

# Westerkirk Parish

in the years

## 2020/21

# Westerkirk Parish in the years 2020/21

Photographs

together with some updates  
on the book  
“Westerkirk in the year 2000”

main property photographs by  
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thank you to  
many other contributors  
for additional photos

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“WESTERKIRK, a parish in the district of Eskdale, county Dumfries, Scotland. It extends 10 miles in length from S. to N., with an extreme breadth of 6½ miles; and it is bounded on the N. by Roxburghshire, and on the other sides by the parishes of Ewes, Langholm, Tundergarth, Hutton and Corrie, and Eskdalemuir. The surface is generally hilly and mountainous, abounding in sheepwalks. The predominant rocks are graywacke and graywacke-slate, with shell marl at Megdale, and antimony at Jamestown. In the vicinity are ruins of Westerhall and Glendonwyn or Glendenning towers, with some remains of Crooks and Enzieholm towers, besides several hill forts and burians or “picts” houses, and Druidical circle and several ancient camps. The village is about 6 miles N.W. of Langholm, and stands at the confluence of the rivers Meggot and Stennis with the Esk, and on the road from Langholm to Ettrick and Selkirk. The parish formerly belonged to the Glendonwyns, and contained Eskdalemuir till 1703. The parish is in the presbytery of Langholm and synod of Dumfries. The stipend of the minister is about £153. The parish church was erected in 1788, and the churchyard contains the mausoleum of the Johnstone family. There are a parochial school and a public library, the latter founded and endowed in 1795 by Telford, the civil engineer, who was a native of this parish. Sir John Malcolm, author of “History of Persia,” Governor Johnstone, and Admiral Pasley were also born here. The principal seats are Westerhall, Burnfoot, Dowglen, and Hopesrigg.” [Description(s) from The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland (1868) Transcribed by Colin Hinson ©2003]

## A Note on the derivation of Westerkirk

On the surface the derivation of Westerkirk seems simple, something to do with compass points and churches no doubt, however a quick glance at the historical record reveals a much more complex and interesting story.

The earliest references are from 14th century legal and ecclesiastical records and they spell the parish as follows: Wathstirkir (1304), Wathstirkir (1305), Wastirker, (1309), Westirker (1316), Westirker (1316) Wathstirker (1319). The name ‘Westerkirk’ in something like its modern form only emerges in the 16th and 17th centuries and is clearly a phonetic rendering of ‘Wathstirkir’ into Scots.

Now we are left with the question “what does Wathstirkir (and its various spellings) mean and where did it come from?” Wathstirkir is thought to derive from the Old Norse vað Styrkàrr. Vað meaning a ford and Styrkàrr being a personal name. Styrkàrr’s ford. Interestingly whilst the language is Old Norse the word order is Gaelic (what is known as an inverted compound) meaning that both languages were probably spoken and understood at the time. Wathstirkir became Westerkirk later when all memory of Styrkàrr, his ford and, indeed, Old Norse had been forgotten and people relied upon phonetics alone.

Incidentally inverted compound place names are quite rare but there is another one in our Parish, the name of my house Douglen derives from the Gaelic for dark valley ‘Gleann Dubh’ but the word order is from Old English. Meaning, once again, that the inhabitants would have, most probably, been bilingual.

Written by Craig Caldock at Douglen

### Further Reading

Sottish Place Names, W.F.H Nicolaisen, Birlinn, 2001

Documents Illustrative of the History; of Scotland (1286-1306)., ed. J. Stevenson, 1870,2 vol

Libor Sancte Marie de Melros, 2 vols. Bannatyne Club 1837

Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland 1108-1509 e d. J. Bain, Vols. I-IV, 1881-8

Rotuli Scotiae, 1814,2 vol



Map showing boundary of the Westerkirk Parish



## A Note on the Second Statistical Account - see below

The Reverend William Little's account of the origins of the place name, Westerkirk, are interesting but no longer supported by modern philological studies (see for example W.F.H Nicolaisen or M.G Williamson). The Reverend's suggestion that the name is derived from what he calls Gaelic (but today we would say Brythonic) *Caer* is no longer considered to be correct. Whilst *Caer* is superficially phonetically similar the older spellings of the name (Wathstirkir) do not support this idea (it should also be noted that the Brythonic for West is *Guolleuin*).

The idea that it could be because it is the most westerly of the five kirks of Eskdale is quickly disproved by a glance through the historical records. Westerkirk is clearly a later phonetic rendering of Wathstirkir.

In the Reverend's defence the study of the philology and etymology of place names has come a long way since 1793. His remarks should be seen in context of the time they were written in and studied for historical interest only.

### Further Reading

Scottish Place Names, W.F.H Nicolaisen Birlinn, 2001

The Non-Celtic Place-Names of the Scottish Border Countries, May Gordon Williamson, 1942

## Copy from the Statistical Account of 1793 by the Reverend William Little

The parish of Westerker might, in process of time, be named Westerkirk, from the circumstance of its being the most westerly of the five kirks of Eskdale, commonly so called, vis. Canonbie, Wauchope, Ewes, Staplegordon, and Westerkirk; of the last of which the present parish of Eskdalemuir was a part, till the year 1703, when it was erected into a separate establishment. The farm of Westerker, from which the parish is supposed to have got its name, was probably so called from its vicinity to, and its situation in respect of an ancient building in the neighbourhood. There are vestiges of a castle on the farm of Crooks, a great part of which was standing in the memory of many of the present inhabitants. *Caer*, in the Gaelic language, signifies castle and *Wester-caer*, or *Westerker*, must mean a place to the west of the castle; and the farm of *Westerker* seems to have been so called, because it lies along the *W* side of the *Megget*, opposite to, and distant not more than a furlongs from the place where the castle formerly stood.



