set – and one necessary item of equipment, a black tin box for us to sick into. And we were sick flying in this outdated contraption over the Downs. After a few more flights those who were still airsick were taken off the course, but I survived and went on to do more exercises in a small single-engined plane called a Percival Proctor. Just a pilot and me – cosy, except that the pilots were refugees from the Polish Air Force and were bored stiff because the RAF wouldn't let them fly on operations (knowing they would be murdered by the Germans if captured. On one occasion, I finished my work and turned round to tap him on the shoulder to go for a landing, only to be quite scared — he was flying along and reading a book at the same time!

We were issued with rather old-fashioned flying suits, boots and helmet and expected to go straight to gunnery school. There was a kind of lull, however (early 1941) and we were sent off in all directions to do odd jobs meantime. Jimmy Porteous and I went to RAF Andover where they were still flying Bristol Blenheims, and our job was repairing telephone lines broken in the frequent German air raids at that time. We spent as many nights in air raid shelters as we did in bed. I remember Jimmy tripping over something on our way to our workshop one morning , and being somewhat shaken to find it was the fin of an unexploded bomb!

Next posting was to RAF Stormy Down near Porthcawl in South Wales, where we were taught to be air gunners. What a primitive place this was – we slept in bell tents, and the most regular food was stuffed sheeps' hearts. Never tried that since! Here we flew in really old Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers taking turns to fire World War 1 machine guns at drogues pulled along by other aircraft which had long cables in case they got hit by mistake. I even sank below the belly of a Whitley a "dustbin" turret — the most frightening ever!. Now qualified as a "sound" air gunner, it was off to the final stage of learning — the Operational Training Unit at RAF Abingdon in Oxfordshire. Really intensive work followed, learning to be

part of a crew involving pilots, navigators and ground maintenance staff. We did cross-country flights by day and night, watched over by experienced “screen” aircrews, and it was with great relief that we were accepted as fully trained and ready to be posted to an operational squadron, keen to get there and quite unworried about the future risks.

I was allocated to no. 77 Bomber Squadron in no. 4 Group, based at Leeming in North Yorkshire and still flying the old Whitleys. There were no runways, being a plain grass field, so the pilots just looked at the windsock and took off in that general direction. In the dark some men went out and laid two parallel rows of “gooseneck” paraffin flares. There was no formal crewing—up then and you didn’t know who you were flying with until briefing for each operation. I did four operations from there, two to Paris to drop leaflets, one to Genoa in Italy (this had to be aborted when the plane couldn’t climb high enough to clear the Alps) and lastly the Combined Operations Raid on the locks at St. Nazaire. Because of thick cloud we could not drop our bombs and had to perform our secondary task, i.e. fly round and round over the port in order to draw fire from the German flak guns to prevent them from being depressed and used against the Commandoes and others on the ground. What a display of pyrotechnics lighting up the underside of the clouds.

Shortly afterwards, we were moved to RAF Chivenor in North Devon, where our aircraft were painted with white and pale blue camouflage, and we practised low level bombing before being sent out on very long flights down the Bay of Biscay, searching for German U-Boats either leaving or returning to their pens on the French coast. Other crews saw them, some even attacking and sinking them, but we spotted nothing except the odd oil slick, and some French fishing boats. Some of these were suspected of escorting the submarines at night, and they were all ordered to leave the Bay. At the end of the warning period, we had orders to shoot through their sails to scare them off. I was in the rear turret on the day it was our turn, and I had to let off a few seconds of fire from 4 machine guns — the only time I ever fired “in anger” as it seemed at the time.

Because of the duration of these patrols we were double crewed — two pilots, two wireless operators and two gunners, but one day a different operation was ordered, namely a direct flight to the French coast to bomb an oil tanker. The Squadron Commander decided to reduce the crews involved, and I was removed from Alex Cassie’s team, much to my disgust. Off they went, failed to find the tanker, but came across a U-Boat on the surface. Alex went in to attack, but the sub stayed on the surface, and shot up the plane so badly that the plane had to be put down on the sea near a fishing boat. The crew became prisoners of war for the next 3 years. Indeed Alex ended up in Stalag Luft 3, where he became one of the document forgers in readiness for the Great Escape. He appeared in the TV series about the event, and admitted he did not want to join the escapers because of claustrophobia! He was lucky – his three room-mates were among the 50 officers murdered by the Gestapo on Hitler’s orders. Their war had ended, but I just joined another crew and finished a few more “trips” before we were all posted back to Yorkshire.

