

RECORDS & RECOLLECTIONS

Contents

Memories of the Breamish Valley	2
The Alnwick Bandies - a Tale of Hooliganism?	8
Dixon's of Whittingham	10
Whittingham Village Shop - the End of an Era	13
The Pastor at Brandon	15
Armstrong's Map of Northumberland	17

SOCIETY NEWS

We are pleased to report that attendance at meetings has improved markedly this spring. The April and May meetings have attracted 24 visitors which does wonders for our finances and leads to the distinct possibility that some of these visitors may think about joining the Society.

The other encouraging thing is that half the articles in this volume of Records and Recollections have been supplied by people who are not committee members. Alan Winlow, Hugh Dixon and Michael Erben have all either written articles or provided the material for them.

In Hugh's case the stimulus was the inclusion, in the last volume, of the front page photograph of Dixon's shop. As great grandson of William Dixon who was the proprietor in 1896, he has been in an ideal position to analyse and explain the details of the photograph. Doreen Carruthers has then brought the story up to date for us.

Alan has in his possession his grandfather's scrapbooks which include a lovely newspaper clipping from the days when travel from Alnwick to Wooler could happen by train over the Summit on Alnwick Moor and via Edlingham.

Michael has only recently joined the Society and although he lives in Oxford he clearly knows our area well. His piece concerns the Pastor at Branton Chapel and fits in with his concerns about the current state of the chapel.

This view of the interior of Branton Chapel was taken in 1972. Since the outside of the Chapel is in a poor state, one wonders whether this lovely interior is still intact 42 years later. As the article on pp 15/16 mentions, congregations of 600 could be accommodated here in the late 18th Century



MEMORIES OF THE BREAMISH VALLEY

By RICHARD POPPLETON in conversation with JIMMY & JEAN GIVENS



One of the best known long-term residents of the Breamish Valley is **Jimmy Givens**. His local fame arises from many aspects of his life – perhaps particularly his long service to the Northumberland National Park which won him national recognition in the form of his British Empire Medal in 1992, his 22 years as a magistrate and his great prowess as a flower and vegetable gardener which has won him many awards in shows throughout the north of England and the Borders. But we'll come back to these later.

Much of the Breamish Valley has belonged to the Allgoods of Nunwick for generations. So when, in 1898, Jimmy's grandfather came to the house in Brandon it was to take up a job as a woodsman for the Allgoods. Those were the days when, as you turned off the main road by Brandon Whitehouse farm there was a big house on your left – Brandon Hall.

Jimmy's father, William, was born at Brandon and when he had finished school he worked with his father at the woodsman's trade and after his father died in 1937 he continued as the head woodsman for the Estate. Meanwhile Jimmy himself was born in 1932. He went

to school at Branton which was very close for him, across the footbridge over the Breamish. At that time there was also a school at Ingram, although later, as the number of children of school age further up the valley decreased, the school ceased to be viable and it closed.

In the first few years of his time at Brandon School there were only two pupils from Brandon itself and overall the school had very few boys, so there was no such thing as a school football team.

Fortunately there was a youth team in Powburn and Jimmy

played for that Club and continued to do so for 23 years. But then in 1942/43 the whole school situation changed because many children were evacuated from Tyneside because of the dangers from enemy bombing and the local schools really filled up. The children were billeted with families throughout the valley. Jimmy's parents took in a boy called Harry McDonald from Heaton who was a year or



Records & Recollections

two older than Jimmy. They re-met for the first time since the end of the war about five years ago. It was clear that for most of the Tyneside families, the Breamish Valley must have seemed an enormous distance away because Jimmy never remembers any of the evacuee children being visited by their families, despite the fact that it was comparatively easy to get as close as Hedgeley by train from Newcastle via Alnwick.

Jimmy spent his entire schooldays at Branton School where the Headteacher was Teddy Robson supported by one other teacher. Children often took the 11+ exam for entry to the High School at Alnwick, but Jimmy never remembers anyone passing. He got close, in that he was invited to have a second attempt, but still just fell short of the necessary mark. As he says, the fact that no-one ever seemed to pass from Branton School may have had something to do with the fact

that, for example, the 11+ had a section on algebra in the maths papers – but algebra was never taught at Branton! In any case, if Jimmy had passed he might not have been able to take up the High School place because of the time and cost of getting to and from Alnwick.

He has little real memory of his school lessons, although he was very good at maths and still retains a real proficiency at mental calculations. One thing that does stick in his mind is that, in common with many rural communities throughout the land, during the war at busy times on the farms boys over the age of eleven were allowed to take half days off school to help with the farm work. This was especially true at harvest time and during potato picking season. The youngsters were paid the princely sum of 2d an hour. He particularly liked working on the corn stacks where he would be on top, receiving sheaves thrown up from below