Craigcleuch (according to map, this is not in Westerkirk parish!)



South Lodge Craigcleuch (...however this IS in Westerkirk parish!)





North Lodge Craigcleuch



The Craig



Craig Windfarm Sub Station



Kemra Cottages





James Ewart Horse yard



Craig Windfarm



James Ewart Race track



Partridge Ghyll



# James Ewart Racing

We moved to the area from France in 2002 and established James Ewart Racing Limited in 2004.

We had approximately 11 loose boxes that had been previously used for cattle and Neil converted these to use for, initially point to pointers for James to ride and then he took out a permit himself..

James obtained his own licence in 2004 winning the prestigious Morebattle Hurdle at Kelso with Kimbambo as his first winner.

We became a source of French horse to many of the northern based trainers, who enjoyed plenty of winners themselves, and each year, and with some help of local Scottish business growth initiative grants, we were able to expand the number of loose boxes. Now being able to house 50 horses.

We also converted some of the land into training gallops (sand, Tapeta and grass) schooling fields, a menage, turn out pens and paddocks, and a bespoke horse walker. This diversification provides notable employment to the local environs and brought clients and visitors from all over the UK in helping local tourism and foot-fall also.

We are also always looking at ways to innovate and put in new systems to help and improve the results including veterinary practice working alongside industry leaders with things like nebulizers, water filters, hay steamers fogging for hygiene and testing all forage and bedding to name a few. We now have facilities to rival any more southern based trainer. South West Scotland being such a rural area we also have so many benefits with location providing the perfect controlled and quiet place to train.

Briony Ewart







**JAMES EWART  
RACING**  
*First Choice For Success*







Burn Cottage



Carlesgill House



Carlesgill Lodge



Carlesgill Stables





Carlesgill Steading



Whitelaw Cottage



Carlesgill Steading



Carlesgill Cottages





Sentry Box on road up to Old Hopsrigg



Calkin



Old Hopsrigg



Boykenhopehead





Hopsrigg



Bombie



Hopsrigg Cottage



Old Bombie



## Life in the village of Bentpath

Bentpath Post Office finally closed in 2008.

A new water main was put in in 2010. Mains water is now from the Black Esk reservoir.

Super fast broadband was installed along the B709 in 2018.

The telephone box was removed just days after the photo for this book was taken in December 2020.

Kenneth Dixon stopped doing the milk round in 2014.

Pelosi's icecream van does a circuit around the parish on every Friday evening from when the clocks go forward in spring until the clocks go back in autumn.

The fish van (JK Collin) visits regular customers every Wednesday morning and has a stall at the producers market on the first Saturday morning of the month (except during the covid pandemic)

Billy Johnstone is often to be seen on his ride on mower cutting the grass verges throughout the village of Bentpath keeping it looking neat and tidy.

The sound of chainsaws can be heard, most Sunday mornings in winter, cutting up supplies of logs for locals wood burning stoves and open fires.

The B709 has become a popular route for touring motorbikes, car clubs and cyclists.

The B709 is to be driven with caution. It is often full of potholes; pheasants and hares have a tendency to leap out into the road; followed by birds of prey (which are slow to take off if they try to carry away their quarry); heavily loaded logging lorries cant help but take over more than half of the road as it is relatively narrow; and herds of sheep are sometimes moved to a fresh field; and race horses returning from a gallop; and tractors with big heavy trailers bouncing slowly along. It's an interesting drive.

When the pheasants have just been let out of their pens then sections of the road need to be driven with caution at certain times of the day. Many a bird of prey waits for its lunch.

During the shooting season you can often hear the sound of the guns echoing across the valley.

At other times you can hear the horns and hounds out on a hound trail. Occasionally one of the hounds goes astray for a while.

In February, usually around the time you hear the first Oyster Catcher return, a quiz is held in the Benty Hall. Margaret Sanderson, the ex-headmistress of Bentpath School is the quiz master and still uses the old school bell to keep everyone in order.

In spring, the bleating of the lambs and bountiful birdsong welcome in the warmer months.



Erected by the voluntary subscriptions  
of his tenantry and others  
to perpetuate the memory of  
Sir Frederick George Johnstone  
of Westerhall Baronet  
Born 10th January 1811, died 7th May  
1841  
universally lamented

Johnstone Memorial



Johnstone Memorial





Bentpath Sign



Bentpath phone box



Bentpath Telephone Exchange



Back of Allan Cartner's Yard





Bentpath House



The Old Post Office, Bentpath



Bentpath Cottage (once was 2 houses)



Ivy Cottage (was once the local shop)



## The Benty Hall and Benty Bowling

After the celebrations around the Millennium the usual round of events resumed. The popularity of the whist drives tailed off but they were replaced by an annual quiz night, held in February.

In 2007 a walk to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Thomas Telford was arranged from Glendinning to Bentpath, accompanied by our local piper. Despite the dreich weather the walk was very well supported; the barbeque afterwards in the Hall went towards Hall funds.

In 2008 a local trust generously paid for the tarmacking of the Hall carpark.

