

**Carsphairn Heritage Group
Newsletter number 42**



Exhibition this year

**"All About Ewe - The Story of Sheep
Past, Present and Future"**

April 1998

This year our Exhibition is about sheep, a fitting subject for Carsphairn. Articles and exhibits poured in as usual earlier in the year when the word went out what we were focusing on.

The result is a colourful and varied mix of thoroughly researched articles about farms, shepherds, marking, diseases - both ancient and modern - backed by photos, maps and memorabilia from various households around and about. There are details of the number of farms earlier this century and those still farming and likewise shepherds in the parish. These have dropped markedly - and we know why... those sitka spruce!

The Shepherd's Year is detailed which will make surprising reading for some visitors who may not have realised, with each farm having several flocks at different altitudes, how many gathers a year it takes to do even the basic work on sheep.

There is the story of Mr Harper and his celebration of 50 years farming at Furmiston complete with photo of him and his guests in 1889 with the Dalmellington Brass Band.

There are historical and biblical 'sheep-bites' as in political 'sound-bites' - for instance "in 1831 the last man was hanged for sheep stealing" and "Abel's sheep are the first mentioned in the Bible" etc.

One of the most unusual items on display comes from Craigen Gillan, Dalmellington and is a tup's head snuff box. It is a quite marvellous concoction of over-the-top Victorian combination of taxidermy and silverwork rather past its sell by date but nevertheless impressive.

There is a drenching gun from the 1920s; a gangarel - sort of a coat hanger dead sheep were hung upon to be butchered; a whole fleece the size of which surprises visitors who think it must come from several sheep; wool and how it is processed into usable products; spinning wheels; a small loom and a drop spindle where visitors can try their hand at weaving and spinning; a quiz to occupy children while parents have a look around and much more.

Our sales table this year includes plenty of sheep products from horn lamps, individually made cards with wool enhancing the drawings, to a sheepskin covered rocking horse and a basket full of little blackface ewes which are selling very well. For this year's exhibition Sue Wiseman has compiled and illustrated a collection of recipes using, appropriately, mutton and lamb. For cook's convenience they are spiral bound with a see-through cover. Very good value at £1.20.

This year for the first time the Carsphairn Show is putting on a Back-To- Back competition involving wool. From clipping to finished articles is the aim involving teams of shearers, carders, spinners and knitters. You'll have to go to the show on 6th June to see how it is done...

Each year we try to improve the Centre and make life easier for stewards. Last year we installed a telephone which has proved a popular move. And, so far, no one has phoned Aunty in Australia...

Earlier this year the committee painted the inside of the Centre and the Council has just painted the outside so the whole is now looking very smart indeed. The daffodils, which were dug up as part of a plan to eradicate the horse tail from the heather bed, have flowered where they were re-planted around the village and will soon spread and make a welcoming yellow splash each spring as drivers enter the village.

The Heritage Centre signs in their new position on the pebbles seem to have worked well but nothing deters people looking for the loos from opening our door and enquiring within... We keep hoping, once inconvenienced, they will return to have another look at what is inside the Centre.

Carol Catchart

WANLOCKHEAD

On Friday 15th May at the Lagwyne Hall, Carsphairn
we are holding our popular

SPRING BUFFET SUPPER

Mrs Carol Davies, Assistant Curator at the Museum of Lead Mining, Wanlockhead will be talking about the museum and showing slides of this interesting site.

7.30 for 8pm Tickets £3.50 Children £2.00 Bar Raffle

History, Heritage and Nostalgia

by Sue Wiseman

My first efforts at helping (or more probably hindering) with the Heritage Centre exhibition this year set me thinking on the differences between History, Heritage and the Laura-Ashley-gift-wrapped version, Nostalgia.

History, I suppose, is something you can learn about at a safe distance whereas Heritage you have thrust upon you by your forbears whether you want it or not, be it a community building or Aunt Aggie's old family recipe for fishcakes.

Nostalgia, on the other hand, is about 'the old days' when fresh-faced milk maids were courted by handsome swains in tight trousers as they strolled over flower strewn hillsides where the sun shone every day and midges hadn't been invented.

As a newcomer I cannot claim to know about life in Carsphairn in past generations but I imagine it was much like life elsewhere in the rural British Isles - Hard.

My husband Bill and I research into and demonstrate domestic life of ordinary folk in the 5th and 6th centuries and most people who come to see us like to try their hand at spinning, dyeing, weaving and making things from cloth or leather. They are intrigued by the skill of the early blacksmiths and by the charcoal-fired forge. (Hands on experience of the past.....wonderful... mind enhancing.)

However, suggest that they might like to catch a tapeworm or dysentery, pull out their own aching tooth or attend a 'gangrene for beginners' week end and they recoil in horror. Once, somebody at an archaeological site we frequent regularly caught fleas and insisted that the environmental health officer be called and the whole place be fumigated. What, we all wondered, was he complaining about? Surely fleas were an added bonus, a real taste of the past; his heritage in fact.

During the freeze-up of 1995 when our newly acquired house still resembled a derelict warehouse with huge rotted holes in the floor

and just one cold water tap, the water pump broke down and every pipe froze solid.

We used the ineffectual, smoky coal fire to melt snow and ice for our water supply and rigged up a temporary latrine with a bucket in the wood shed, (at -16 degrees C an experience your average masochist would definitely not want to miss.)

"This was how they did it in the old days," chirped Bill as we fished pine needles and bird droppings out of the washing up water. "Yes" I agreed, "and when they weren't doing this they were amusing themselves catching tuberculosis or starving."

