

# RECORDS & RECOLLECTIONS

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*Our lead article was written by Bill Mackie in 1972. It charts some of the history of the Presbyterian Schools at Glanton and Branton. The picture on the right shows the Board School at Glanton soon after it was built in 1873. It is interesting to compare it with the appearance of the same building on Page 2, taken more recently and incorrectly dated in its original handwritten caption.*

## SOCIETY NEWS

Our autumn season of talks so far has seen Phil Rowett from Berwick giving a lively description of some of the preparatory measures taken before and during WW2 to repel a potential German invasion of our coast – not such a fanciful possibility, even if it never materialized.

Then Hugh Dixon of the well-known Dixon Family of Whittingham and Rothbury fascinated us with details of the family's history and fortunes. Who knew, for example, that in the early 1800s Whittingham seemed almost not to feature on the County map while Glanton had as many businesses and tradespeople as much larger villages.

At the risk of replaying a broken record, your Society has still had no volunteers coming forward to join our dwindling committee. Eileen Robinson from Yetlington has very kindly joined the team sorting out the refreshments at our meetings, but we really do need one or two more willing brains to add ideas to our short twice-yearly committee deliberations. Could it be you?! We shall shortly be starting to plan our talks programme for 2017/18.

After the current November DVD presentation, we shall look forward to seeing you all at meetings when they re-start on 15th March with John Swanson's talk on the History and Gardens of Glanton Pyke. Programme details are on the final page.

Richard Poppleton (Editor)



## PRESBYTERIAN DAY SCHOOLS AT GLANTON AND BRANTON

*In our summer issue we published an article about Bill Mackie, vicar at Harbottle and later at Glanton, written for us by Sheila Richards, Bill's daughter. We are now able, courtesy of research by Michael Erben, to publish an article by Bill Mackie, rather than about him.*

*Michael Erben lives in Cambridge and has been a 'distance' member of A&BLHS for several years. His particular interest has been in the history of the Non-Conformist churches in our part of the world. Bill Mackie's article, which Michael Erben found, was in the May 1972 issue of the Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England. This is a précis of the original which was rather lengthy for our Journal, but we have endeavoured to remain true to Mr Mackie's original text.*

Glanton began its separate existence as a congregation by splitting from Branton in 1781. There was already a school in Glanton, but originally the building was part of the estate of Edward Anderson, a local landowner and Presbyterian, who gave the land on which the church and manse were built. In 1813 Edward Anderson's estate was broken up and sold and in 1820 the Church Trustees obtained from the new owners a lease of the school for 100 years.

The wording of the lease included the key passages that: "... finding that the said Schoolhouse is unfit for the Purposes of a Public School, have agreed with such assistance as they can procure to make

some Alterations and Improvements for the better Education of Youth therein .... " and "Upon Trust, as soon as the House has been repaired they shall appoint and nominate some fit and proper person to officiate as Schoolmaster therein and who shall be qualified to teach the English Language, Writing, Arithmetic and the Elements of Mathematics under such Prices and for such Time and for such Remuneration and under such Regulations as they or the majority of the Trustees shall think fit to impose and adopt."

Nothing further is known about Glanton School except that it continued to serve the village until 1873, when a Board

THE BOARD SCHOOL.      Opened 1876.





**Glanton School Pupils and Teachers with Mr Greig in about 1890**

School was established under the 1870 Education Act. The minister at the time, the Rev. R H Davidson, was an ardent educationalist and believed that the school needed greater resources than could be provided by the congregation, even with the help of grants from the Government and the Synod School Fund. The Glanton Board School is believed to be the second in the country to be founded under the 1870 Act. Mr Davidson was Chairman of the Board for 30 years until his retirement in 1903. The first school building still (*in 1972 – Ed.*) survives and part of it, having been used as a stable for many years, now houses the minister's car.

Branton School started a little later than Glanton and the date of its foundation is given by an entry in the congregational Treasurer's cash book: "1786, July 17<sup>th</sup>, To defray the debt for the Schoolhouse Building: £1-10-10". The normal running of the school must have been financed separately from the ordinary congregational income, for most of the entries in the accounts relate to repairs only; e.g. "1805, April 29<sup>th</sup>. Paid for thatching a part of the school – 5/0. 1840, To executing Mason and Plaster work of the school room - £23-4-8."

Only from 1846 onwards was an annual collection taken for the Synod School Fund. The Sunday School had been formed in 1816 and had always done better from its annual collection than the School Fund. In 1846 the School Fund collection produced £4-11-4¼, while the Sabbath School collection raised £7-8-2¼.

Nothing else is known until 1863, but from then onwards the history of Branton School is well documented. Copies of the Government Inspector's reports for 1863, 1864, 1865, 1868 and 1871 have survived, together with the head teacher's Log Books from 1876 to the present day. The 1863 report is encouraging: "[This school is very useful in Branton and district and is giving valuable instruction to the children who attend. Almost all presented for examination could well satisfy the requirements of the Code and the first group were also well versed in the geography of Europe. The master will shortly receive his certificate.](#)"

The average attendance for the year was 43; 33 children were presented for examination and 33 passed in reading, 32 in writing and 29 in arithmetic. 12 pupils at

evening classes qualified for Grant at 2/6d each and the total Grant awarded for the year was £20-11-2.

The 1868 report was not quite so good: "Considering the difficulty of teaching in the inconvenient schoolroom the children acquitted themselves creditably. No Grant can be allowed for the seven months when the school was under an uncertificated teacher. My Lords would like to see the school moved to more suitable premises." 35 were presented for examination. 29 passed in reading, 32 in writing and 24 in arithmetic. Amount of Grant claimed was £26-12-6; amount awarded was £13-6-1.

In 1869 the Managers were again urged to provide more suitable premises, but without result for, in 1871, the Inspector reported: "This schoolroom has the unenviable distinction of being the worst in my district. As there are upwards of 50 children in it, it is regretted that the managers cannot see their way to the erection of a more suitable premises." The room measured only 24ft by 18ft by 10ft high. The inadequacy of the premises made it hard to find good qualified teachers willing to teach in such conditions and this problem continued until as late as 1925 when responsibility was transferred to the County.

The unfortunate teacher in the late 1800s had other difficulties to contend with. The all-important grant allocation depended on the results of the annual examination and attendance and the former of these clearly depended to a considerable extent on the latter. Before school attendance became compulsory many reasons were recorded for children failing to attend. "1878, Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> Many children have left owing to a female teacher being appointed. June 14<sup>th</sup> Some of the half-timers have left for the summer work. Sept 16<sup>th</sup> Reopened after the holidays with only 9 children; the minister had failed to announce from the pulpit that the school was reopening. Sept

23<sup>rd</sup> Only 16 present; the rest are still harvesting. Nov 29<sup>th</sup> Brandon Bridge impassable and roads blocked by snow. Dec 13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Only 9 – 11 present all week because of heavy snow. 1879 Jan 10<sup>th</sup> Brandon Bridge still impassable."

The next H.M.I. report was unfavourable: "No infant qualified for grant; the exam results for the whole school in the Three Rs were decidedly bad; Grammar and Geography were a total failure; the only good subject was needlework; the out-offices were not properly separated – a separate place should be provided for the girls across the road." In addition the registers were found to contain fraudulent erasures. The next month the unfortunate Miss Cockburn left. She was followed by John Conacher, a former pupil-teacher, uncertificated. During his first year attendance rose to 50, but an unannounced visit by H.M.I. found him also guilty of falsifying the registers and he soon left. His successor, another pupil-teacher who was provisionally certificated decided to abandon fancy subjects such as Grammar and Geography in order to concentrate on Arithmetic whose pass rate the previous year had been only 34%. Teachers were torn between their desire to attract additional grant by offering extra subjects and the risk of losing grant by failing in the 3 Rs.