Greenses wood crosscutting wood	2	15.0	Ingram Rectory	2	15
Beaveley railing.	2	15.0	Brandon Dem cleaning trees	6	2 5 0
Barbellies repairing wood fence	2	15.0	Brandon gate & wheel making	7	2 12 6
Brandon gate making	2	15.0	Brandon hanging gates	2	15
Barbellies strip cleaning trees	16	6.0 0	Brandon setting Boundley ^{10th}	2	15
James Givens July 22 1920 24 1/2	9	0 0 0	Brandon nursery weeding	3	1 2 6
Ingram Rectory	2	15.0	Beaveley whin cover/cutting ^{Beath}	2	15
Barbellies strip cleaning trees	10	3 15	James Givens Sept 18 1920	24	9 0 0
Brandon young fence	2	15 0	Beaveley whin cover railing	16	6 0 0
Brandon young fence	1	7.6	Brandon gate making	2	15 0
Greenses repairing wood fence	1	7.6	Beaveley hanging hunting wheel	2	15 0
Brandon Dem cleaning trees	8	3 0 0	Greenses wood repairing fence	2	15 0
James Givens Aug. 21 1920 24	9	0 0 0	Beaveley whin cover wire netting	2	15 0
			James Givens Oct. 16. 1920.	24	9 0 0
			Beaveley whin cover setting ^{rather}	14	5 5
			Beaveley whin cover cutting fence	3	1 2 6
			Brandon beating	3	1 2 6
			Beaveley whin cover cleaning of whins	4	1 10 0
			James Givens Nov. 13. 1920.	24	9 0 0

and passing them to the stacker.

That wage of 2d an hour needs to be seen in context. Jimmy's father kept small notebooks with meticulous records of the tasks he undertook each month and the number of days spent on each. For a typical 24 day month (4 weeks at six days a week) he was paid, in 1920, £9. The calculation was 7/6d per day. Above are copies of two pages from these notebooks showing what work he had done and how many days had been devoted to each task. The page is from 1920, but tellingly if one looks at a similar page from 1926 you can see that there had been no pay increase in the six years. In fact Jimmy says that at one stage the day rate actually went down so the monthly wage reduced to £8.8s.0d.

During Jimmy's childhood, while his father was working on the Estate, his mother spent some time as a nanny in the household of Canon Roland Allgood who for 38 years was the rector at Ingram (1909-1947). He and his wife Edith had a son and a daughter and they maintained quite a big staff in the Vicarage. Canon Allgood is a good example of the way a large landed family were involved in many aspects of the family estate. He was the youngest of eleven children of the Rev James Allgood of Nunwick Hall who had himself been Rector at Ingram in the late 19th century. Both Rev James and a number of his children are buried in the churchyard at Ingram.

Between 1951 and '53 Jimmy did his National Service with the RAF. His natural intelligence and his mathematical skills must have been spotted early on because in no time at all he was given the job of catering clerk at a Bomber Command base in Lincolnshire where he was responsible for ordering the correct supplies for 1200 service personnel on the base. By the end of the two years he had been promoted to full Corporal and under other circumstances he might have signed on to make a career in the RAF. But he

was needed back at home because his father's back was in a bad state and Jimmy had to take on much of the physical labour of the woodsman's work. Meanwhile he had gained a much younger sister, Iris, who later married John Brown of Powburn, where they still live.

One of the great entertainments in the valley after the war were the local dances. Ingram had a reputation as a wonderful dance venue. Bands would come from long distances, often from Scotland, and on a Saturday night the full set of 150 tickets would be sold and there would often be a waiting list. That was where Jimmy met his wife Jean. His immortal chat-up line was "Can you hop?". Clearly Jean could hop and their marriage has lasted so far for 36 years.

*Jimmy's immortal
chat-up line was
"Can you hop?"*

Jimmy worked with his father until 1961, but at that time rabbits were a major rural pest. Myxomatosis had appeared in Britain in 1952 and by 1955 it is estimated that 95% of the rabbit

population was wiped out. But it wasn't too long before the population of disease resistant rabbits began to increase and by 1960 they were again becoming a problem. The Ministry of Agriculture encouraged the setting up of societies where many local farms would club together to employ a rabbit extermination officer and 50% of the costs could be reclaimed as a grant from the Ministry. Jimmy was employed by a 60-farm Aln and Breamish Rabbit Clearing Society. In those days gassing was the most effective legal method of control for rabbits and moles. Interestingly, he remembers that there was a man with a stall on Blyth market who paid £1 per pair of rabbits to sell for meat, which was an excellent way of boosting income.

He continued to work as a pest control officer on a self-employed basis until 1974, and moles and woodpigeons figured high on his list of target species, although, as we shall see, woodpigeon control had lasting consequences. But meanwhile since 1961 he had taken a part time

Records & Recollections

summer job with the National Park as a warden in the valley. He shared this job with another warden and their main job was to try to deal with the increasing number of tourists who would often come up into the valley on warm summer weekends, camp out and light barbecue fires and then leave again without any thought for cleaning up or taking their litter away with them. Some weekends there might be 1000 cars in the valley and as well as the mess and litter there were also no toilets. The wardens' job was a combination of education and enforcement.

years was involved with many rescues including some, involving suicides and a plane crash on Hedgehope Hill, that did not end well.

Eventually his hearing, which had undoubtedly been damaged by so many years of shooting woodpigeons without any ear protection, became so bad that he could no longer deal with the office work and meetings that being Head Warden demanded. So at the age of 60 he retired. But a couple of years before that he had been recognized for his devotion to the work of the National Park by being



By 1974 Jimmy had become so indispensable to the National Park that he became a full time warden for the Cheviot region and in 1980 he was made Head Warden. Among many other responsibilities he began to lead 14-mile all-day guided walks, but these soon built up a regular clientele and really became too popular so that sometimes 40 or 50 people would turn up, which was far too many for a walking group. He was also the founder member of the Cheviot Fell Search and Rescue team and over the

awarded the British Empire Medal in 1992. He received this from the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland and this led to an invitation for him and Jean to attend a Buckingham Palace Garden Party. One of Jean's memories is that the cakes were Mr Kipling's and the quality of the sandwiches was not too good!