Our beloved Whitleys were taken away, and we started to convert to the Handley Page Halifax — not exactly modern, but with 4 Merlin engines and more speed. Our base was a newly-constructed airfield at Elvington near York (now the home of the Yorkshire Air Museum and our Squadron Association). Everything was raw and damp, with days on end of the infamous Vale of York mist. We were soon off on operations starting with night bombing of the submarine pens at Lorient and Brest, then over the Third Reich. The Ruhr was often our target, and could be very scary – but one night we went off to Berlin as part of a massive raid. I can still see the sight of that burning city, and hear the sound of exploding flak outside my little window.

On another night we were sent to bomb the Skoda car factory at Plzen in Czechoslovakia. We got lost on the way and ended up as last in, which I meant that on the way back we had the flak batteries all to ourselves! I May 1943 saw the end of my tour, little realising what was yet to be. I went home on leave, only to read in the I newspaper that I had been awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal along with my pilot and a rear gunner friend. I cannot remember when the investiture at Buckingham Palace took place, but I clearly recall the change in my father – he was actually proud of me.

Next, I was recalled, and sent to become an instructor at RAF Abingdon near Oxford. It wasn’t a very happy time after the camaraderie of squadron life, and I got into a few scrapes along with two buddies in the same boat as me – one Canadian and the other Australian, and we spent a lot of our time on bikes touring the area in search of remote pubs. We were disciplined occasionally – in my case made to sit in the rear turret of a Whitley while a trainee pilot practised “circuits and bumps” i.e. take-offs and landings without stop!

Escape came early in 1944, when I was interviewed regarding a transfer to another training unit- or possibly volunteering for a return to operations. They were looking for experienced men, so I jumped at it. Off I went to another newly built base at North Creake in Norfolk to join a young but inexperienced crew in 199 Bomber Support Squadron learning to fly Short Stirling bombers, yet another type of obsolescent aircraft. Now I ceased to be a Wireless Operator or an Air Gunner (the crew covering these duties) and was classified as a Special Operator (sounds like a James Bond title). In a way, it was an unorthodox position, in that I was not part of the 7-strong crew, but was a kind of passenger to be taken up by them to do duties in which they had no part. Having said that, we got on very well together in some very rough trips. The training ended on the day before D-Day, when the whole squadron took off and lined up along the English Channel and the Special Operators switched on their oscilloscopes, searching for traces of German radar stations in France. Once identified, we tuned in jamming machines on their frequencies in order to provide cover for the ships, parachutists and gliders employed in the invasion. We learned later that the Americans in particular were greatly pleased that we were responsible for a great reduction in their expected losses that night. Mind you, we were also castigated by the Royal Navy for apparently jamming most of their ship-borne radar equipment.

I went on to do 33 more of these jamming missions, mainly protecting the main bombing force at night by so confusing the Germans that they did not know where the main force was coming in - or even if there was a main force at all that night. I also did a further 13 operations of a different sort, involving a lot of manual labour in freezing conditions — still jamming the German radar system, but in another way.

These missions involved only a few aircraft loaded up with hundreds of bundles of aluminium foil strips wrapped in paper with a string lanyard, known as Window (not to be confused with Microsoft!). Once airborne I had to move all this lot along the fuselage to correct the centre of gravity – hard work .The planes had to fly on very accurate heights and speeds, and at a given signal the Special Operator had to pick up these bundles, rip the string and paper, and push the foil down a small chute between his legs, at the same time counting to himself so that each bundle went at four second intervals. The theory was that, if done accurately, these few aircraft would now appear on German radar screens as several hundred, and delude the ground forces that a large bombing raid was on the way, sound the sirens, scramble the Luftwaffe and alert the flak gunners. Meantime the main RAF bomber stream was approaching somewhere else, or was not even flying that night. Once we reached a certain point our activities ceased, and we turned round and retreated at great speed. I often wondered if the spoof really worked, or whether I toiled like a navvy in vain.