Having just peeped at the 'Sheep' exhibition set up most impressively by the more experienced members of the committee, I can confirm that it encompasses history, heritage and just a touch of woolly, homespun nostalgia.

A Summer Outing to BLACK CRAIG LEAD MINE near Palmure on the A75 between Creetown and Newton Stewart has been arranged for Sunday 14th June. Numbers are limited so anyone interested please let Anna Campbell know. She is co-ordinating meeting place, time and transport. tel 01664 460208

Births, Marriages & Deaths at Woodhead Leadmine - Anna Campbell

Over the years we have accumulated much data about Woodhead Leadmine on Garryhorn Farm, Carsphairn which has enabled us to build up a picture of what life was like there. Much of this information has come from the birth, marriage and death registers, all of which became compulsory after 1855. The opportunity to look at these registers is fascinating for historians

specialising in several fields, namely the family historian, the social historian and the local historian.

Many years ago the Heritage Group obtained the register of births at the leadmine between 1841 and 1854 which are particularly interesting as they cover the years when the mine was at its most populous. From it, we can see that 111 children were born there in that period. (Compare that with nowadays, when in the parish there are about 3 births in an average year).

The register shows the names of the parents as well as the child. Sometimes the same name appears twice in a family which indicates that the first child of that name had died at an early age. Two sets of twins were born and the most popular names were John (14) and Margaret (13).

Most children were given just one name or their mother's maiden name as a middle one but the most names were those given to the schoolmaster's children. The first, born on 21st May 1844 was christened Charles Fitzroy Stuart, the second Christina Mary St. Clair born on 17th November 1845 and the third Lachlan Alexander St. Clair was born on 26th September 1849. Incidentally their surname was Maclean.

We can expect that some of those 111 babies did not survive infancy, but we do not know exact numbers. There were only three infant deaths from the mines reported in the Dumfries Standard before 1848 and sadly two of them were in the same family. Another mystery is that no-one knows where they were buried. A legend has developed that there is an unmarked child's grave at the mine but some years ago when some of the older generation went up there equipped with spades anxious to dig there was no success. In fact each had a different understanding of where the grave might be so all four of them scattered over a distance of a quarter of a mile in search of the elusive grave.

There are some burials from the mine in Carsphairn Kirkyard before 1855 but probably these do not include all the deaths there. For example, David Wilson, a miner died in Harris's Jerry Shaft on 16th January 1852 but he is not buried in Carsphairn. Three other adult deaths, prior to 1852 are reported in the Standard, though their place of burial has never been established.

After 1855 the death registers give meticulous details. The very first register contains the most detail as it required information regarding the deceased's children and their ages. After 1861 no record was required of where

people were buried, an omission which complicates the family historians search.

By 1865, in the decade since compulsory registration was introduced, the ages of the twelve who died at the mine indicate they were either in their late 70s, 80s or under 26 with the exception of one female aged 54.

The most common cause of death in the 37 year period between 1855 and 1892 was TB known then as Pulmonary Consumption, Consumption and Phthisis - hardly surprising, considering the conditions in which people lived. Whooping cough and croup claimed the lives of three infants, whilst there were two premature births and a variety of illnesses which culminated in deaths. The names of some are unfamiliar to us, bowel hives, low nervous fever and scrophula.

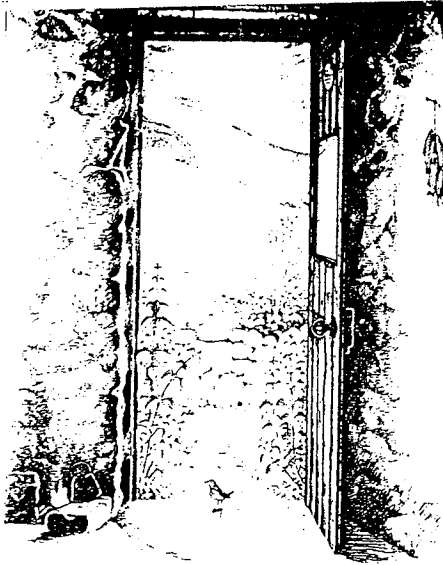
Most of the death entries state when the last visit by a doctor had taken place. The doctors came from Dalmellington, Patna, Moniaive and New Galloway but occasionally the entry states "*no medical attendant*" which probably means that the family was too poor to pay for the doctor.

On a happier note, romance did blossom at the mine between 1850 and 1874 when 11 marriages were recorded. Often the man was a miner as was the woman's father but there are several instances where young men following different occupations went up to the mine to find a wife (and succeeded).

Over the last 10 years we have had people enquiring about their leadmining ancestors. These people come from all over the country and very occasionally they come to the mines to see where and how their ancestors lived. It is hard to imagine that this ghost village was, 150 years ago, a mine where people lived, loved and died but this fact is brought home to us by those who are so painstakingly searching for their roots.

Our **Annual Walk** is planned for the beginning of September and will be going to Loch Doon - further details in the July Newsletter

THROUGH THE DOOR



CARSPHAIRN IN POETRY

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of this Newsletter the editor has gathered together some of the poems already published here together with new ones from members and other sources.

The anthology contains over 20 poems, is illustrated, ring bound and priced at £2.00. It is available at the Heritage Centre or from Mrs C Cathcart, Culraven, Bogue, Kirkcudbright DG6 4SG - tel: 01557 870247

In the words of one of our most consistent contributors Arthur Pook who died last year following a car accident :-

There was an old buffer called Pook
Who wrote poems all day at Dundough
Then Cathcart and Campbell
Said "Let's take a gamble
And make them all into a book".