Jimmy's life was not all estate work. As well as the football for the team at Powburn he was a member of Dunstanburgh Golf Club for 40 years and he did a year as Captain at the turn of the

millennium. Also, as with so many people from the local area, he played cricket for Eglington.

He also did a very long stint as a Justice of the Peace, although during his 22 years on the Bench it sometimes seemed that he wrought a trail of destruction. He began at Whittingham and when that court closed he moved to the Bench at Wooler. When Wooler closed he was transferred to Rothbury and when in turn that closed he moved to Alnwick. At least we can't blame the recent closure of the Alnwick Court on him – he retired from the bench at the same time as he retired from work when his hearing loss stopped him from dealing with the court cases.

Jimmy and Jean have a daughter, Angela, who lives in Whitley Bay and is a nurse at the Freeman Hospital. She is pictured with her parents at the beginning of this article. A year ago Angela presented Jean and Jimmy with a grandson who is clearly the apple of Jean's eye.

So at long last we come to his life-time love of gardening. He has always wanted not only to grow flowers and vegetables



but also to show them, with Sweet Peas being his particular favourite. He says that if he wins the Sweet Pea cup at the Glanton Show this summer it will be 50 years since he first won it. What an amazing record! He always particularly liked the Gateshead Flower Show because it brought him into competition with growers from much further afield and when he won there was some real money involved. Sadly in 2013 the Gateshead

The Sweet Pea Church at Sprouston

Talking of real money to be made from showing Sweet Peas, I asked Jimmy about the Church at Sprouston on the south bank of the Tweed near Kelso. This village church achieved fame in the year 1911 when the Daily Mail announced a massive prize of £1000 for the best bunch of 12 mixed sweet pea blooms grown by an amateur gardener. There were to be second and third prizes of £150 and £50, 100 silver medals and 900 bronze medals.

The impoverished vicar at Sprouston, Rev Denholm Fraser, was a keen gardener but had never grown sweet peas before. Nevertheless he decided to try to enter the competition. The judging was to be held in the Crystal Palace in London which meant that his entry (plus another in his wife's name, which was allowed by the rules) would have to go down by train because he and his wife could neither afford the time nor the cost of going themselves.

The size of the prizes was such that the judges were faced with a phenomenal 38,000 entries. They were all kept anonymous so that "well-known experts" could not gain advantage from their names being known. In the end the bunch sent by Mrs Fraser won the £1000 and her husband's entry got the £50 third prize. It was absolutely extraordinary that they achieved this result from such a massive entry and as first-timers to the discipline of growing and showing sweet peas.

The money enabled Mr Fraser to build a new chancel at Sprouston church. 2011 was the centenary of this event, which is why the church has been displaying a "Sweet Pea Church" banner since then.

Flower Show came to an end with the withdrawal of financial support from the local Council due to budget cuts.

What saddens Jimmy is that there are only a very few committed contestants in the flower and vegetable classes at our local shows. All are in their 70s and 80s, with no sign of younger growers coming through and Jimmy fears that in a few years there will no longer be enough entrants to justify keeping those exhibition classes open. Still, he's done his level best to maintain people's interest and until only a couple of year ago he ran the Alnwick Gardening Club's Vegetable Demonstration sessions with Tom Pattinson and David Parker.

When Jimmy thinks back to the changes in the valley in his lifetime his first regret is for the state of the river.

When he was a lad the river was in excellent condition, with many calm pools where it was possible to 'tickle' for trout. Then the County Council started to extract gravel and as more and more was removed, first of all by hand-digging with shovels and then by mechanical diggers, the stability of the river was changed and gradually the susceptibility of the banks to erosion and to changes in the water course were increased so that it is no longer the same river it once was for wildlife.

He remembers the fact that the postman would have the valley as his sole round.

He would come by bike up from Powburn as far as Linhope and then go further up on foot to the Bleakhope farms. The fact that he also delivered the daily papers meant that he was obliged to do the whole round every day. The particular postman Jimmy remembers was Walter Thompson whose widow still lives in Glanton.

Farming and land management practices have changed. In the 1940s most farms were still independent and most had three shepherds. Some of them from the higher farms would regularly walk over the tops at weekends to dances in the Coquet Valley. The increase in shooting, particularly at Linhope, has meant an increase in gamekeepers. One gamekeeper at Linhope was Adam Sisterson. He and his brother were very good Cumbrian wrestlers. Linhope used

to be owned by Gerald Houseman, but when it looked as though the Forestry Commission intended to get hold of it Houseman sold it to the Northumberland Estates to keep it in private hands.

Jimmy Givens' life and experiences give the total lie to any who assume that rural valleys are simply

backwaters. He has had a highly varied and valuable life and one is tempted to assume that had it not been for the deterioration in his hearing he would still be leading Cheviot walks and sitting on the local Bench to this day.

When he was a lad the river was in excellent condition, with many calm pools where you could tickle for trout

THE ALNWICK BANDIES – A TALE OF HOOLIGANISM (?)