Throughout his 12 years at the school Mr Cowling, who did not see eye-to-eye with the Rev Blythe, complained that the Managers would not bother to visit the school from time to time to inspect the registers, thus imperilling the teacher's grant. He also took a dim view of the annual inspection by what he calls "The Synod" on the grounds that they did not confine their questions to religious matters, but poked their noses into everything. As soon as this Presbytery inspection was out of the way, all scripture teaching was abandoned in order to concentrate on the three basic subjects.

Many children coming to the school for the first time were illiterate, so the teacher had to spend a lot of time teaching them their letters, while the rest of the pupils were left to their own devices, assisted only by a monitor. Children were traditionally put into standards according to their age rather than their ability because parents objected if their child was kept down a year. But in 1886 Mr Cowling firmly decided: "Children in the first three standards who failed in 2 subjects last year or in one subject for two successive years are kept down so that better grounding will be possible."

Parents also created difficulties by withdrawing children because they were required to clean the building, although Mr Cowling claimed the children enjoyed cleaning the floor. He also had trouble with truancy: "1886, Feb 17<sup>th</sup> 15 boys away following the hounds. They will be punished by detention, extra homework and a stroke or two on the hands. March 29<sup>th</sup> 15 boys away after hounds; more effective punishment is called for."

Epidemic illness was a frequent cause of absenteeism: "1883, July 2<sup>nd</sup> School closed for two weeks because of fever. July 20<sup>th</sup> to Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> Closed for whooping cough." In 1898 the school was closed for seven weeks on account of measles.

Other absences were seasonal. Every summer some of the girls were kept at home to help with the hay and harvest and later with potato picking. The summer holiday was arranged to coincide with the harvest, but in a wet year this was prolonged and sometimes children did not return until October.

Snow storms in winter and heavy rain at any time could block roads or carry away bridges. 1890 must have been a very wet year: "Aug 15<sup>th</sup> Brandon bridge washed away; Brandon children had to make a

three mile detour to get home. Nov 6<sup>th</sup> Brandon bridge washed away again. Nov 21<sup>st</sup> Temporary bridge erected, but no handrail so unsafe for children. Dec 5<sup>th</sup> Bridge down again."

William Walton who succeeded Mr Cowling in 1894 decided to do something about the overcrowding. On Nov 26<sup>th</sup>, with the approval of the minister, he sent two classes out into the passage. There at least the air would have been fresher though the cold must have been unpleasant. After one week, however, the Deacons ordered all the children back into the schoolroom and kept the door locked, thus depriving them not only of the passage but also the upstairs room which had been used for sewing during the week and by the Sunday School. Mr Walton complained about this treatment and on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> won a great victory, being thereafter allowed to use not only the passage and the room upstairs, but also the vestry.

The following April, after a very good report from H.M.I., Mr Walton was awarded his certificate. About this time the government inspector began to press for the appointment of additional staff. Pupil teachers were employed, but did not last very long and in 1900 Mr Walton himself left for Wooler Presbyterian School – no doubt an easier sphere of service.

The next teacher, Mr Anderson, was a Presbyterian Elder. He had less trouble with absentees for by this time a School Attendance Officer was operating in the district. But his job was no sinecure. For almost eight years he was in sole charge of up to 45 children, nearly half of them below the age of seven, all in that same inadequately-sized schoolroom. Then in 1908 an infants teacher was appointed and the infants departed to the upstairs room. This was described in the 1908 report as: "Badly lit and ventilated, lacking in height and reached by a narrow, steep and dangerous staircase."

## Records & Recollections

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The Inspector had for some time been trying, without success, to get the Managers to carry out improvements to the building and in 1903 a deputation from the Presbytery strongly urged them to hand the school over to the County Council. The managers, however, decided that the school should retain its denominational character. It now took another 22 years, interspersed with involved and sometimes acrimonious discussions, before the new County Primary School was opened in 1925. By this time, and in fact for a number of years before, the schoolroom had reached a truly deplorable state. Once the new

school had opened the old building was converted to a house for the Church Officer, which function it still fulfils.

This is clearly a sketch of Branton School "warts and all", no doubt with undue prominence given to the warts, which makes more interesting reading than routine reports. The wonder is not that there were defects, but that a place as small as Branton was able to maintain a school at all for nearly 140 years. The village itself consists only of two farms, ten cottages, the church and a shop which closed in 1955.

*It would be good to have been able to include one or more old photographs or drawings of Branton School, but internet searches have not produced any images and our own Society Archives also lack any. The only relevant reference found comes from the 1855 "History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland" from which the section shown below at least makes reference to the Presbyterian Chapel and the fact that there was a school.*

*This pre-dates by eight years the reference made in Bill Mackie's article to the 1863 Inspector's report which was very favourable and which made no reference to any unsuitability of the school building. The rather strange layout of this section of the "History ..." has undoubtedly resulted from the original document being scanned into digital form and not subsequently corrected and tidied up.*

Branton is a township and hamlet, the property of Alexander Brown, Esq.
The township comprises an area of 1 1 47 acres, and number of its inhabitants
in 1801, was 108; in 1811, 100; in 1821, 111; in 1831, 110; in 1841, 119;
and in 1851, 102 souls. The Hamlet of Branton is situated on the south side
of the Breamish nine miles south by east of Wooler. Here is a Presbyterian
Chapel, erected in 1781; it is a neat stone edifice, and will accommodate
about 700 persons. The Rev. James Blythe, minister. <b>Attached to this</b>
<b>chapel, is a school which is respectably and numerously attended. George</b>
<b>Davidson, teacher.</b>

*Shepherding is a key feature of our part of Northumberland. The following article was written this past summer by a shepherd in South Northumberland in the Bellingham area, but there is little doubt that the experiences recounted will have been true for many shepherds and their families in this part of the county, as is seen from the photographs of the clipping at Hartside. The author writes anonymously under the byline "Hill Herd", but someone who knows who he is managed to get permission for the article to be reproduced in Records and Recollections.*

### FARMING NOTES

So at the time of writing the lambing is fading into a distant memory and a start has been made to sheep shearing, with a couple of local notables ably whitening the bulk of the stock hogs before their return to the hill.

It suddenly struck me how much the shearing job has changed in my lifetime. I am lucky that I can still remember the big 'neighbouring' shearing handlings of old. Hot summer days when a farm's flock of teens of hundreds of ewes were clipped with hand shears in two days. Shepherds young and old, and other men from neighbouring farms, together in one sheepfold – several men



1947 Hartside sheep clipping

shearing, some on the stool, most on the tarpaulin-covered ground at the top of the 'clipping green'. Others in the pens sorting lambs or catching 'roughies' to pass out to the waiting blades. The rhythmic snick, snick of the shears was never too loud to prevent cheery chat amongst the assembled throng, and sometimes jokes I couldn't understand. Occasionally the shout of "TAR!" got up and the tar pot was rushed to the source of the request to dress any nicks a ewe had suffered from the blades. The earthy smell of sheep's wool was constantly in the air, oft times mixed with the tang of pipe smoke.

With so many men arriving on the farm for this work, the women of the place were kept busy also, preparing lunches and dinners for the workforce. Everything from crockery to kitchen chairs were pooled together in the one place to aid the smooth running of the catering – every bit as important as the clipping itself.

Even though I was but an infant laddie, spending much of my time running about jumping on the woolsheets, often being told to "Keep away back frae thae shears, boy!", much of these days is vivid in my memory and I am glad of it.