It all ended on completion of my third operational tour in March 1945 — 84 assorted missions in all over a spell of 3 years. I appreciate how lucky I was, looking at the statistics of the number of aircrew killed (I believe the average “life” was 25 trips) and the risks were not all because of the dreaded flak or night fighters. Accidents arose from the age of the aircraft, the poor weather forecasting particularly regarding fog, primitive navigation equipment, the blackout and mid-air collisions. I was now eligible for ground staff duties, and I was told that 3 tours qualified me for whatever job I chose. I quickly opted for air traffic control and went off to Air Ministry in London, only to be told they had something else in mind — helping with the demobilisation of those now eligible for release. I had to thank them on behalf of the RAF and give them advice as to settling into Civvy Street, particularly about getting their old jobs back. I went first to an old pre—war base at Uxbridge where elderly officers were being released, and you can imagine how I was laughed at when I offered “advice”. I have a wonderful memory of Uxbridge. My senior officer was “Pop” Makin, a real old stager with a chestful of queer medals from the First World War and even the Russian Revolution in which, as he told me, he dropped bombs by hand on to enemy ships! One day, he ordered me to accompany him up to Town, and into the Royal Aero Club in Piccadilly. At the bar, I met the world famous aviator from the early aviation days — Jim Mollison, who married the equally famous Amy Johnson. I played snooker with the Master of the King’s Flight and ate pigeon for dinner washed down with Algerian wine.

The RAF then saw sense, and posted me to do the same duties dealing with “other ranks” at RAF Kirkham (now an open prison). The site also contained a substantial RAF hospital caring for servicemen afflicted by the dread disease of tuberculosis, for which new drugs were just coming into use. There were quite a few Sisters there from the Princess Mary’s Royal Air Force Nursing Service, including a certain Sister A L G Robertson, who will feature largely from now on. I shared a room at Kirkham with a young doctor from Glasgow whose father and uncle were eminent ENT consultants at the Western Infirmary and elsewhere. At that time, the male patients were given a bottle of Guinness every day, and I would call on Hamish

sometimes, put on a white coat and visit a ward, where we would collect a couple of bottles from patients who didn't like the stuff and return to his office to drink their health.

A recollection from that time — one day Hamish and I went to the Opera House in Blackpool where the famous tenor Benjamino Gigli was giving one of his farewell recitals. I was disappointed when this little fat man walked on to the stage, but what a voice. We also had a most fantastic Christmas Dinner at the house of the manager of the Blackpool Co-op – being Scots we were the only officers on duty while all our English colleagues had gone home. Considering that food rationing was still strictly in force, the meal was out of this world.

My friendship with Sister "Robbie" was interrupted, when they sent her off to Germany to run a maternity unit set up to look after the wives of RAF personnel. Then, amazingly they decided to post me to the RAF base at Buckeburg which happened to be only about 7 miles from Robbie's hospital! Did somebody fix this? I never found out – but I certainly enjoyed it. We had some marvellous times there, despite me having sometimes to cover up my uniform occasionally when going through communities which had obviously been bombed during the war. We had an officers' club (in the local castle of course) and I now know why the British Raj was so disliked by the locals. We were eating the best of food while the local children were starving. I recall our German mess steward, a gentle elderly man of great manners who was fired for stealing some soup for his family. He was smuggling it out in the frame of his bicycle!

My work took me to other units, comfortably located in ex-Luftwaffe messes in one of which we were entertained by a group of musicians in a gallery playing Mozart. Their reward was a cigarette each – standard currency then. I scrounged a lift from one of these bases, flying in a tiny two-seater Auster. I offered to map read, but the pilot said "Don't have a map — I just follow the railway line". All good things come to an end and, despite 18 months deferment the RAF said "enough" and I flew back to Abingdon then by train to Kirkham again. Robbie was also on the plane going on leave, and spent part of the journey repairing my tunic sleeve which had been torn in a final game of Mess rugby, using a soda siphon as a ball!

A brief return to Kirkham to listen to the information I had given to all those others, receive my civvy suit complete with waistcoat and natty felt hat and, most importantly a gratuity paid into the bank. Incidentally, did anyone know that, as commissioned officers risking our lives every other night, income tax was deducted from our pay? I got the tax back many years later as "post-war credits". After a very indecisive period – "What do I do now? Where am I going?" it was suggested by a friend that I go down to the Employment Exchange to be sure of some money, so I went – and was immediately given a job as an enumerator going round the houses asking various questions dreamt up by the Scottish Office as part of a Town Planning Survey of Hamilton. My "colleagues" were in the main dedicated dole-scroungers so it was easy for me to outshine them and I was talked into staying on as a temporary civil servant in order to categorise and analyze the collected data. Back to working in Glasgow, in a dreary old building, and sharing the lift every day with even more scroungers – people on sickness benefit coming in to face an examining doctor and putting on some wonderful acts to ensure they stayed on benefits. Bad backs were the most common complaint, and it was really comical to see the bent figures coming in – and upright figures going out afterwards. The doctors plainly knew it was just a game!