Article courtesy of ALAN WINLOW

Did you think football hooliganism was a modern phenomenon? This is an account (slightly abridged) of an incident on the railway between Wooler and Alnwick on 13th April 1891. The newspaper clipping was kindly provided by Alan Winlow from his grandfather's archive and was probably taken from the Alnwick and County Gazette and Alnwick Mercury – the predecessor of the Northumberland Gazette. Interestingly there is no mention of alcohol.

The Alnwick Bandies Football Club went by train to Wooler on Easter Monday to play the Glendale. Returning home at night, the behaviour of the larger portion of the team was of an undesirable nature and in consequence proceedings were instigated against eight of the Bandies by the North Eastern Railway Company. The case was heard at Whittingham Petty Sessions before H. Pawson Esq and Capt Carr-Ellison. The court room was full.

All the Bandies appeared as follows: John Gibson, labourer; Thomas Pickard, printer's apprentice; Robert Murray and William Graham, fishing rod maker's apprentices; David Jackson, joiner; Henry Moore, cabinet maker; George Scott, plasterer; Henry Smith, woodman; all of Alnwick. They were charged that they, being passengers in a carriage on the North Eastern railway, did unlawfully and wilfully interfere with the comfort of another passenger, James Ferguson of Whittingham, at the parish of Edlingham on the 30th March.

Inspector Darrell of Newcastle said they had been playing football at Wooler and joined the train there. At Whittingham a youth named James Ferguson got into the same compartment. Immediately after the train left Whittingham these fellows began to throw one another about and on to the top of this youth. When the train reached Edlingham, Ferguson intended to get out but was prevented and the bad behaviour continued.

James Ferguson said he was assistant to Mr Allen, grocer, of Alnwick. He had been

at home at Whittingham. All the defendants were in the compartment when he took his seat. They were all quiet then

and he did not force himself in. After the train left Whittingham they commenced to push each other about and on top of him.

A lad called Appleby was also there but he did not interfere.

On arriving at Edlingham he got his parcels and tried to change compartments. Pickard got onto the step so he could not get out. A railway official then came and pushed Pickard and Ferguson back and shut the door. The train left Edlingham and they commenced the same manoeuvres.

Smith started to kick him and knocked the skin off his shins. His hat was knocked off and he never saw it again. He valued the hat at 4s 6d. After this they got hold of his coat and tore a lump off. Turning round, Ferguson noticed that Jackson had thrown

something out of the window but he could not say what it was. The torn coat was here produced and also the piece about a yard long. Ferguson said each of the defendants took part in the annoyance. He did not give the defendants the least provocation.

Defendant Gibson: *Why didn't you report the case when you got to Alnwick Station?*

Complainant: *I was so confused I did not know what to do.*

Defendant Moore: *What was I seeking for below the carriage seat?*

Complainant: *For my hat.*

... did unlawfully and wilfully interfere with the comfort of another passenger ...

Records & Recollections

Moore: *No I wasn't. I was seeking for my trousers. (Laughter)*

The Clerk (to witness): *Did he say anything about his trousers?*

Complainant: *Not at that time: he got my hat. Some of them told him I had his trousers, but that was later.*

The Chairman: *Had he not his trousers on? (Laughter)*

Inspector Darrell: *There is no doubt somebody pitched his trousers out of the carriage window, for they were afterwards found on the line. (Laughter)*

Defendant Smith: *Did I kick you intentionally?*

Complainant: *Yes*

Smith: *I was only keeping the others off you. We were having a bit of fun amongst ourselves.*

The Chairman: *You had no right to have fun at the expense of other passengers.*

Capt Carr-Ellison (to witness): *Why did you go into a carriage that was full?*

Complainant: *Pickard shouted of me.*

Inspector Darrell: *I believe when they were pulling your coat tail off you came to the window and shouted 'Murder!'*

Complainant: *Yes*

Henry Appleby was the next witness called. He stated that after the train left Whittingham the defendants started to carry on fun amongst themselves. Some of them fell up against Ferguson and knocked his hat off. At Edlingham station he advised Ferguson to get out because he seemed frightened. When his coat was torn he shouted 'Murder' and then laughed.

John Hettle, platelayer, deposed that he traversed the line from The Summit to Edlingham. A short way from The Summit he picked up, on 31st March, a mit, a cap with a card pinned to it bearing the words 'Play up the good old Bandies' and also a pair of tweed trousers. Moore owned the trousers, Graham the cap and Ferguson the mit.

Defendant Gibson, in defence, said: *We were enjoying ourselves coming from Wooler. Ferguson came to the carriage at Whittingham. He was told not to get in. He said he wanted to get in to see the fun. He was laughing and having the fun the same as us.*

When the tickets were taken he didn't report it to the collector or the station master. When he got out of the train at Alnwick he was still pleased with himself and quite made up with the fun and the way he had enjoyed himself. (Laughter)

He came down the toon all laughing and told Mr Douglas (Defendants here all burst out laughing). After having a jolly night you always have a sad morning you ken; well Douglas of course put it in this fellow's heed to gan and 'persecute' and he did it. (Laughter) A'am done now sir.

Jackson, Moore and Scott made short statements in defence. The Chairman said there was no doubt they were all guilty of the offence with which they had been charged and they would all be fined 10s and 11s 6d costs or seven days.

The chairman pointed out that it was not only for tearing Ferguson's coat and losing his hat they were being fined, but for creating a disturbance on the railway. If Ferguson had not been there they would still have been liable to a penalty not exceeding 40s each. Those who did not pay were allowed a month's grace.