Time wore on and the days of the neighbouring clippings came to an end. Shepherds were fewer and the old hands 'wearing awa'. Many farms opted to take on the services of professional machine-shearing squads. Others, like the farm I grew up on, bought the necessary equipment and the shepherds sheared their own flock. With less men at the job the work was still there to do. The click of the shears gave way to the thrum of electric motors and below where they turned, talk grew less as the shearers put all their concentration into the day's task. With no mass of incomers to

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feed, the clipping time was easier for the women of the farm. Years passed and the smell of the pipe smoke just wasn't there any more.

Even though I've been at it for roughly thirty years, I still regard myself as just a passable amateur at the machine shearing. One thing I do take a bit of pride in is the fact that I'm reasonably competent at hand clipping. I don't go out of my way to do too much of it, but it is a handy skill to have and I'm glad I was well taught it. Each time I bend to the task I regard it as a link to those days of long ago on the clipping green at the back of the dyke – the days of my Grandfathers.

"Hill Herd"



**Sheep clipping on tarpaulins c. 1950**



**The Hartside Clipping Team c. 1920**



*And then this autumn Hill Herd followed up with this beautiful, emotional evocation of the relationship between a shepherd and his old sheepdog.*

### A TIME TO GO

The 'Herd stepped up to the byre door  
His days first task, oft done before  
Was to louse the dog chains one by one  
And take out the collies for their morning run

Keen to be out in the dawning day  
The dogs all followed across the way  
Each took the stackyard gate in turn  
Ran twice round the meadow then lappit the burn

For a time he watched as they played and wrestled  
Then bade to gie out the 'Cry Up' whistle  
But stopped an' slowly turned to stare  
As the Auld Dog approached him, standing there

His tae nails clackit on the cobbles  
A slow sure gait gied whiles a wobble  
The grizzled face seemed worn wi' care  
As he snuffed awhile at the morning air

At last the 'Herd he turned to face  
Through tired eyes fixed him with queerlike gaze  
As the man looked down he at once did find  
'Twas like the dog did speak to him, in his mind

"When first me hameward ye did fetch  
I was but a pukin' shiv'rin wretch  
My mournful howl – heartfelt refrain  
For litter mates ne'er I'd see again

But cheer me ye did, wi' good plain gear  
And in time I was pleased to settle here  
Tae sit by the fireside whiles I was glad  
But mind – I ran for the door quick, the times I was bad!

In nae time at all I grew up big an' strong  
Wi' m cockit lugs, fu' ribbed an' long  
How I revelled in my puppyhood  
Those carefree days when life was good

Of course, I was nae pet for you tae keep  
I lived for the chance to run on the sheep  
An' ye'll permit me to say, my education  
Was while filled on baith sides wae much frustration!



"... a pukin' shiv'rin wretch"

D'ye mind that day upon the hill?  
When you would have me do your will  
Next time you gave the 'Wide Oot' whistle  
I damn near gathered half the Hirse!

From that day on you had me made  
Those months of learning, how they paid  
The bond 'twixt us grew to such an end  
We're nae such master and servant – more man and friend

Through winter snaws we hae travelled, and deep summer bracken  
From the first light of dawn 'til the day it would darken  
Whiles we'd sit by the Cairn, I'd hear your hopes and your fears  
An' I ne'er tell't a soul that I'd whiles seen your tears

But the years have rolled on now, I'm auld and I'm done  
These past months I've nae mind for work, play or fun  
The days when I ran on the steep braes – 'Way Wide'  
Are but distant memories in my failing mind

Nae more can I do all the things that I ought t'  
Like proud cock my leg by the gate to make water  
My bed board is hard now and my banes they are sair  
As time passes by I sleep mair and mair

I've ne'er asked ye for much, tho' this hurts, I can tell  
But I'd take my Last Rest down by yon Bottom Stell  
The soft peat my blanket for the place where I lie  
As o'er head flies the whaup, with his stark lonely cry



**"... I'm auld and I'm done"**

This is easy for me, for I am but a Collie  
A Man loves too much, maybe that is his folly  
But, ye can see it through your tear blind e'e, in the darkening clouds in mine  
It's time, Auld Friend. It's time ...."

"Hill Herd"

## THE BELLS, THE BELLS!



Shepherd's Law Chapel with the Bell Tower

Many local people will know Shepherd's Law, on the east side of the the main A697 road from Glanton. Some may have been up to the chapel or to see Brother Harold's home. But even if you haven't seen the buildings close up you may well have heard the bell which rings out at noon and 5.00pm every day when Br. Harold is at home.

In 2014 I went up to Shepherd's Law to find out about this bell. At Br. Harold's front door, just inside the enclosed cloister of the main building, there is a smaller bell which you can ring with its bell clapper to let Br. Harold know you are there. If you look at it you can see that it has the inscription:

LCT 4040 1945
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This bell was found in a reclamation yard and it was only fairly recently that Br. Harold discovered what it was. LCT stands for Landing Craft Tank. 4040 is the vessel's number given to it when it was built at Alloa in 1945. So this vessel would not have been present at the Dunkirk rescues in 1940. These ships were designed to carry troops, lorries and tanks and to land these on relevant stretches of coastline. 4040 was given a name – HMS *Bastion* – and it was involved in the Suez Crisis in 1956. In 1961 the newly independent Kingdom of Kuwait was threatened by its neighbour, Iraq, and LCT 4040 took part in Kuwait's defence. The photo shows the vessel on a Kuwaiti beach. It was sold to Zambia in 1966 and there its known history ends.



When I spoke to Br. Harold he quoted me a passage from the Book of Common Prayer:

*“And the curate that ministereth in every Parish-Church, or Chappel, being at Home and not being otherwise reasonably letted [prevented], ..... shall toll a Bell thereto, a convenient Time before he begin, that such as be disposed, may come to hear God’s Word and to pray with him.”*

When Shepherd’s Law Hermitage was being built, Br. Harold was on the look-out for a suitable bell that he could use to fulfil this requirement. In the early ‘90s he spotted an advertisement for a disused church bell in St Magnus Church at Bessingby, near Bridlington in Yorkshire. When the old St Magnus Church was pulled down and rebuilt in Gothic style in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the new bell tower wasn’t strong enough to take the big 4cwt (203kg) bell.

So this magnificent bell, which was cast in York in about 1500, stood unused and unwanted for more than 100 years. But when it was suggested that it should be moved to Bridlington Museum, the Diocese of York disagreed and began to seek a home for the bell where it would be used for its proper purpose. Br. Harold applied and, after a two-year wait, was given a long-term loan. One of the conditions was that he must make an annual report to the Diocese on the condition of the bell.

He had to have a bell tower built that was strong enough to take the weight of the bell, and this involved a professionally-built steel girder construction in which the bell, with its pulley wheel ringing mechanism, was hung. At the moment, as can be seen from the photographs, the lower half of the bell tower is open, but eventually Br Harold hopes to get this enclosed.



A smaller, but similar bell after restoration



The St Magnus Bell in its tower at Shepherd's Law

Some people assume that because the bell came from St Magnus, this must refer to St Magnus Cathedral on the Orkney Islands, but this appears not to be so. Nevertheless St Magnus, Bressingham is one of only three English churches dedicated to this saint and it is interesting to know a little of St Magnus's story which we glean largely from old Norse Sagas.

Towards the end of the 11th century the Orkney Isles were jointly ruled over by three cousins - Hakon, Paulson and Magnus. On his way to raid Ireland King Magnus Barefoot of Norway collected the cousins to assist him in his battles. During the Battle of the Menai Strait, Paulson was killed leaving Hakon and (our) Magnus to rule jointly over Orkney. Magnus, a peace-loving man, refused to lift a sword, preferring to stand to one side and to chant psalms from the Old Testament.