Anyway, as the work there drew to a close, the man in charge of the office contacted his old boss who was now the Chief Medical Officer with the newly created branch of the National Health Service called the Western Regional Hospital Board. I was interviewed and realised that it was a bit of a chaotic organisation, not even knowing where all the hospitals they had taken over were! I was taken on like a shot at the noble salary of £265 per annum. Since I had been involved however tenuously in "planning" I became a clerical officer with the Chief Architect, and that started me off on a career completely tied up with alterations, extensions etc. at existing hospital and other health buildings, and the planning and construction of new hospitals and health centres both with the Hospital Board and from 1974 with Lanarkshire Health Board primitive organisation when it first started up. 38 years sewice in all and the highlight came in 1982 with my becoming a Member of the Order of the British Empire (I prefer to call it British Endeavour). The realisation that someone other than a top administrator could be chosen created a most fantastic swell of support I had throughout the Service and also from all the architects and other design teams with whom I had worked. I really didn't realise I had so many friends until then.

So it was up to Buckingham Palace for the third time, the first being paraded in front of King George VI for my DFM, and the second as a spectator watching Sister Robertson being invested by a very new Queen Elizabeth with the insignia of the Royal Red Cross (nothing to do with the International or British Red Cross, being purely a decoration awarded by the monarch to military nurses for outstanding work with war wounded servicemen). In Laura's case she was in the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service, both in RAF hospitals and later in the Casualty Evacuation Service flying home wounded soldiers from the Korean War. She had also been involved in the development of a device called the Monaghan respirator which allowed polio patients to be carried in an aircraft using the lower power of the plane and starter motors on the ground. The alternative at the time was the "Iron Lung", a massive piece of equipment. I think her work here contributed to her award. A remarkable woman, but I'm prejudiced, naturally.

We had a strange relationship I suppose for about 9 years. She was away in various places abroad then in hospitals in England while I was stuck in Burnbank with a public telephone a weekly contact or writing long letters. We met on the odd occasion when she was on leave at her parents house in Sunderland. We had talked about marriage, but the PMRAFNS code was very strict at that time - officers had to be single. Anyway, the authorities heard the rumours, and that brought her career to a close very abruptly. She wasn't really happy at the end, so there was no remorse. We were married in St Peter's Church in Monkwearmouth – a building going back in parts to the 9"' Century and associated with the Venerable Bede. Interestingly, the vicar at first said he couldn't marry us in his church because I was not a member of the Church of England. I showed him my birth certificate which showed on the reverse that I had been baptised in the Scottish Episcopal Church in Hamilton, part of the Anglican Communion and "quite acceptable" as he said. We had bought this house in Stonehouse in Lanarkshire and we moved in towards the end of January 1956 and never moved since.

Laura died in November 2003 and is buried in the Glebe Cemetery in the village as she wanted. A simple headstone with no fancy flowers or other embellishments. We had 47 years together (plus the 11 years from first meeting her!). We had no children, but we enjoyed getting involved with our nephews and nieces and with neighbours' children. Even today I have my 3 year old boy "pupil" from next door coming in for a discussion. To them I am simply Charles, but Laura was revered as "Auntie".

My outside interest was the Royal Observer Corps which was linked to the RAF, although the spotting role soon changed to a nuclear monitoring role. There was no pay – merely expenses of a frugal nature – but we had great camaraderie even under horrible conditions on overnight exercises. I served from 1963 to 1986, leaving with another medal to add to my collection and a certificate from the Lord Lieutenant of the County

My health has been reasonable over the years - some minor operations but one more serious thing happened in December 1970 when I was diagnosed as having a tumour in my left kidney and was operated on only a few days later in the Beatson Memorial Cancer Hospital in Glasgow. I recall sitting by the side of my bed on Christmas Eve when a "doctor's round" took place. The doctor this time was a huge Nigerian surgeon with chunks of white cotton wool stuck on his face to represent Father Christmas. He was slightly squiffy naturally but he grinned broadly as he dished out presents to the patients. His nurse assistants had got kind of mixed up between male and female wards, since my gift, on unwrapping, turned out to be a pair of black nylon tights! The other memory of that time was sitting in the day room and watching the infamous Ibrox disaster unfold on the TV.