In 2013 the Benty Bowlers donated a new table for the Hall.

In 2018 there was a well-attended talk on a local's trip to the Himalayas, and in the following year an equally popular talk on local wildlife was given by a speaker from Lockerbie.

Meanwhile, a defibrillator was placed outside the Hall; inside new blinds were fitted, the Hall painted and a new kitchen installed. The ceiling was lowered and insulation fitted to help with heating costs, again with a donation from a local benefactor.

At the end of 2019 two weel-kent raconteurs from Hawick and Langholm performed their famous double-act on the history of Eskdale and Teviotdale to a packed audience...the last entertainment before Covid-19 closed the Hall for public use in March 2020.

The Benty Bowlers started up in the Hall as far back as 1927. In later years they have met at Glendinning Hope, Billholm and Harperwhat, all now abandoned. In 2001 the bowlers had twenty members, ranging in age from fifteen upwards, and the club is flourishing. Every Monday night bowlers come to support the tournament from as far afield as Moffat, Selkirk, Dumfries, Milltown, and Brampton, and the Benty Bowlers return the compliment. The pairs tournament attracts up to forty pairs and seventy-two for the singles. The last tournament before lockdown took place on March 16th 2020.

Wull Little.



Benty Hall



Benty Hall with defibrillator



## The Benty Show

There have not been many changes in the last 20 years to the show. Probably the most notable was the evening disco in the hall stopped once “Titanic Tommy Johnson” moved away. An evening BBQ with drinks tent in the field is now the entertainment for later in the day.

List of trophies and who donated them (plus year?):

Heather Buckley Memorial trophy - Westerhall  
John Scott Memorial trophy - Scott family, Langholm  
Silver Challenge Trophy - The Benty Show  
May Martin Challenge trophy - ??  
Andy Dalgliesh memorial challenge trophy - Georgefield  
Nancy Park Perpetual Trophy - Park Family, Langholm  
Tommy Moffat challenge cup - Moffat family, Bentpath  
Wullie Mackay challenge trophy - Mackay family, Hopsrigg  
Buckley Challenge trophy - Westerhall  
Bonese challenge trophy - Mr Wilson, Bentpath  
E&L Silver challenge trophy - E&L Langholm  
Ella Jackson Trophy - Jackson family, Ewes  
The Dalgiesh cup - (Elma Aitken) - Dalgliesh family, Enzieholm  
The Potholm perpetual challenge trophy - Mr & Mrs Wood family, Potholm  
Fell race Scott challenge trophy - Ernie Scott & family, eskdalemuir  
Georgefield cup - Com Balfour, Georgefield  
Garwald cup - McTagarts family, Eskdalemuir  
Late Robbie Little cup - The Little family, Bewcastle  
Jack Armitage special challenge trophy - Jack Armitage, Langholm  
Elliot Borthwick Challenge trophy - Elliot Borthwick, Langholm  
Hartmanor Hotel Challenge trophy, Medcalfe family  
Malcolm Little trophy, Malcolm Little, Megdale  
Silver challenge trophy - Jackson family, Stennieswater  
Silver challenge cup - R. Douglas, Arresgill  
Lyneholm Challenge cup - McFarling Grieve, Lyneholm  
Silver challenge cup, Neil Manning  
John A Reid memorial trophy - Reid family, Cleudeerg  
George Bell memorial trophy, Bell family, The Bloch  
Megdale challenge trophy - Little family  
Effgill challenge cup - Douglas family  
P&J Medcalfe challenge trophy - Metcalfe family, Hart Manor  
Scott of Glendearg challenge trophy - Scott family, Glendearg  
The Dunning-White challenge cup - Dunning-white family, Westerhall  
Hopsrigg Challenge cup - Brian McKay, Old Hopsrigg  
Clay piigeon - Allan Kerr, Garwald cottages  
Commander Balfour Trophy - Commander Balfour



The start of the Benty fell race - folk from as far away as Australia have entered.



Sheaf tossing competition at the Benty Show



## Westerkirk SWI update since the year 2000

Whist drives no longer take place due to the majority of the older players unable to attend any more for varying reasons. The game did not have the same appeal for the younger generation! The whist drive was historically held to raise funds for the children's party. The party is now run by the mother's & they do their own fundraising. SWI gives a donation but no longer has anything to do with the organising or holding of the party. The children still have a good time!



The name change from Scottish Womens Rural Institute (SWRI) to Scottish Womens Institute (SWI) was brought about in 2015 in a drive to attract new members to join the organisation. It was believed that by dropping the word "rural" from the name this would encourage women from the town's to join. Westerkirk SWI always had a percentages of members coming up from Langholm so the change of name made no difference to us. Some new institutes did spring up in some towns with afternoon meetings in a more informal setting ie in a pub or someone's home! A new badge was designed to coincide with the name change!



Many institutes now have a uniform ie polo shirts, sweatshirts, fleece jackets which can be worn at certain events. Westerkirk members chose to have purple tops. Each item of clothing has the logo for Westerkirk & depicts pictures of both badges, the old & the new. Each institute can now put forward a team of four members to compete in a Ruralympics competition usually held in February in Dumfries, by the Dumfriesshire Federation. The winner at Federation level then competes at National level. The Games comprise of fun, indoor activities to suit all age groups. Westerkirk have won gold at Fed level 3/4 times, a great achievement.