Chairman: "Had he not his trousers on?"

The newspaper clipping has this footnote:

I notice a new team at Alnwick, viz. "The Bandies". What's in a name? Nothing, but where the sense of this one comes in I cannot see. Are the players all bandy-legged or what? Bandy-headed perhaps? All the same I wish them luck. They deserve it.

DIXON'S OF WHITTINGHAM

By HUGH DIXON

In the last issue of Records and Recollections we published on the front cover this picture of Dixon's Shop in Whittingham in 1896. This prompted this piece from Hugh Dixon, great grandson of William Dixon the proprietor at the time. Hugh also kindly sent the portrait photographs of his great grandparents.



Photography in the late 19th century was not the casual commonplace it has become in our times. It was still the realm of the specialist with his (and, only very occasionally, her) cumbersome equipment and magician's art which could freeze the light of a moment. It was expensive and thus a matter of status, often requiring a visit to a studio. People 'sat' for their photograph as they would to have their portrait painted. They dressed carefully. The arrangement of the picture and the inclusion of objects, were rarely accidental.

We look at this photograph and, over an interval of 118 years, our stare is returned,

with a mixture of interest, confidence, diffidence, even boredom, by eleven people and a horse. Who, we might ask, are these people assembled in front of Dixon's? Why was the photograph taken? We may never be able to answer all the questions, but we may adapt the historian's approach in assessing the evidence and offering interpretations.

The photograph of Dixon's was first published in 1978 in *Northumberland Yesteryear: A Selection of Old Photographs illustrating life in Northumberland*, subtitled *An album of photographs of life in Northumberland between 1860 & 1930* and 'Edited by

Robin Gard for the Northumberland Local History Society'. This was one of a series of books produced by the Oriol Press and Frank Graham for the Northumberland Local History Society (founded in 1966) which, as other societies (including the A&BLHS) came into being, was transformed into the Association of Northumberland Local History Societies.

The pictures were selected and edited by Robin Gard, then of the Northumberland County Record Office (now Northumberland Archives) who deserves acknowledgement for being a pioneer in recognising the importance of collecting photographic records as well as written ones. One of his greatest achievements was to rescue the enormous collection of photographs created from the late 19th century by John Gibson, chemist and antiquarian of Hexham, now available at Northumberland Archives.



But Gard collected from many sources. The photograph of Dixon's in Whittingham was credited to the Aln and Breamish Local History Society. It was actually then in the possession of Mary Brown, the Society's secretary, whose father, George, worked most of his life at Dixon's eventually becoming manager for Henry Dixon, the last of the family to own the business. The photograph may have come from the shop, and the identification of the people probably came to Mary from her father.

At first glance the photo seems to be of an informal group. Closer inspection shows that it is very carefully arranged. It was described, simply but effectively as 'staff on the left and family on the right' by my father's cousin, Bill Dixon, Henry's son, when he sent me a print of the photograph in 1988. The figures are not casually placed. They were identified in 1978 as, from the left: J (John/Jack?) Ewart, the carter, who leans with some assurance against the cart. His duties were wide-ranging, sometimes to remote farms, and consequently less supervised and more independent than those based in Whittingham. He delivered but also took orders and, for example, would carry swatches of tweed or other material from which the farmers could choose their next suit, or their wives new dresses or curtains. The cart is loaded and (mindful of Northumbrian weather) covered with a tarpaulin; and the horse, another vital

member of Dixon's team (name, alas, unrecorded), seems to be wondering why the start of the journey is delayed.

Rather more hesitant are J Johnston, E Donkin, W Donkin and W (Willie?) Ross; they were all shop or store assistants and are shown with smart collars but hatless to indicate their indoor working status; Miss

Ross, probably a sister of Willie, was also a shop assistant who dealt, no doubt, with draperies, haberdashery and other more feminine requisites. As a young unmarried woman, she would have been, naturally, an object of interest to the younger men on the staff; so her placing here, symbolically near to the protection of the respectably married proprietor – and thus closer to the orbit of his family – is probably not accidental. All these are gathered around the door of the shop with its two flanking tall windows.

To the right, in front of the door to the private part of the house is Mrs Dixon with her sons, William, called Will, and Henry. Here, too, is her sister, identified as Lucy Layton but known in the family as Auntie Lizzie. All are smartly dressed, especially the two small boys with their spotless Eton collars. Will, perhaps as befitting the elder son, was permitted a relatively informal posture, hands in pockets and leaning against the doorpost. Henry, younger and less comfortable, has been put into his Sunday kilt. It is probably no accident that his mother's hands are just behind him - to limit fidgeting. The success of the photograph at that time depended on the subjects remaining quite still.

Significantly placed between the two groups, slightly forward of both, and evidently the senior person in the view, is the proprietor, William Dixon. Like his family, he wears a hat, and his informal stance with hands on hips, allows his suit jacket to be parted to reveal his waistcoat and, more importantly, the double watch chain with its implied authority.

Less transient (although they did change from time to time) but not without interest are the notices. Above the framed name-board, with its raised, ornamental letters, are three painted signs between the upstairs windows. These are also framed but the letters are bold, plain capitals without serifs or other flourishes. They were meant to be read from left to right:

DRAPERS HATTERS GROCERS &c.