When the King of Norway died Hakon was proclaimed Earl of Orkney and for the next few years he and Magnus ruled together uneasily. Hakon determined that their joint rule must end with himself as the sole ruler of the island. A conference was arranged on one of the islands and it was accepted that each man would attend with only two ships and their crews. Magnus came with the agreed number of ships and men, but Hakon cheated and brought with him eight ships fully manned.

Magnus retired to the little church on the island to pray and to seek sanctuary. Hakon's men stormed the church and found him hiding. After much discussion Hakon's followers demanded the death of Magnus. Hakon's cook, Lifolf, was called to behead him. The Saga says 'he signed himself with the cross and bowed himself for the stroke and his spirit passed into heaven'.

*Richard Poppleton*



**Brother Harold tolling the bell**

### THE SHEPHERDS



**The Shepherds in 1987**

In 1964 a teenage Alistair Anderson attended his first Alnwick Gathering. The event began with a big concert in the Great Hall at the Castle. By about 10.30pm people moved to the Northumberland Hall for the dance, while the competitions began in the Town Hall on the adjacent side of the Market Place. It was usual for the musicians who were due to play competitively to join a massed band, led by

The Cheviot Ranters, to play for the dance, with the individuals being called out to go across and play in the Town Hall for the judges as the competitions progressed.

All of this took a very long time, so that the dance lasted more or less all night. Some of the keenest participants amongst the dancers were the miners from Shilbottle. The younger ones were there in drape jackets and crepe-soled shoes, but unlike the Teddy Boy image, from the late 1950's, of sullen aggressive youths from the south of England, these fashionistas threw themselves with great enthusiasm into all the old dances like Strip the Willow and Dashing White Sergeant.



**Will Atkinson**

This event was the first time that Alistair, who lives at Mount Hooley by Whittingham and is a renowned local accordion player, came across Will Atkinson who was a founder member of the Cheviot Ranters. Will at that stage was already 56. He was born at Crookham and had variously lived at Lucker, Titlington and East Lilburn. Later, for 30 years until his death in 2003, he and his wife Bella lived at Broome Hill in Glen AIn, west of Alnwick.

Will once recalled memories of his younger days at Crookham:

*"In those days the population was so different. Each stead was almost a village. You might have 10 ploughmen, 2 shepherds, 2 spademen – who did ditching, fencing and general work – a Turnip Dick – a young lad who led turnips to feed the sheep – plus a steward and a ploughman steward. Most of these had families who also played their part in the work of the farm so you had quite a few folk living there and nearly always there were some who could play something. After work you would get washed up and then gather at the corner end for a bit of crack and some music – sometimes even a dance.*

*Then on a Saturday night you might walk along to Wooler for a dance – that's about 6 miles each way. Of course, if there was a gang of you, you would be chatting as you went along, constant leg-pulling, so it didn't seem far."*

Will Atkinson had played the harmonica as a child, but for much of his life his main instrument was the button accordion, but in the 1970's he took up the mouth organ again. The story goes that he bought one for his son James one Christmas, but when Will discovered it on the mantelpiece several weeks later, still unused, he appropriated it for himself and found this 'moothie' to be "a good'n". He did continue also to play the button box for many years, but focused on the harmonica as his fingers stiffened in later years.

Unlike a chromatic harmonica, the diatonic mouth organ plays in only a single key. Because of this there are many tunes that theoretically can't be tackled on the single instrument because of their key changes. The measure of Will Atkinson's mastery of the instrument was such that he could find harmonic alternatives which even the best-tuned listener would find almost impossible to tell were not the notes as in the score. But Will's real skill lay, as with all great traditional musicians, in bringing these apparently simple pieces to life through very subtle use of

timing, dynamic and decoration, shaping each musical phrase to draw the listener in. At one concert where Will Taylor and his fellow musicians were sharing the platform with the classical musicians in the Lindsay String Quartet, the leader of the quartet, Peter Cropper, was heard to say, during one of Will's solos: "that is greatness".

Will Atkinson achieved great success on his moothie at competitive events both in Northumberland and in Scotland – his trophy cabinet at home was proof of his success as a soloist. But Will and his fellow shepherds, Joe Hutton on the Northumbrian Pipes and Willy Taylor on the Fiddle, were asked to perform at various folk festivals across the country and became a regular feature of Whitby Folk Week. After a few years of entering all three names in the programme each time they played the organisers started referring to them as *The Shepherds* and the name stuck.

Will Atkinson, in his working life, was not solely a shepherd. He began at a farm near Pegswood, working with the heavy horses as well as sheep, but he soon returned to North Northumberland as a shepherd. However with five children to provide for he set up as a rabbit catcher, continuing to help out as a shepherd at lambings and other busy times. Rabbit catchers would come to a contractual arrangement with individual farmers to control their rabbit pests. When the animals were removed from the traps the catcher would gut and skin them and sell them to local butchers. In Will's case he had a lucrative arrangement which involved emptying the traps in the morning; preparing the carcasses; packing them in large wicker baskets; getting them on a late night train from Ilderton Station and they would be available to the butchers in Leeds by 5.00am the following morning. Will said: "if it hadn't been for the myxy I might have been able to buy me own house".

After the rabbit trade ceased Will went to work for the Council and was responsible for checking, repairing and renewing the road signs in North Northumberland. It is likely that some of the signposts now being restored by people like the Glanton Heritage Group and

by Lawrence Goodfellow in Bolton would have been erected or maintained by Will Atkinson. *"From the top of Billsmoor to the coast, from Wooperton to Longfram and right down to the coast. Back by Doxford, North Charlton, all the minor roads and the A1 from North Charlton to Felton, all those signs, I changed them all twice."*

Willy Taylor, on the other hand, was a lifelong shepherd. Born at Lilburn, he worked as a young man at High Bleakhope with Geordie Armstrong. Geordie was also a fiddle player and the two of them spent hours whiling away the long winter nights learning new tunes and going over old favourites until they achieved just the 'lift' they wanted. Willie played almost exclusively in his own community, walking miles over the hills to play at village dances. These would last all night until it got light enough to walk home the following morning, arriving back just in time to start the new day's work.



**Willy Taylor**

Later on, while Willy was shepherding at farms in Coquetdale, a man called Askew from Berwick owned a number of the farms. He liked to play backing piano behind the local fiddlers and he even built a dance hall at Windyhaugh. A week before each of the dances he would send his Rolls Royce into the valley to collect the musicians to go to Berwick to practise. The men, of course, had to get themselves down from their cottages to

the road to be picked up and when they were brought back late at night had to walk back home from the road. But at least each was given a bottle of Antiquarian Whisky to keep them happy.

Willy learned to play the fiddle as a child, but, still in his teenage years, he lost the final two joints on the forefinger of his left hand in a farm accident with a turnip slicer. The left hand, of course, is the fingering hand on the strings, and therefore he was having to do with three fingers what everyone else did with four. YoYo Ma, the world famous cellist, saw Willy playing in the Artists Bar at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and was amazed, saying that Willy's left little finger must be the strongest around. But for those with an ear for such things it becomes clear that Willy's tunes usually don't go higher than an A, or rarely a B, because it was such a stretch for him.

Aly Bain, the Shetland fiddle maestro and leader of the Transatlantic Sessions series in recent years on BBC 4, once described Willy as "the best jig player he had ever heard". His technique was very different from that of most good fiddlers. He achieved much of his attack by the use of very strong up-bows at points where most fiddlers would use a down-bow, which gave his music remarkable rhythm.