Westerkirk SWI celebrated their 90th year in 2019



We now hold a fund-raiser in February which works alongside an open day held at Craig Farm. There are many varieties of snowdrops growing on the farm & a snowdrop walk is held as part of the Garden Scotland Scheme. When the visitors have completed the walk they can then come to partake of refreshment in the hall. On offer is homemade soup served with bread, then a choice of homemade scones, cakes & traybakes, all washed down with many cups of tea! Just what is needed after a walk on a cool February day.

Lib McNeil  
Chairwoman of Westerkirk SWI 2020/21



Team show competition entry



Results of one of our fun craft learning sessions for learning new skills





## To The Benty and Back

Becoming Langholm Cornet for any young local lad is a tremendous honour. To be given the opportunity to represent your town, carry the town standard round the marches and become a part of local history is a fantastic experience.

In May 2007 on the third time of standing I was finally elected as Langholm Cornet with a vote count of 701. I stood against three other candidates that year and two of the three I am pleased to say went on to be Cornet in later years.

The part of my story that is slightly different from others is I was the first and only person from the village of Bentpath, and as far as I am aware, the first and only from the parish of Westerkirk to be elected as Langholm Cornet. It is something that I am very proud of but also something I hope somebody in the future replicates when I am still around to see it.

The post of Langholm Cornet was not one that I had planned from a young age but more of a slow burning desire as I entered my early 20's. Horse riding was something I came late to but after learning the basics so I could follow Cornet Steven Hotson round the marches in 2000 I found I great enjoyment in the whole experience being on horseback, following the Cornets on the preliminary rideouts and Common riding day. So in 2005 after discussions with family and friends I decided to put my name forward for the post of Langholm Cornet. Losing the elections in both 2005 and 2006 did not put me off and in 2007 I finally found success.



The Castle Craigs Club is a local club with a main aim being to foster the spirit of the common riding and they organise and run all the preliminary rideouts that proceed the commonriding day itself.

To become a member of the Castle Craigs you firstly must be Male and live within a 9 mile radius of the Crown Hotel (clubs headquarters) for more than twelve months and finally follow the Cornet on Caste Craigs rideout (Saturday before the Common riding) on Horseback and you must ride the complete route from North toll bar of the town (way out) to the South Toll bar on the return journey.

If you manage to complete this criteria then you will be awarded your Castle Craigs Tie and Badge in the Crown Hotel at the evening meal after the Ride out.





This Cairn was erected by The Castle Craigs Club for the community of Bentpath to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of The Benty Rideout. 1960-2010



The Rideout which I was most excited about in my year in office was of course the Benty rideout.

The Castle Craigs Club have been riding to the Benty since 1960. Previously the rideout went to Newcastleton but due to the hill track to "The Holm" having been modernised to tarmac it was no longer suitable for an enjoyable ride out and it was decided an alternative route to the Benty would be better. This must have been the case as the Benty is still the desired destination.

The Westerkirk WRI became involved soon afterwards providing the Cornet and his followers with a hearty meal within the hallowed tin walls of the Benty Hall of a cold meat salad with pasta salads, coldslaws, breads, scones, cakes and tea. Which often washed down with a medicinal Whiskey or two.

This is then followed with a toast to the Cornet..his reply and then the singing of several local songs to put us in fine spirits before the journey home.

When mounted and ready to leave we wait for the Cornet and his right and left hand men to sing the song "A WEE BIT TOON" outside the hall before they lead us down through Westerhall on our homeward leg.







The Benty ride was of course one of the standout moments for me as cornet. The experience of leading the cavalcade of riders into the Benty loring and seeing and hearing the crowds of people, some I had known since I had been a small boy hooraying and cheering was a thrilling and humbling experience and one which I will never forget . Also being given the customary nip o whisky from my mother before we left for Langholm was lovely moment. Memory's which I am lucky to have and will treasure for the rest of my days.

As a lad from “ the Benty “ to be given the honour of representing Langholm, Westerkirk and the Benty by Carrying the Langholm Burgh Standard and check the town boundary's is one that I will be forever grateful for .  
Fingers Crossed it can inspire other young lads in the area to follow suit in the near future .