To the left, between the windows and above double doors on the single-storey store's wing, is another notice:

DIXON & SON'S STORES

Here the letters are capitals but painted with shaded sides to give a three-dimensional impression. This seems to refer as much to the stores themselves as to the whole enterprise. To reflect the wide-ranging services on offer, Dixon's seems most often to have been called

'General Dealers'. Alongside the grocery there was, as advertised, a drapery and hat department. To judge from items in the shop window and from other advertising, there seems to have been, too, a stock of kitchen utensils, china, and general hardware. To the rear of the main building was a garden quite large enough for vegetables for the family and probably providing a surplus which could be offered for sale.

A feature of the house which might be easily overlooked is the apparently haphazard painting of the windows; but in fact this makes some sense. The windows of the private part of the house including upstairs are painted white encouraging reflected light inside. The frames of the larger shop windows, however, are painted in a darker colour which would have made window displays more striking.

Just visible, too are external shutters fitted for security to the windows of the store, the uninhabited part of the premises.

The taking of the photograph must have been quite an occasion in the village – and the careful arrangement of 'the cast' the result of serious thought. The photographer might well have been John Worsnop of Rothbury, a friend of William's two half brothers, David Dippie Dixon and John Turnbull Dixon, who took individual portrait photographs of William and his wife around this time.

The reason for taking the photograph is not known. Photography was starting to be used for advertising but, if that was the intention, the inclusion of the family was curious. It seems more likely that the picture was celebration of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the business, or the 21st of William's sole ownership. In any case for him this must have been a moment when he could allow himself a measure of quiet satisfaction. But to expand on that must wait for another occasion.

Henry, younger and less comfortable, has been put into his Sunday kilt.

WHITTINGHAM VILLAGE SHOP – THE END OF AN ERA

By Doreen Carruthers

Much has been written about the village shop in Whittingham before Henry Dixon bought it from Eslington Estates in 1928. At that time it sold many hardware utensils as well as smaller domestic items and it employed 17 staff both to serve in the shop and to deliver to outlying farms.

However, not much has been written about its transfer to succeeding owners or about its eventual closure.

In 1953 it was sold to John Lawson and part of the buildings were also sold off and converted to a private house. John Lawson cleared out all the remaining hardware items and turned the now smaller premises into a more general village shop, selling food and domestic items.

His ownership did not last long, however, for in 1954 he sold it to Mr & Mrs Greenhalf. Until that time the village Post Office had been housed in a room in "Alndale" which was on the opposite side of the village green. The postmen kept their bicycles in Stable Cottage, situated behind Alndale and continued to do so until vans were introduced which were then kept in garages on May and Roy Smith's Castle Farm in the village.

At this point on 1954 it was decided to transfer the Post Office to the newly refurbished village shop and Mr Greenhalf became the Postmaster.

Until that time there had been a well-worn path across the village green from the original Post Office to the shop on the other side. From the transference of the Post Office into the village shop that path gradually disappeared and was replaced by one leading from the Lonnen, the means by which the other half of the village around the Eslington road arrived

to visit both the shop and its newly incorporated Post Office.

In 1962 the premises were sold to Mr & Mrs Burdon. Their tenure was the longest and they lived above and served in the shop for 14 years. For many of those years Jimmy Givens' wife, Jean, was the pleasant 'front of house' assistant, helping to smooth the rough edges of Mr Burdon's efficient but rather brusque manner. As he neared the time for retirement he spoke longingly of moving up to Coldstream to be near his beloved golf course, but although he achieved his aim in 1976 when the shop was sold to Mr & Mrs Wallace, he unfortunately died within a year of moving to Coldstream.

Jean Givens helped to smooth the rough edges of Mr Burdon's efficient but rather brusque manner

The new owner, Mr Wallace, was a businessman from Newcastle who spent a lot of time travelling so the work of running the shop fell mainly on Mrs Wallace. She introduced many more luxury items for sale and for a while the shop prospered,

but the onset of ill-health meant that she could no longer continue and in 1981 the shop was sold yet again to Colin and Ada Lee.

This was a very successful partnership with Colin running the Post Office and Ada looking after the shop. Ada in particular took an active part in village life and was a member of the Church Choir, but by 1988 they felt ready for retirement and passed the baton to the McDougle family.

The McDougles also integrated well into village life and were well liked, but when Bob became ill they too took early retirement and in 1993 the shop passed into the hands of its last owners, a young couple known only as Alison and Peter who struggled for a while to maintain a viable business. But when the Alnwick

Records & Recollections

supermarket competition became too great they bowed to the inevitable and estate agents began to look for buyers willing to convert the premises into a private house.

For a short while David Allen opened up a room at the back of the Castle Inn and integrated both the Post Office and a small shop selling basics with his public house business, but this also proved not to be viable and both soon closed.

So now, like many other villages in 2014, only the School, the Church and the Village Memorial Hall remain as binding symbols of village life.

The paths across the village green have long faded, but the memories of times past when the shop and Post Office were the centre of community life linger on in the reminiscences of the older inhabitants. For younger people and more recently settled residents the focus of community life now is in the Memorial Hall, but that story will have to be related in a separate article.

The photographs show the same row of buildings in the 1930s and in the current decade.