Not only were Willy Taylor and Will Atkinson cousins, but Willy had another cousin who lived at the now derelict Lantern Buildings at Bolton and whose son is David Taylor from Percy's Cross on the A697 north of Powburn. While at Lantern Buildings, David Taylor's father was also a rabbit catcher by trade. And Will Atkinson was still helping out with lambing at Percy's Cross when he was in his late 70s and early 80s. It's all wheels within wheels in a rural area like ours.

The third of the trio, Joe Hutton was also a lifelong shepherd. His work was at The Trows and Rowhope farms in Upper Coquetdale – land that goes right up to Windy Gyle on the Border Ridge. When Joe's wife Hannah was being interviewed for a BBC documentary on shepherding she described a day in the bad



winter of 1962/63. Joe appeared almost frozen to death, with a sheet of ice so thick across the front of his coat that she couldn't chip it off. She had to soak a towel in boiling water and beat the ice sheet with it until she got it to crack sufficiently to remove the coat and all the rest of his soaking wet semi-frozen clothes.

Joe was born at Halton-le-Gate near Brampton in Cumberland, although the Huttons were historically a large reiving family from the North Tyne area. His wife Hannah was a Robson – another family name with strong reiving connections. He was taught to play the Northumbrian Smallpipes by a noted Hexham piper called G.G. Armstrong – another reiving family name. Yet Joe himself was a gentle man who commanded great respect from those who knew him personally and those who came into contact with him through his music.

I shall say nothing more about Joe Hutton in this article because the following pages are a transcript of a piece Joe wrote himself for the Northumbrian Pipers Society in the early 90's.

All three of the Shepherds are now dead. Joe Hutton died in 1995 at only 72. Willy Taylor died in 2000 at 84 and Will Atkinson, the oldest of the three, died in 2003 aged 95.

There is no doubt that Alistair Anderson formed a very close musical bond with the three men and that this was mutually beneficial. Alistair's influence helped ensure that their music reached a much wider audience than would otherwise have been the case and being able to play with them over nearly three decades has had a profound effect on his own

style of playing and his whole approach to music.

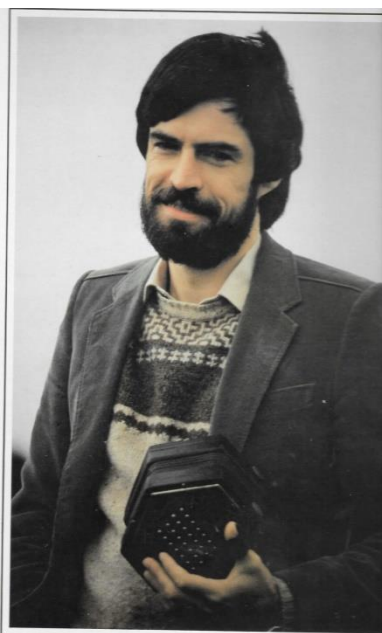
Often, when Will Atkinson produced a new tune "straight oot the top of ma heed", as he often did, Alistair would be there with his tape recorder to ensure it endured. He would also "set the tunes oot to dots", which he did on one particular occasion when Will was 93 and Will called the tune *Ninety Three Not Out*.

As Alistair took them around to different venues they became better known outside our own area and were asked to make recordings. Alistair managed to get funding for two of their recording projects. He would take the trio to perform concerts far afield; the one where they shared the programme with the Lindsay Quartet was in Stoke-on-Trent. But they also played at London's South Bank and at festivals from Cambridge to Lerwick, from Sidmouth to Whitby. As well as being so central to Alistair's own music, The Shepherds

had a significant influence on other younger musicians such as Katherine Tickell, Nancy Kerr, Sophy and Emily Ball and many more.

So an era passed in Northumbrian music with the death of the three shepherds, but their influence continues. The compositions of Willy Taylor and Will Atkinson are heard at music sessions throughout the country. Jimmy Little and several other musicians of the generation immediately after theirs are still very active and, with both Kathryn Tickell and Alistair Anderson teaching folk music at the university and Alistair's

mentoring of young musicians throughout the county and beyond, the music and traditions of *The Shepherds* will live on into the future.



Alistair Anderson in 1987

*Richard Poppleton, with much help from Alistair Anderson, to whom many thanks.*

### A SOUND OF THEIR OWN

by Joe Hutton (written in 1990)



Joe Hutton

In 1956 Hannah and I came to live at Shilmoor, where I herded Cheviot sheep; but I much preferred Blackface sheep, and so in 1959 we moved on to Rowhope. I was in charge there, and on my own, which I liked. I was working for the Telford brothers. I loved being in the hills. It was about 1000 acres, rising from 800ft at the house to over 1200ft. It was steep ground. I had 700 sheep to look after – you could say roughly 30 score. That's how shepherds go, by the score.

I had started to play the pipes in 1936. My father was a fiddle player and he used to play at local dances. Now he knew where there was a set of pipes, but they weren't in working order. He got the loan of them and we took them down to George Armstrong, the pipe tutor and maker at Hexham, to get them renovated.

It was a very old set, in ebony and brass; probably about 1810; a seven-key chanter with three drones. When we went to collect them I put the bellows on and took hold of the instrument. I got a note out of them from the start. George Armstrong said I had a good shape to play and so I

started going to him once a month for lessons in the winter time. I won my first competition in 1936; that was at Bellingham Show, the under-15 class.

When the war came there were no competitions at all, and indeed I played the pipes very little for about ten years. The big farms had barn dances to raise money for the Red Cross, but the pipes weren't included in the bands because they were pitched in C and F. Instead I played an accordion and sometimes the fiddle. Nowadays they are making pipes in concert pitch. They have the same fingering but you're playing in D and G.

The pipes were very popular from about 1950 to the mid-60's, and there was a lot of competitions – at Bellingham, Rochester, Alnwick, Hexham and Newcastle. Then it just died down and there was hardly anybody playing, for the simple reason that they couldn't acquire the instruments. George and Jack Armstrong of Wideopen were both pipe makers, but they didn't make a lot of sets, maybe three or four a year. Nowadays David Burleigh at Longframlington aims to

make a set and a half or two each week, to name but one maker.

In 1973 the Alnwick branch of the Northumbrian Pipers' Society had an idea that they would buy three sets from David. People could come along and try them and I would give them lessons. After a few months, if they couldn't play they just handed them back and if they could play they bought them. We soon had a long waiting list. At first people came from as far as Edinburgh, but now we keep it to a 25-mile radius of Alnwick.

The Northumbrian pipes have a sound of their own. They're the only pipes in the world that have a closed, stopped end. That different sound you get, the bubbling sound, is when you lift a finger and get a note, then put it down to get another note. You can actually play staccato which you cannot on any other pipes.

The set I play now, in ivory and silver was made at Sewingshields on the Roman Wall by Thomas Errington Thompson. The bag is leather covered in velvet. Years ago it might have been canvas. A chanter now can have 7, 9, 12, 14 or 17 keys. Mine is 17. In the 1850's/60's James Reid of South Shields, Eric Thompson and Batey of Wark all got together and masterminded the 17-key chanter. It gives you more notes.

It's maybe just a coincidence that quite a few pipers have been Coquet men: Jamie Allan, Billy Pigg, Archie Dagg, John Armstrong. I'd come across John at Alnwick for the competitions. A good fiddle player and piper, he lived at Carrick, and when I first came through to Coquetdale I went along there to a piping-music night. Tommy Breckons, Archie Dagg and Billy Robson were there and John had Billy Pigg over that night. Billy wasn't playing; he'd just come along to listen; but after that night, hearing the



**Billy Pigg**

pipes again, it started him playing. It revitalised him.