W.Andrew Johnstone







A couple of the Benty Horse hauders - William Jammeh and Geoffrey Ireland



Horses resting in field behind the Benty Hall



Farrier at work whilst the riders enjoy lunch in the hall



Pelosi's Ice cream van provides refreshments for onlookers

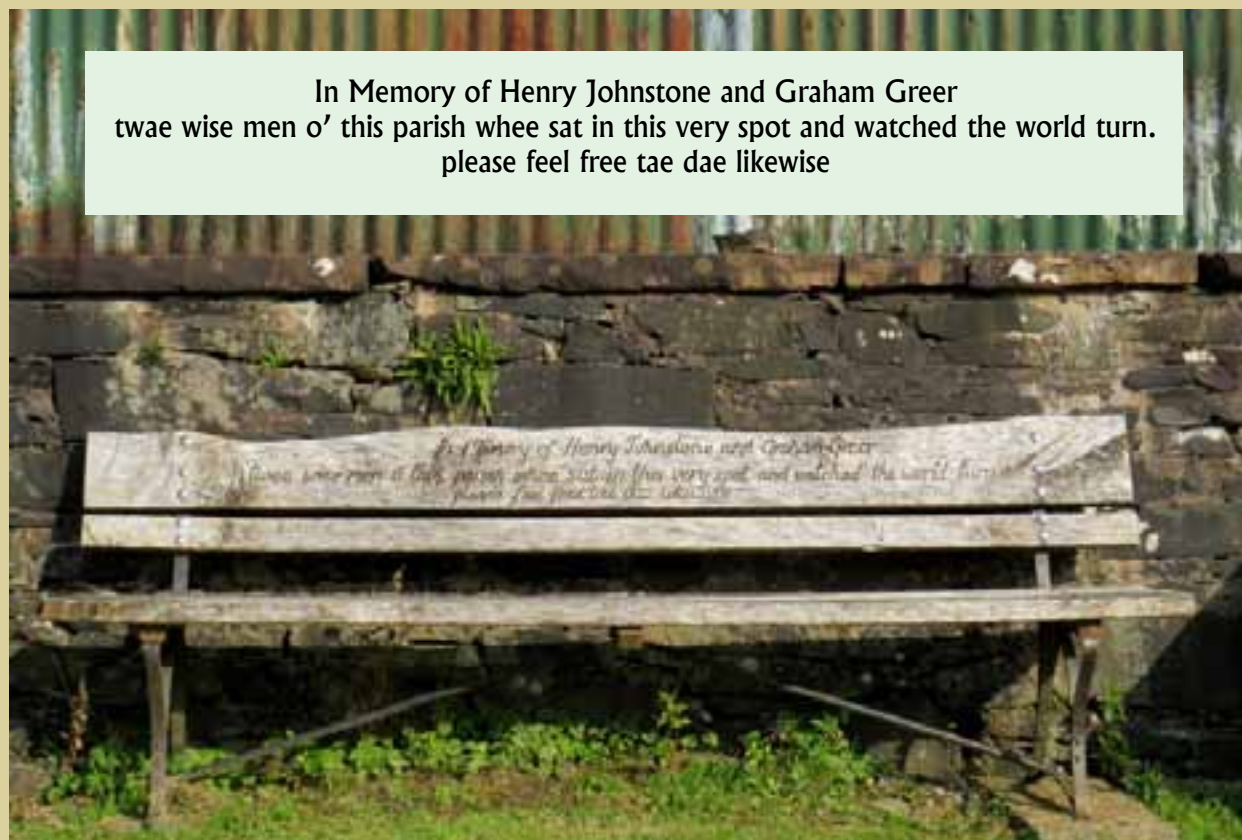




...even The Benty post box was “slated” in 2020 during covid lock down



Allan Cartner's Yard



Bench in Bentpath



Bridge (Brig) End Cottage





## The Benty Showtrucks

I have always, from a young age, had an interest in trucks. My father was a haulage contractor from up the valley in Eskdalemuir. I bought my first truck in 1992 at the age of 27. It was an early Volvo F10 model that I used to haul timber from forest to sawmills around the country. In 2007 I moved my base to the old steading in Bentpath where I run my 3 trucks out of up to this day in 2021, still hauling round timber grown in forests locally.

My pride and joy is a Scania R730 truck, the most powerful Scania truck to date at 730 horse-power. It is a real pleasure to own and drive a truck of this calibre. Although my drivers show the other trucks occasionally, the R730 has caught the eye at many a truck show where it has attended and came home with a trophy or two. The shows mainly attended are: Full of the pipe truckshow in Co Kildare, Ireland; Ingleston at Edinburgh; Kirkbride nr Carlisle; Barnard Castle in north east England and a couple of charity events held at Lockerbie and Carlisle.

The classes it qualified for were: Best in Show; Best Rigid Configuration; and Best Timber Truck. So far we have come home with eleven trophies for winning these classes and a couple of runner up shields.

Allan Cartner



The R730 was purchased new in 2016 and will grace Bentpath for many more years with the beat of the mighty V8 engine!





Not just for show...these vehicles earn their keep.







Esk Cottage



View from Westerkirk Bridge towards Johnstone Monument



Westerkirk Bridge Bentpath Built 1734-1736 by Robert Paisley (Bd. 25th July 1737)  
plaque unveiled on 23rd July 2001 by The Much Hon. Duncan W. Paisley of Westerlea



Benty Church View





Looking down at Westerkirk Library, Old School and Schoolhouse



Westerkirk School (now closed)



Westerkirk School House

## Update on Westerkirk School

In 1999 the Head Teacher , Mrs Margaret Sanderson, announced that she would be retiring in June 2000.

As pupil numbers had been declining for several years and there was no realistic prospect that the numbers would grow the education authority decided that the school would close in June 2000.

After consultation with parents, it was decided that the pupils would transfer to Langholm after the Easter break and that Mrs Sanderson would be available to deal with any problems and would oversee the dispersal of all school property to other schools.

Since the official closure of the school in early June 2000 the property has remained empty.





## Addition to Westerkirk Parish Library entry for 2020

Although the Restoration Project was completed in 1998, it became apparent that a thorough overhaul of the Library's stock was also required. The numbers catalogue now exceeded the 15,000 mark, although it was obvious that the Library in fact contained around 8000 volumes at best. What had happened to the missing books? Clearly the catalogue required urgent revision, but which cataloguing system should be adopted was a matter for consultation with other comparable libraries. Several trustees have visited Innerpeffray Library, a very successful and well-used 'penny library' in Perthshire; as a result, Westerkirk has received advice and support from its librarian, Lara Haggarty. The Library has now traced and recovered numerous volumes, though puzzling gaps in the sequence of the numerical catalogue remain.