THE PASTOR AT BRANDON – Rev. James Somerville

A new member of our Society, **Michael Erben** from Oxford, came across a lengthy article in *The Evangelical Magazine* from February 1809, published as an obituary piece following the death of James Somerville in July 1808. The selected extracts printed below portray Rev Somerville as a paragon of Christian learning and ministry, but they also give a little insight into the place of the Branton Nonconformist Chapel in the local community more than two hundred years ago. **The punctuation and spelling is that of the original article.**

Mr Somerville was born at Pitmuir, in the parish of Lauder, Scotland, in 1743, of poor but eminently pious parents, who taught him to read, and instructed him how to pray. Happily, he soon took very great delight in both these exercises. When six years of age, he was put to school at Netherhaughton: here he learned writing, &c. He learned Latin, and probably Greek, at the Grammar-School of Lauder.

He entered the University of Edinburgh in 1762, and continued there ten years. He generally had young men with him; to whom he taught the mathematics, &c. in the evenings. He was often engaged with them till 10 or 12 o'clock; after which, he had his own exercises to prepare for the next day, so that he seldom got to bed before 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning; and, one night in every week he never went to bed at all.

He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Lauder, Dec. 3, 1771; and, in Oct. 1772, was recommended, by Mr: Scott, of Heckmondwike, to the congregation at Stainton, near Kendal. In 1775, he received an invitation from the congregation at Ravenstonedale, in the same county, which he accepted; and preached his first sermon there, May 28.

In 1776, he received information that his father was ill, and longed to see him. He flew on the wings of affection to visit his dying bed, - found him extremely weak, but full of hopes of a blessed immortality. He stayed with him a fortnight, - conversed with him fully on many important subjects, and took his last farewell without any hopes of seeing him

again. His mother was then in perfect health. In about a month, he received the mournful news that his mother died on the Sabbath, - his father on the Tuesday following, - and that both were buried in one grave.

On the 6th of June, 1777, he married Isabella, who bore him 4 children. She died on Oct 28 1791; and, in a very little time before and after her decease, 3 of their children were taken away by the stroke of death: an only daughter now survives both her parents. On the 19th of May, 1796, he was married again to Margaret Plenden [from *Alnham - Ed.*], a most excellent woman.

In 1784, he received a call from the dissenting congregation of Branton, in

Northumberland, to be their pastor. He was not hasty in accepting it, being greatly attached to his people at Ravenstonedale, and they to him; but, by much intreaty, and after due consideration, he at length consented.

Mr. S entered on his charge at Branton, March 28, 1784. Though Branton is only a small village, and the neighbourhood by no means populous, he seldom preached, when the weather was fine, to less than 600 people; some of whom came 8 or 10 miles. He was a plain, bold, animated preacher; had a most solemn and venerable appearance in the pulpit; a strong, clear voice, and could have been heard with ease a considerable distance. His preaching tended wholly to exalt the Saviour and debase the sinner; but he was not fond of that method which some affect, - to terrify people into religion!

*He seldom preached,
when the weather
was fine, to less than
600 people, some of
whom came 8 or 10
miles*

Records & Recollections

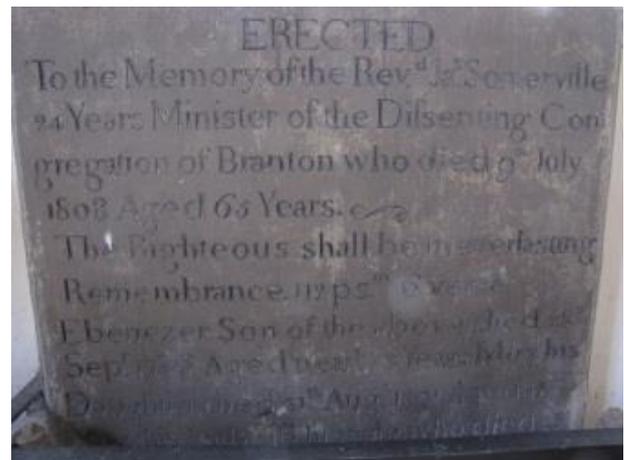
He was particularly excellent in expounding the holy Scriptures. His thorough knowledge enabled him to set the most difficult passages in so clear a light, that the most illiterate of his audience were forcibly struck with their great importance.

He had no stated times of visiting his people; but often spent three days a week in this exercise, instructing them from house to house: his congregation extending over a large tract of country, made this exercise very fatiguing. In these visits he made himself a companion of the old and the young, the learned and the unlearned; equally happy with the poor as well as with the rich. Few men could administer the balm of consolation better than he: his company was much longed for by the afflicted. Once a year he catechized the whole of his congregation, consisting of nearly 1000 persons.

In 1803, he established a Library in the chapel, composed solely of religious books. Brotherly Love reigned at Branton; and Peace was seldom interrupted during his abode there.

In July 1807, he was attacked by his last illness. On the 24th April, 1808, he administered the Lord's Supper for the last time. He preached every Lord's Day, though in much weakness, till May 15. He was much entreated to consider his extreme debility, and refrain from preaching, as he could scarcely walk to the chapel (about 200 yards); but he caused himself to be supported, saying he was resolved to speak a few words to his dear people once more.

He survived till 9 o'clock on the morning of July 9: and, without a struggle or a groan, calmly breathed his last, in the 65th year of his age.