At one time pipers never played in groups; they were mainly soloists. A lot of this speed stuff comes from that – they played pretty fast. You begin to play slow stuff as you get older! When Hannah first knew me I played very little slow music. Nowadays I love the waltzes and the slow airs.

What's written in the music books is only the backbone of the tune. I don't play them exactly the way they're written. Pipers especially can do little bits of things with tunes that other players cannot. You sometimes put in an extra note, or a little run-in here and there. That's a thing that comes to individual pipers.

Billy Pigg had a big influence on younger players and quite a lot tried to play in the Billy Pigg style; but style depends on the player. I would reckon that I play a dance tempo. I learnt to dance at an early age and I like to keep a good rhythm.

I hardly ever play the pipes outside – they've got no sound. I would sometimes play on the front at Rowhope on a fine day, but there are just certain sorts of day that suit them. A bit rain or moisture and you're in trouble straight away. It's a dry reed, you see. The bagpipes now, that's a wet reed.

If I played at home at nights it wasn't from sheet music. When I learnt tunes, like "Hexham Races" from my father, I learnt to play them on the pipes by ear. A good example of this is Will Atkinson, the mouth-organ player, who cannot read a note of music. He carries it all in his head – at 82!

Now, as for Willy Taylor and myself, if there's a hornpipe we've forgotten, we look through a music book to sort it out,

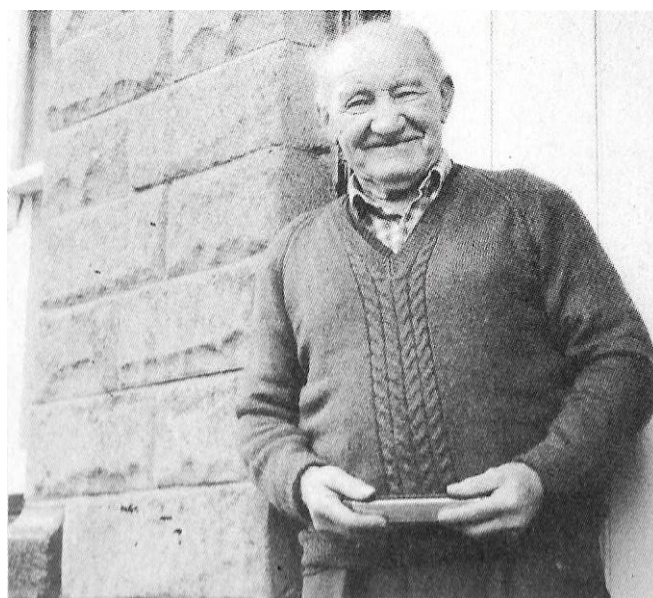
but Will cannot. It takes a lot of doing. The real traditional music was handed on from father to son, player to player, but now they're all written down and it's better to learn the old original tunes from the books.

When I was first playing and shepherding you did your work through the day and, if you had a music night probably you walked five or six miles over the hills. Nowadays travel's such a lot easier and, since I retired, I actually have the chance to go away, even down to London – well it's nothing nowadays. And when we do play at the South Bank in London there's a tremendous reception. They really love the music.

I wouldn't like to be on the road every day and every week, but I quite enjoy the odd festival, and we do a few folk clubs in the North East.

The Northumbrian pipes are world-wide now – about thirty sets in Sydney, some in the USA, Canada and on the Continent – Germany and France. At the turn of the century the pipes were a Northumberland instrument and I don't think they went very far out from here.

In those days Hall of Hedgeley made the pipes for Hannah's great-grandparents up at Milkhope. Their daughter, Hannah's great-aunt, started playing in her early teens. She was obviously a good player and she played at Alnwick for Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. In later years she was known as Piper Mary, and she's still talked about, though there's nothing much known about her really. In those days it was all men pipers and musicians. That's quite a lot of women playing now, but way back I think she'd be the only one.



**Will Atkinson at 80**

### FORMER ALNWICK TO CORNHILL RAILWAY BRANCH

*In the previous two issues of Records & Recollections we published Parts 1 and 2 of the full text of Mary Brown's article about the history of the Alnwick to Cornhill railway. We are indebted to Mary's nephew Alan Brown who lives in the USA for providing this material for publication. We left the story after the heavy construction work to create the line during the years 1884 to 1887. This third part of the saga takes us from the official opening of the line in 1887 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.*

#### PART 3

So we reach September, 1887 when the following announcement appeared in the Newcastle press:

**“North Eastern Railway  
Opening of the Alnwick to Cornhill Branch  
On Monday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, the Alnwick and Cornhill Branch was opened for  
general traffic, and the service of passenger trains will be as under...”**

Unfortunately, the press cutting ended there. However, I have a Photostat copy of the original time table for the Branch which I obtained from the Keeper of the Railway Records at York.

There were three trains each day, except on a Sunday when none ran. In the following few years, the time tables were slightly changed, as I have a copy of a press cutting for 1892. There were then four trains from Coldstream (or Cornhill) to Alnwick, and three running in the other direction. A special was run on a Saturday afternoon; passenger fares were 1d per mile!

From the issue of the first timetable, the station originally named Lilburn was recognized as Ilderton. It is interesting however that Alnmouth Station was at that time known as Bilton. I don't know when it was changed to Alnmouth.

#### DAY 1

From the Northumberland Gazette Office I obtained the following story of the first trains on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1887:

“The first passenger train to run the entire route left Cornhill at 6.30 a.m. on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1887 and arrived at Alnwick at 8.18, thus taking one hour and forty minutes for the journey. The first train from Alnwick ran on the morning of the same day, leaving at 8.35 a.m. About 100 passengers travelled on this train, boarding the coach at Alnwick and other stations along the Branch line.

Alderman Adam Robertson was the first passenger to book from Alnwick on the new line. He was one of a party of members of the Local Board of Health who had engaged a saloon for the journey. They were the moving spirits in pushing the railway scheme and the idea was to celebrate its accomplishment in a free and happy sort of way, for they had a feast at the end of the programme.

Other “city fathers” aboard were L. Ainsley (Chairman of the Local Board), J. Bolam, J.L. Newbigin, Chas. Percy, W. Turnbull, G.E. Watson, W. Robertson, J.J. Horsley, Luke Scott, G.S. Smart and M. Armstrong.



**Wooler Station in 1887**

Some hundreds of townfolk watched the train leave the splendid, brand new station on the 35¼ mile journey. The only tunnel – a quarter mile long – was on the approach to Whittingham.

Flags were displayed at Wooperton and Akeld, the only places along the line where bunting was put out. Familiar Alwick faces were noticed at Edlingham and Ilderton where Mr. H. Harrison and Mr. W. Bird had just stepped into the stationmasters' uniform.

Wooler bridge and Station were crowded with people. Cornhill was reached in just over an hour and a half. On the return journey, a halt was made at Wooler and the party of Alwick public men dined at The Cottage Hotel where Mr. Thomas Binks was “mine host”.

There was some speaking in a manner befitting the event: “success to the Alwick and Cornhill Railway and prosperity to the district through which it passes” was proposed by Mr. Adam Robertson.

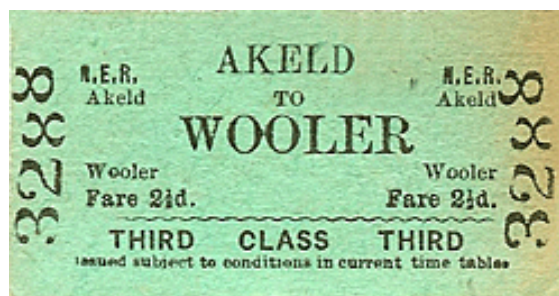
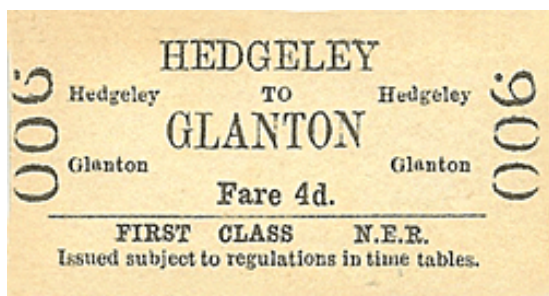
Mr. Chas. Percy proposing the Town and Trade of Alwick said that had it not been for the perseverance of the tradesmen of Alwick as represented by the Board of Health there would have been no railway from Alwick to Cornhill”.