The Library maintains close contact with the Leadhills and Wanlockhead miners' libraries, both of which are in the process of recataloguing their holdings. For the moment, however, Westerkirk continues to add to its numerical catalogue, for future plans will depend on the outcome of a research project launched by the University of Stirling, funded by a major grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, into the reading habits of the Scottish people in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750-1820. Westerkirk is fully involved in this project, since the Library holds extensive records of acquisitions and lendings from its establishment in the late eighteenth century. Once these have been evaluated we will have the basis for an informed recataloguing.

Meanwhile, the Trustees have brought the Library up to modern conservation standards, with the installation of an air-conditioning system, improved ventilation, heat sensors, fire alarms and window blinds. These steps could only be contemplated once the roof had been relaid with Burlington slates, in conformity with the Library's status as a listed building. The sizeable expense of reroofing was made possible by a generous legacy from Arthur Bell, who devoted so much time and energy to getting the Library back on its feet from the 1990s onwards.

The Trustees realize that the survival and success of the Library as a centre of research and the dissemination of knowledge depend upon a major upgrade of its facilities. The Library at present lacks toilet facilities, indeed a water supply, quite apart from an internet connection. The Library badly needs more storage and an exhibition space (to include the recently acquired Thomas Telford medal awarded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh). To that end, the Trustees are embarking on a feasibility study, with plans drawn up by a locally based architect. Planning applications have already been submitted, though progress will depend on the easing of pandemic restrictions. On the basis of the feasibility study it is hoped to construct a suitable Library annex, deploying the latest ecologically sustainable technology. Information on all aspects of the Library is available on its website. A free-to-join Friends of the Westerkirk Parish Library list numbers over seventy subscribers.



inside main library room



inside Reading Room of Library





Display cabinet: Antimony mine photos & samples loaned by Lorraine Luescher



New Books printed by Westerkirk Parish Library



stamp from leather book binding donated by John Crawford of Langholm



Westerkirk Parish Library





Thomas Telford Medal



Julian Glover with his book "Man of Iron" at Buccleuch centre Nov 2017

Description of medal from auction lot 408.

A Historically Important Membership Medal Belonging to Thomas Telford, silver membership medal embossed to one side 'ROYAL SOCIETY EDINBURGH INSTITUTED 1783' and engraved on the other side 'THOMAS TELFORD 1803', Telford was elected a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh on the 31st January 1803 Thomas Telford FRS, FRSE (9 August 1757 – 2 September 1834) was a Scottish civil engineer, architect and stonemason, and road, bridge and canal builder. After establishing himself as an engineer of road and canal projects in Shropshire, he designed numerous infrastructure projects in his native Scotland, as well as harbours and tunnels. Such was his reputation as a prolific designer of highways and related bridges, he was dubbed The Colossus of Roads (a pun on the Colossus of Rhodes), and, reflecting his command of all types of civil engineering in the early 19th century, he was elected as the first President of the Institution of Civil Engineers, a post he held for 14 years until his death

Julian Glover's book *Man of Iron: Thomas Telford and the building of Britain* was serialised on Radio 4's Book of the Week.

Julian accepted an invitation from the Westerkirk Parish Library to give a talk on his book at the Buccleuch Centre in Langholm.

#### Reviews:

A biography of great verve ... brings back to vivid life a man who should never have been forgotten" – Andrew Marr,

"Glover has done detailed research and any other author will struggle to improve on his life of Telford ... *Man of Iron* is a competent, interesting book about an engineer whose star ... deserves to shine a little brighter" – Simon Heffer, Daily Telegraph

"An evocative biography of Britain's greatest civil engineer ... An evocative telling of an interesting life, an account that has lots to admire ... Glover catches the thrill of Telford's engineering quite beautifully" – Guardian

"A strikingly clear portrait of the man who helped shape Britain. ... A beautifully-written biography, reading almost as a work of classic literature" – Engineering & Technology

"Vivid, enthusiastic ... Glover makes an enormously readable and persuasive case for Telford's importance in our national story" – Dominic Sandbrook, Sunday Times

"Astonishing and inspiring ... Mixing effortless prose with genuine insight has produced an immersive biography that proves hard to put down ... The story of Thomas Telford is the story of modern Britain, and never has it been so well told" – BBC Countryfile