And that is me up to date – stuck here for all those years in the same place and having no desire to wander off to exotic places. Apart from a couple of flights to Newcastle in the 1950sin converted WW2 military aircraft, I have never flown anywhere — never even been inside one of these new-fangled jets – nor had any notion to do so.

I've never owned a passport nor a credit card, have only recently acquired a CD player and digital radio, and am hanging on to my P registered Peugeot 106 — even if it is only used for local shopping. I must also be about the last person to become the owner of a computer, thanks to my nephew Jackie, and one day I shall learn how to use it properly!

I don't need much more, all I'm sure as a result of those early days "up a close" in Burnbank. You cannot get away from the experience of a weekly shower in the public baths, or helping your mother during her

weekly “turn” in the communal washhouse. My father would light the fire under a large copper boiler and then hours would be spent with sinks, scrubbing boards, mangles before she could hang the clothes out on the line or, if raining, on the pulley in the house. The latter item is being sold today as a “Victorian” airer. At the end of her stint, she would carry a pail of soapy water upstairs and get down on her knees and wash the lino floors in the house. She didn’t cook that evening — I was sent to Delgrosso’s for fish suppers instead.

My two brothers were born in such accommodation – hospitals were solely then for infectious diseases with surgical work being carried out in the infirmaries in Glasgow. I vaguely recall sitting on a wooden bench in the Royal Infirmary, then having a tonsillectomy, and being sent home that same day – quite barbaric. In the fever hospitals, patients were given numbers, and a bulletin was posted every day at the Town Hall listing those were in the various degrees of illness. My brother Jack was in Udston Hospital with a mastoid condition and remember dearly climbing the perimeter wall and crawling through the bushes to see and wave to him. Tuberculosis was rampant then so isolation was essential, and it wasn’t till was posted to Laura’s RAF hospital that I saw what a breakthrough was coming from the new sulphonamide drugs. The only treatment had been to put the poor patients out in the fresh open air, even when the snow covered them and giving them fresh milk and, in the case of male patients, a bottle of Guiness daily. I often went down to the hospital at lunch time to meet Hamish Young and enjoy a bottle rejected by the patient recipient. The change regarding TB was fantastically quick. when I first started with the Hospital Service there was at Hartwood Hospital a unit of 200 beds caring for mental TB patients from Lanarkshire alone. This was closed and a small 20 bed unit built to cater for the remaining patients from all of Scotland – and later I saw the closure of even that small unit and the remaining 2 patients transferred to a general hospital’s infectious unit. What a transformation! I hear recently that the disease is coming back, but I’m sure it will be controllable this time.

Talking about that small unit at Hartwood leads me to my present dismay about what has happened in hospital development. In my days it took 10 years or more to plan and build a new hospital like Monklands General, with crucial cost checks at regular stages, most involving severe cuts throughout the process. Today they bring in PPI – a system which allows outside interests to design and build within a very short period on a pay back system which will cost a lot of money later. Our two local new general hospitals have been built this way and I marvel at the finishes they have achieved – including fantastic landscaping which we would never have been allowed to provide. In passing, I found out that our Health Board has to pay a supply and service fee for all the American type water dispensers located in every department in the unit.

I think I’m becoming one of those “Grumpy Old Men” seen on TV. My latest gripe is about waiting times. Laura and I waited exactly a year (Govemment target) to be seen about cataracts then told to come back in three years time. Now I have to wait 6 months, not to see a consultant but to be examined by a “colo-rectal” nurse. How long after that before I get a prognosis I dread to think. I’ll finish here.

15 June 2005

My Stonehouse Story

Mary Hislop Somerville Gossman (D.A.)

An old word for Holy in German ‘Heiligt’, also means Healthy and on this little Crusade, there is an ascent, but no visible hills So, slow the pace, take a thankful breath of ice-cream moorland sir, and murmer “This is my own, my native land’’. “A refreshing tonic erects the body, clears the vision to observe, (in this, one of the oldest Parishes in Scotland, where the W. and S.W. storms abate in violence before reaching Stonehouse,) our Ancestors’ dwellings here. Precious, shapely little historic stones they are, left to us by the seas of time, yet in verdant, green surroundings “This fertile region, green with wood”.