### **THE EFFECT OF THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY**

One can scarcely imagine the difference the opening of this railway must have had to the lives of practically everyone within a few miles of it. It quite obviously sealed the doom of the stagecoach which previously had been the only means of travel for the people. We have a Mrs. Jane Brown (no relation) now living in Whittingham, who travelled from Lilburn to Wooler in the stagecoach in the 1880s. She was one who was eventually able to use the railway.

While such places as the Castle Inn at Whittingham must have lost a lot of trade – stagecoaches had stopped there, but the railway station was 1½ miles away – the Bridge of Aln Hotel must have seen greatly increased activity.

Grain, cattle and anything to do with the agriculture made up the main goods traffic on the branch and, as well as passenger trains, one goods train ran between Alwick and Wooler each day.



MART A direct result of the railway was the setting up of an auction mart near the Bridge of Aln. It is a little story in itself, which I obtained from Mr. Cecil Turnbull of the Alnwick Farmers' Livestock Auction Co.

HORSES All the estates and "big" houses kept lots of horses. Among them was Mr. Adam Scott of Alnham, whose race horses were sent by rail to all parts of the country from Whittingham Station. His horse Jazz Band (he won the Northumberland Plate in 1924) was perhaps the most famous.

PITS It brought about the death of many small local pits as coal began to come into the area to the stations. The sale of coal and coke became one of the perks of the station masters – quite a lucrative one, too, I believe.

Of course, the railway brought other types of employment. Staff at stations consisted of a Station Master, at least one clerk (Wooler would probably have two – Alnwick would get additional staff), porters, signalmen and plate-layers.

BUSINESS PEOPLE in the area used the railway a lot, as did tradespeople in Alnwick, who came out into the country with their goods and met their customers in their own homes. Even the Salvation Army (women members) brought out all manner of hand-made clothes, and went from door to door in the villages selling their goods.

POSTMEN Among those who used the railway in the early days was Postman Robert Rutherford of Alnwick. Born in 1874, he entered the postal service as a messenger in 1888, and became a rural postman three years later.

Mr. Rutherford travelled every day from Alnwick (about 8 a.m.) on the Alnwick to Cornhill branch, leaving the train at Ilderton with his mail, walking to such places as West Lilburn, Lilburn Grange, Chillingham Newton, Hepburn Bell and Quarry House. He was always at Chillingham Castle at mid-day where he joined the staff for a meal. His colleague who delivered to the Chatton area also managed to be there for a meal and short rest.

Mr. Rutherford then re-covered his district, collecting letters. There were no letterboxes as we know them, and people stuck their letters for collection in their windows for the postman to see as he passed.

The article from which I got this information does not mention the return journey of Mr. Rutherford, but obviously he would join a train in the late afternoon to get back to Alnwick.

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## Records & Recollections

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ALNWICK SCHOOLS Children from Wooler and the villages began travelling to the Dukes' and Duchess's Schools in Alnwick. They were very long days – for example – walking 1½ miles to Whittingham Station to catch the 7.40 a.m. train to Alnwick. Leaving Alnwick at 6.50 p.m., arriving at Whittingham Station at 7.16 p.m., and then walking 1½ miles back to the village.

COMMUTER TRAVEL People were able to take jobs in Alnwick as they were able to return home each evening. In 1921 the train departed Wooler at 7.10 a.m., Whittingham at 7.42 a.m. and arrived at Alnwick at 8.10 a.m. The return journey departed Alnwick Station at 6.50 p.m., arriving at Whittingham Station at 7.16 p.m. and Wooler at 7.54 p.m.

From the Press: “One of the main occupations of Wooler folk on a Sunday night was to wander down to the station and see the arrival of the last train”.

*{Mary Brown's note says – “but I have not found a timetable showing a train on a Sunday! Someone may be able to solve that little problem for me some time”.}*

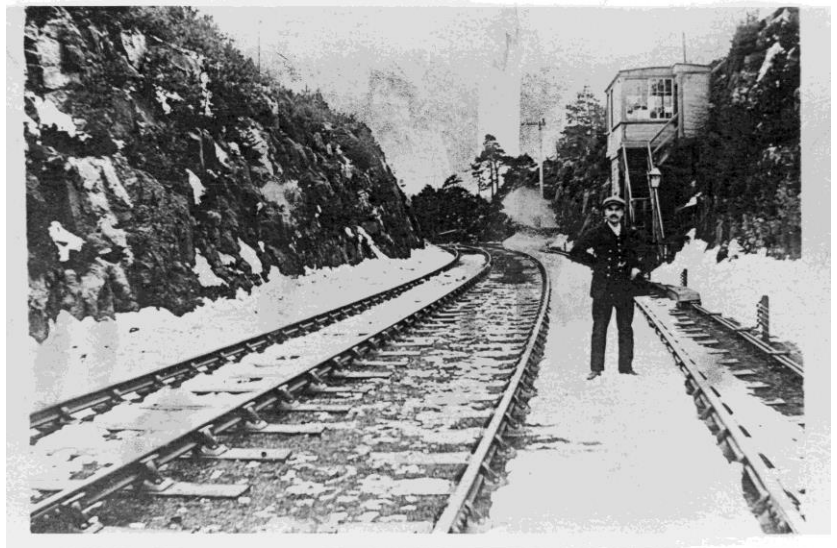
### PASSENGER TRAFFIC FIGURES

I obtained some interesting traffic figures for Whittingham which show what a busy little station it must have been.

In 1894	8,510 passengers	...	Receipts	£988
In 1919	8,562 passengers	...	Receipts	£1,573

### GETTING OVER THE SUMMIT

There were indeed problems in getting some of the goods trains over the summit. The gradient was 1 in 40. A maximum load was laid down for the trains between Alnwick and Whittingham. Station Master Watson recalls the tonnage to be 3,500, and many times when the weight was in excess of this, two engines were used to pull the train “up and over” the top. At other times, trains were split at Alnwick or Whittingham, and the engine had to return for the remainder of the trucks.



Summit Signal Box (Closed 1911)

### SINGLE LINE

The branch was as you know a single line. The only passing place for a train between Alnwick and Wooler was at Whittingham where there was an island platform.

There are I believe three types of signalling systems for single lines, ours was the Absolute Block System. Some of you may recall seeing a signaller and driver exchanging a staff (like a policeman's truncheon) or tablet (a circular metal with a pouch-like contraption). The system was based on the use of token instruments, two of which are required for each



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section (a section was between two signalling cabins). These instruments were electrically connected in such a way that once a token had been extracted, no further token could be extracted from either cabin in that section.