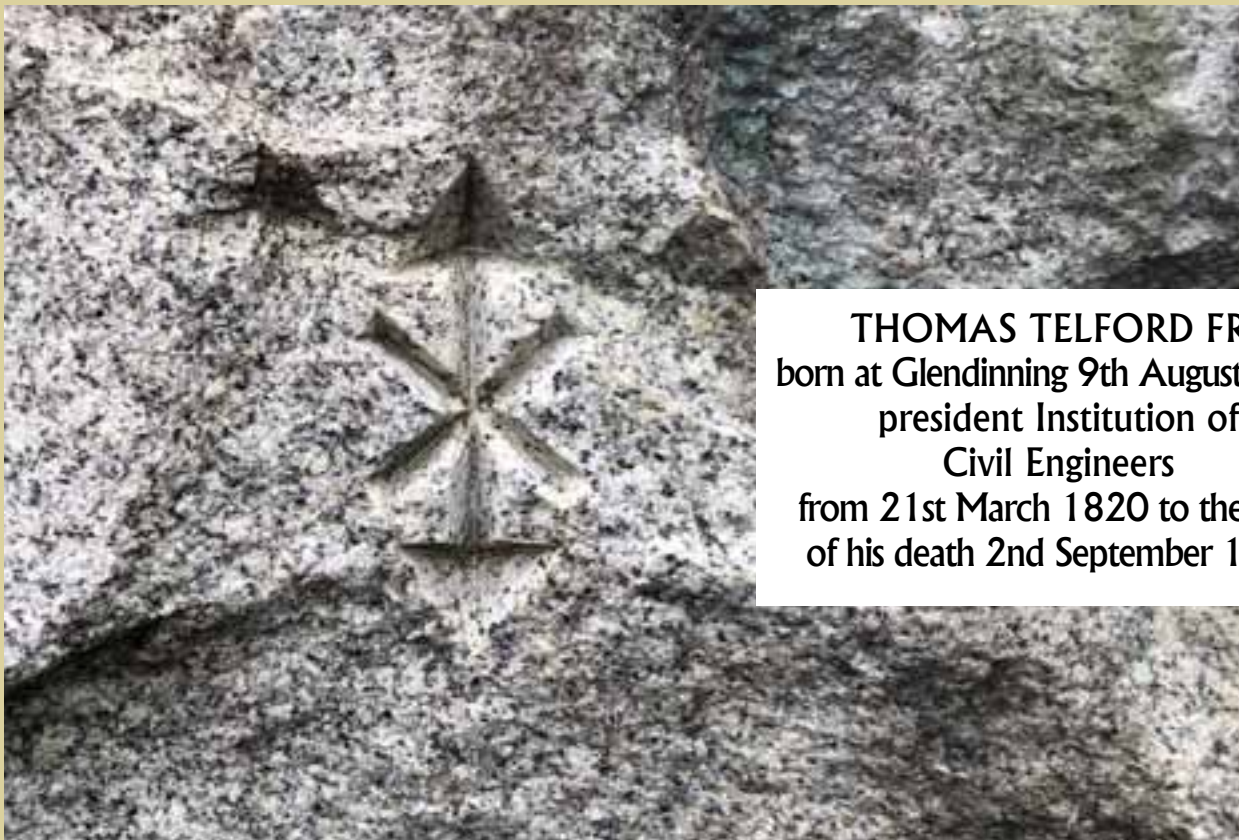




Thomas Telford memorial



Thomas Telford memorial



THOMAS TELFORD FRS  
born at Glendinning 9th August 1757  
president Institution of  
Civil Engineers  
from 21st March 1820 to the time  
of his death 2nd September 1834

Thomas Telford's stonemasons mark







Plaque on left hand side of Thomas Telford Memorial



Plaque on right hand side of Thomas Telford Memorial

This seat was erected in 1928 to perpetuate the memory of Thomas Telford son of the unblameable shepherd and to record his fame as an engineer and his untiring benevolence. Apprenticed to a stonemason in Langholm. His creative genius gave to the nation many works of inestimable benefit. He was the first president of the Institution of Civil Engineers

There mongst those rocks i'll form a rural seat  
and plant some ivy with its moss compleat  
i'll benches form of fragments from the stone  
which nicely pois'd was by our hands o'erthrown

*Telford*





1 and 2 Greenside



Hérons Ghyll - build completed 2006



3 and 4 Greenside



Sherra Craig - built 2008/9



## Dettol

Within Bentpath and the rest of the UK, the year 2001 shall be remembered as the year in which the agricultural community was gripped by the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. This caused widespread uncertainty and devastation.

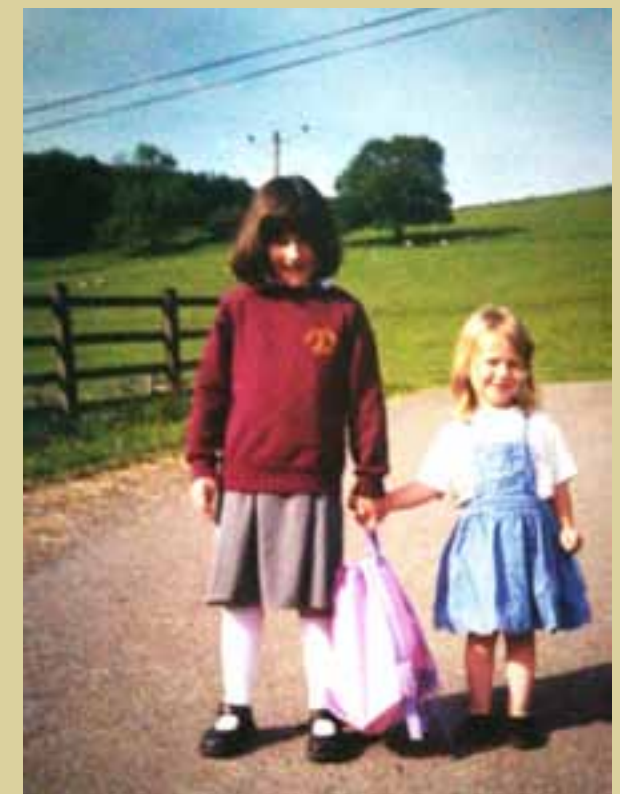
It is a year which evokes many memories for those across Bentpath, who were in the mist of such a crisis- I included. As such, one memory in particular stands out for me... that is the liquid antiseptic disinfectant known as Dettol.