This memorial stone to James Somerville is in Eglington Church. It is strange that it is there and the lower part of the stone is obscured by central heating pipes! The plaque reads:

ERECTED
To the memory of the Rev.^d Jas. Somerville
24 Years Minister of the Dissenting Con-
gregation of Branton who died 9th July
1808 Aged 65 years.
The Righteous shall be in everlasting
Remembrance. 112ps^m 6 verse
Ebenezer Son of the above died 28th
Sep^r 1786 Aged nearly 3 years. Mary his
Daughter died 31th Aug^t 1791 Aged 11
Months. Isabella his wife who died 28
Oct.th 1791 Aged 32 Years: and Christina
Their Daughter who died 6 July 1793
Aged 5 Years

The photos below show Branton Chapel as it looked in about 1900 compared with the sad state of affairs today – obscured and unkempt.



I've always been fascinated by maps and perhaps particularly the comparison between historic and modern maps of an area. Captain Andrew Armstrong was an English Army officer who retired from the Army in 1763 to set up a map-publishing business. He was soon joined by his son, Mostyn and together they proved quite prolific.

Armstrong's map of 1769 is the first for the south side of the border to include reliable detail. A mapmaker called Roy, twenty years earlier, had produced detailed maps of the Scottish side which in their way are more sophisticated in their attempts to reproduce land contours and topography at quite a detailed scale. But Armstrong can be relied on to get the relative positions of roads and named places reasonably accurate for Northumberland.

As you can see from the map on the previous page, nearly 250 years ago many of the names of places are familiar, although some spellings are slightly different – Bremish for Breamish; Hedgley for Hedgeley; Hareup for Harehope; Revely for Reaveley – but there are very few names on the map that cannot also be found on a modern Ordnance Survey Landranger or Explorer sheet.

He also makes valiant attempts to show individual buildings where these are large enough to have attracted his notice. So, for example, earlier in this Records and Recollections reference is made to a large house, Brandon Hall, on the left hand side of the road near Brandon White House Farm and there it is on the map, even though it has long been demolished. With many of the larger halls he adds the name of the owner at the time. So, Roddam Esq

at Roddam Hall; Wharton Esq at Wooperton; Brown Esq at Branton; Lord Ravensworth at Eslington; Clavering Esq at Callaly; Burrell Esq at Broome Park; Hargreaves Esq at Shawdon; Mr Anderson at Glanton.

In some cases places are marked that have almost been lost. Gallowlaw is shown as a pair of buildings to the west of Beanley, but now that site has only a small ruined barn, with, as we discovered by mistake a few years ago, a nest site for Barn Owls. High Barton Farm is also one that is no longer labelled on modern maps, even though Middle and Low Barton are still in place.

The dotted road shown up the centre of the map bears a close resemblance to the route of the modern A697, but in fact is the line of the Roman Road known as the Devil's Causeway. The main road at that time went, of course, through Whittingham and Glanton to join the modern A697 route north of the bridges at Powburn.

Other roads or tracks are noticeable for their absence – there is no marked road from Whittingham to Callaly and the lack of a bridge at Ingram meant that the village was reached by a road from Branton along the south bank of the river, rather than via Brandon on the north side. Then there are those marked that appear no longer to exist, even as trackways. I doubt, for example, that one could nowadays readily find the marked track from Ingram to Great Ryle.

I hope that those with a detailed knowledge of our local landscape will find other differences between what was recorded 250 years ago and what exists now.

Programme of talks for Autumn 2014

- 17 Sept '14 Alan Fendley - *Fortifications of Northumbria*
- 15 Oct '14 Paula Constantine – *Saxon & Viking Clothing*
- 19 Nov '14 David Jones - *Barrowburn – re-discovering a medieval fulling mill*
- 18 Mar '15 David Dickinson – *Bookbinding*
- 15 Apr '15 Sue Rogers – *Undiscovered Historic Routes in Northumberland*
- 20 May '15 Kim Bibby-Wilson – *The Northumbrian Language and its Dialects*
- 17 June '15 AGM + Alistair Sinton – *Tyne to Tees*

Office Holders and Committee 2014

Tony Henfry	(President)
Bridget Winstanley	(Vice President)
Jim Dinsdale	(Chairman and Membership Secretary)
John Burn	(Vice Chairman)
Helen Dinsdale	(Hon. Secretary)
Richard Poppleton	(Hon. Treasurer)
Walter Carruthers	
Doreen Carruthers	

Contact details:

*The Secretary, A&BLHS, Sunnyside Cottage,
The Lane, Whittingham, Alnwick NE66 4RJ*
Tel: 01665 574319
jim.dinsdale@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?

- Renew your membership each year
- Encourage friends and neighbours to join
- **Come to meetings whenever you can!**
- Let our Secretary know about potential speakers
- Think about writing short (or long!) items for Records and Recollections
- Look out old documents or records or photographs and be willing to lend them to be scanned and saved for use in Records and Recollections

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Aln and Breamish Local History Society provides members with a programme of historical lectures and publications. A minimum of six lectures a year are arranged, three in the spring and three in the autumn. In addition there is a speaker or an exhibition at the Annual General Meeting in June.

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. If there is sufficient demand it would be possible to hold meetings in other locations in the Aln and Breamish valleys.

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

RECORDS & RECOLLECTIONS

Records & Recollections is published in Autumn and Spring 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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions to the A&BLHS are £10 for a single member and £15 for two people at the same address.

Subs are due on 1st 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

The option is available to pay by Standing Order with your bank and if you would like to pay by this method, please contact the Treasurer at the address above or by phone 01665 578346 or email

rich.titlington@btinternet.com