Bradshaw July 1922 **ALNWICK and COLDSTREAM. —North Eastern.**

Down.				Week Days only.				Up.			
Miles		mn	ft.	mn	ft.	Miles		mn	ft.	mn	ft.
	<b>Alnwick</b> .....	dep. 8 27	1 50	6 42			<b>Coldstream</b> .....	dep. 6 38	10 40	4 29	
7	Edlingham .....	8 47	2 10	7 2	3 1/2	Mindrum ** .....	6 47	10 49	4 38		
10	Whittingham .....	8 53	2 16	7 8	8	Kirknewton .....	6 56	10 58	4 47		
11 1/2	Glanton .....	8 58	2 21	7 13	11	Akeid tt. ....	7 2	11 4	4 53		
13 1/2	Hedgeley .....	9 3	2 26	7 18	13 1/2	Wooler .....	7 10	11 14	5 3		
15 1/2	Wooperton .....	9 9	2 33	7 25	17 1/2	Ilderton .....	7 19	11 23	5 12		
18 1/2	Ilderton .....	9 17	2 41	7 33	20	Wooperton .....	7 25	11 29	5 18		
22 1/2	Wooler .....	9 27	2 51	7 43	22 1/2	Hedgeley .....	7 30	11 35	5 24		
24 1/2	Akeid tt. ....	9 34	2 58	7 50	24 1/2	Glanton .....	7 35	11 40	5 29		
27 1/2	Kirknewton .....	9 41	3 5	7 57	25 1/2	Whittingham .....	7 42	11 47	5 35		
32 1/2	Mindrum ** .....	7 48 9 53	3 16	8 8	28 1/2	Edlingham .....	7 50	11 55	5 43		
35 1/2	<b>Coldstream</b> .....	arr. 10 0	3 23	8 15	35 1/2	<b>Alnwick 745</b> .....	arr. 8 10	12 16	6 31		

### END OF PASSENGER TRAINS – 22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1930

The arrival of the first car in the mid 1920's, and later the bus, sounded the death knell to the branch, and this is when the "long lingering illness" began.

*From: Gazette and Guardian, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1930*

#### GLANTON: Closing of the Local Railway.

*For a number of years a rumour has been circulating from time to time that The Railway Company was contemplating the closing of the stations and line. Now it seems certain that towards the end of September the last passenger train will run on this useful branch line, though goods trains will still be running. So far as we have been able to learn there has been no general outcry at the prospect of "No Trains".*

*Some no doubt prefer this method of travel and will miss the train when it is no more, but is also possible that many more will someday sadly regret that there is not this alternative method of travel.*

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1930 the line was closed to passengers. The press notices read:

*"After a period of 43 years, the passenger service on the Alnwick and Cornhill Branch of the L.N.E.R. terminated on Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1930, with the passing of the 7.40 p.m. train through Wooler. The departure of the last train was witnessed by a number of spectators, several of whom were present to see the first train arrive 43 years ago".*

The Alnwick staff's record of the event read as follows:

*"With a blast on its whistle and a hissing of steam, the last passenger train – the 7.40 p.m. from Wooler – to travel the Alnwick to Cornhill Railway line, drew up at Alnwick Railway Station on the Saturday night of 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1930.... The final stop at Alnwick was observed with some interest".*

## Records & Recollections

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*{Mary Brown's comment: Looking back it is not really surprising that there was apparently so little interest in our last train. For myself, I knew about it at the time, but I certainly must never have considered going all the way to Glanton Station to see it. (M.H.B. and family were living in Glanton at the time at Holyrood House). I have no hesitation in saying that I would go much further today for a similar event. By 1930, people were more interested in the buses which picked up passengers almost on the doorstep, and, of course, cars were beginning to make their presence felt too.}*

In fact, the last passenger train did not run on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1930. During WWII the Flying Scotsman had to be diverted from the main coast line because of bombing, via Whittingham, Wooler and Cornhill. The little old line creaked into action with a huge train load of troops. S.M.Watson, at Whittingham from 1936 to 1947, has recalled "the Flying Scot came through between 4 and 5p.m.", but unfortunately he gives neither the month nor the year. He says that there were two engines, one in front and one behind (they would never have come up the summit without them) and the Flying Scot engine ran as bogey over the top. It is possible that the second engine would not be required after Whittingham.

When the passenger trains were finished in 1930, and the buses took complete control in the area, arrangements were made for the buses from our locality to go to Alnwick Station with passengers who wanted to go further by rail. Certain buses also left Alnwick Station for many years, and the arrangement only finally ended a matter of a few years ago, since the building of Alnwick Bus Station (at the bottom of Clayport).

You may remember at the beginning of this talk that I referred to "a long lingering illness". Well, I feel that it must have been from the middle of the 1920's (the arrival of the buses) that the branch line was beginning to feel poorly!

The only figures for the 1930's which I could obtain were for goods traffic in 1938, and making a comparison with 1923 they look like this:

<u>1923</u>	<u>1938</u>
719 wagons livestock	54 wagons of livestock
1,129 tons goods forwarded	191 tons goods forwarded
1,494 tons goods received	664 tons goods received
1,469 tons coke/coal received	1,295 tons coke/coal received

Another thing that was changing along the branch was the number of Station Masters. In 1925, Glanton came under the supervision of Hedgeley. As far back as 1926, Edlingham Station became an unstaffed halt. A few years previously, the staff of Station Master, Signaller and Clerk, had been reduced to one man and the S.M. Edlingham came under the supervision of Whittingham.

Wooperton and Ilderton came under the eye of the Wooler Station Master, and I think the Wooler Station Master at some stage was in charge of five stations, in which case he would also have had Akeld and Kirknewton under his charge.

### ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Aln and Breamish Local History Society offers members a programme of historical lectures and publications. A minimum of seven lectures a year are arranged, four in the spring and three in the autumn. The May meeting also incorporates a very short AGM.

All talks take place in the Whittingham Memorial Hall at 7.30pm (unless otherwise indicated in our programme details) and are followed by coffee, tea and biscuits.

Occasionally walks may be arranged in the spring and summer months to look at local places of historical interest.

### TALKS PROGRAMME 2016/17

<b>16 November 2016</b>	<i>The Alnwick Camp of WW1</i>	DVD Presentation
<b>15 March 2017</b>	<i>The History and Gardens of Glanton Pyke</i>	John Swanson
<b>19 April 2017</b>	<i>Wallington and the Trevelyans</i>	Geoff Hughes
<b>17 May 2017</b>	<i>Military Traditions of North East England</i>	Dr Dan Jackson
<b>21 June 2017</b>	<i>Battlefield Northumberland</i>	Michael Thomson

### Office Holders and Committee 2016

Tony Henfrey	(President)
Bridget Winstanley	(Vice President)
Jim Dinsdale	(Chairman and Membership Secretary)
Helen Dinsdale	(Hon. Secretary)
Richard Poppleton	(Hon. Treasurer)

#### Contact details:

*The Secretary, A&BLHS, Sunnyside Cottage, The Lane, Whittingham, Alnwick NE66 4RJ*  
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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions are £10 for a single member and £15 for two people at the same address – due on 1<sup>st</sup> September each year.

You can pay at meetings of the Society by cash or cheque or by sending your cheque, made to Aln & Breamish Local History Society to:  
*The Treasurer, A&BLHS, Greystone Cottage, Titlington Mount, Alnwick NE66 2EA*

If you wish to pay by Standing Order with your bank please contact the Treasurer (see above) or 01665 578346 or [rich.titlington@btinternet.com](mailto:rich.titlington@btinternet.com)

### WE NEED YOUR HELP!!

How can you help to ensure that A&BLHS remains a vibrant and interesting organisation that people enjoy being involved with?

- Encourage friends and neighbours to join
- **Come to meetings whenever you can!**
- Seek out potential speakers
- Think about writing short (or long!) items for Records and Recollections

### RECORDS & RECOLLECTIONS

Records & Recollections is published in June and November and is free to A&BLHS members.

We need your memoirs of life in your village and in earlier times, old photographs (to be copied and returned) and anything else which recalls life in past times.