Yes! As Stonehouse, halfway between Edinburgh and Ayr, was at one time referred to “Let us go to the Stanes”. In the shire of Lanark, and Parish of Hamilton lies this Vale of Avon, and its Tributary the Kype, one of the best trouting streams, meeting with the Cander Water, sunny memories to the music of the ripple of these burns, waving wild flowers on their banks, and coal, limestone, and sandstine, nearby. 320-450ft. above sea level, airy, neat and clean foundations of the handloom weavers of 1776 , builders of their dwellings.

Any little community is usually ringed by the Castles of old, so we hear of Robert Lockhart of Castlehill who encouraged spreading of the town, and its weavers to nearby Sandford village. The Douglas Family, Mowats, De Ross Family, and John, Lord Somerville, all of Coat Castle, and Ringsdale Castle, on the cliffs of Avon, also, a main artery of the surrounding “Gentry” represented in 4 Branches of the Hamiltons.

Necessary to the brain and nerve centre of a community, apart from the “Auld Stanehouse Fair”, school and Church should predominate: So Camnethan St. Public School was known locally as “The Dominie”, closed in 1947. A native of Stonehouse was William Hamilton D.D., (1780-1835) an eminent preacher of the Church of Scotland. Druid worship was the origin of Religion here, and the local Worship used to be held in groves of Sycamore trees (a compact firm wood used for the making of violins; a polished perfection when completed) then, in the 9th Century, the Church and graveyard was dedicated to St. Ninian, and the Bible Society carried on by Rev. Daniel Wilkie 1813.

So it is to extracts from the minutes of the Kirk Session of 1700, we turn to read over with interesting pleasure, names resident in the Parish, in days when it was dangerous to uote Robert Burns from the pulpit. We can see, and- hear them, coming-past the Old Smithy, along King sfreet, to the old Farme Cross. Robert, William, and James Muter of “High honour, and integrity”, John M. Walker, local Poet; even to the days of the Covenanters, and as always, they stood thus, or disscharged their daily tasks, with Spirit, tears, laughter, worry, concern, and Scottish staidness which carries us through. Hans Miller of D,ykehead 1683, Stewart, farmer of Tweedieside 1816. , Thomas Stobo of Hazeldean 1731, Robert Somerville, Craig, Walker, Gavin Stobo of Kittiemuir 1714. Weaver, baker, thatcher, smith, carter, and shoemaker, they all now in Spirit observe us, in our dairy farms, and fruit growing; perhaps discussing now about Tomatoes and Strawberries. Yes! they can hear us boast in 1967, “Tomatoes from Clydeside are not bettered anywhere”. Yet it was real handcraft, beautiful sewing and fine spinning of women, the staple trade, that brought money to the town. At least 500 Weavers were busy as bees at linen, cotton, muslin, gingham, wool and silk, at privately owned 4 or 6 loom weaving, so in this little pilgrimage let’s examine the threads of knowledge, as they weave into the present day picture, round the thought of historical Cam’nethan House (once the residenceof General Lockhart of Castlehill, then Dep. Lieut., of Lanark, to its namesake, beguiling Cam’nethan Street, like a “taut-thread”.

Neat clean, little Cottages now inhabited memorials to the days of 6 ft x 6 ft interiors industry. One can realize that there are no backdoors, in this trim little pattern street; even the “coalman” carries his wares in the front door. Neat little gardens, all to the back; even an old well therein. Best of all enter, feeling a little bit like “Mary in Wonderland”; through a small door to a compact interior, now divided, even a little upstairs. Back and front tiny low windows, ring of footsteps towards the front, roses tapping on window panes at the back9 Cinders large fluffy Persian pussy gazing in at us. Neat interiors, still retaining the feel of yesterday, painted China, flowers, knitting wool, needles laid down, and two of largest, fluffiest Persians indoors (if they had not moved I would have declared they were the new spun fluffy hand knitted teacosies).

To meet here, with the courage of age, over 70, yes, over 80 when these 4 words “A Happy New Year” is in itself a Prayer, it is a clinging memory of Spirit and education, to hear from a Scottish woman, in that village setting, in a language of another Land “Everything that’s good”. Yes! that is my impression of Stonehouse.