I was 8 years old at the time and living at Midknock Farm. During the epidemic, I was in primary school, and like many schools across the UK, Langholm was subject also to closures to protect rural communities. Yet, when circumstances improved and schools reopened, I returned to school like usual- I walked to the bus and caught the bus to school; normal- but with one big difference and that difference was Dettol.

To help prevent the spread of the disease, upon my return to school, I had a routine...a Dettol filled one. I would wash my wellies with disinfectant before walking with my mum to meet the bus- at the top of the hill that formed our road end. Once at the road end I would change my wellies for a disinfected pair of school shoes (that were kept in a box of disinfectant at the road end), before getting on the bus. At the end of the school day when I got back home, I once again changed my shoes to disinfected wellies and walked down the hill with my mum. At the bottom of the hill before walking into the farmyard, I stood in a bucket of disinfectant with my arms stretched outwards, like a scarecrow- cue then being sprayed head to toe with a knapsack sprayer filled with disinfectant. However, my disinfectant story does not end there as once I entered the house it was straight into the bath. A bath of...Dettol.

It is this lasting memory of Dettol, or more like the smell of which, that distinguishes that moment in time for me. It is a smell that makes me wince- I am once again standing like a scarecrow in a bath of Dettol. The further irony of it all is that despite this memory of Dettol, as an adult I am in the medical profession- where Dettol is paramount.

Stephanie Cartner







Boonies



Weatherlea



Scroggie Bank - converted to a house in 2001/2



Boonies Cottage





The Boonies Historic site



The Boonies historic site sign



The Boonies Historic site



The Boonies historic site horse stables



## Westerkirk Library: Archaeological evaluation July 2021

The trustees of the Westerkirk Parish Library, with an enormous amount of help from the Eskdale and Liddesdale Archaeological Society, and from Andrew Nicholson, the County Archaeologist, undertook a 3 day dig in a small section of the mound next to the library. This was carried out as part of the feasibility study into providing some better facilities for the library such as a toilet and water supply. Initially we expected to complete the dig in one day as we thought that the mound was a spoil heap left over from demolishing some older buildings that had been on site as shown on the the old map in the library which was drawn before the library was built. However the first day revealed a large stone right at the top section of the mound so it was decided to find out more whilst we could as the weather was in our favour.

Ideally we would like to complete a further dig to find out more about the mound in the future.

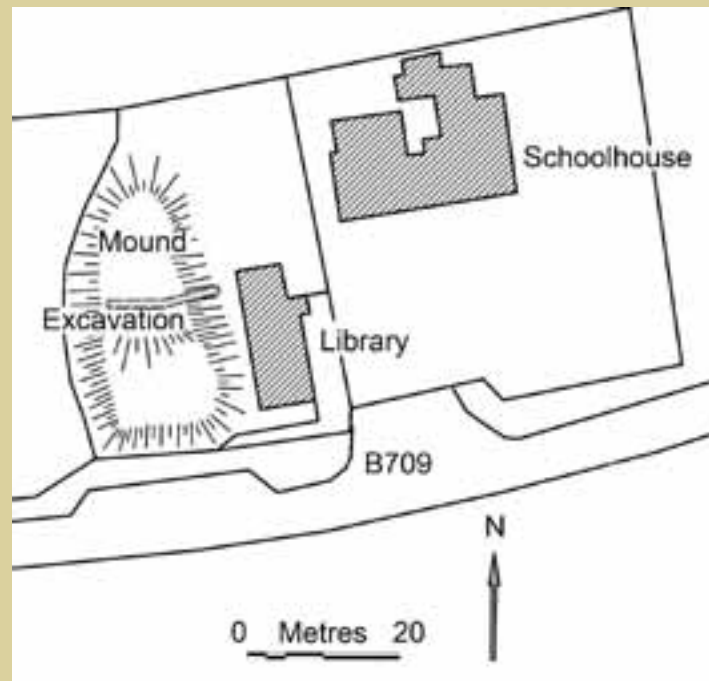


photo of brick fragment.

Several fragments of hand-made brick, of an orangey-red fabric with irregular thin bands of buff-yellow were found near the base of slope.



clay pad heading into mound



taken from Andrew Nicholson's report issued 10th December 2021 on behalf of Eskdale and Liddesdale Archaeological Society

### Discussion

17. The evaluation trench at Westerkirk Library revealed evidence to suggest that the mound was anthropic in nature, though its precise date and function have not been determined. It would appear to have been constructed from local sand and gravel deposits, perhaps consolidated by the construction of the clay pad a third of the way up from the base.

18. There is no evidence, both from the excavation and from boreholes undertaken and inspected in September 2021 to indicate that there is a ditch round the base of the mound.

19. It may be that the site is a medieval motte, with the field to the west being the bailey, as the latter is defended on one side by the drop off of the river terrace and on another by the steep gully of the Bent Burn. However there are no historic records to indicate the presence of a fortification on this site. In the Burghley Atlas of c 1590 a tower is shown to the east of the River Esk at 'Ye Crookes', and about 1794 in the Old Statistical Account the Rev. W Little refers to vestiges of a castle on Crooks Farm, Westerkirk, 'a great part of which was still standing within living memory'.

20. The form and composition of the mound is not characteristic of a prehistoric burial cairn.

21. The presence of the stone feature and post-hole on top of the mound do indicate evidence of human activity and some form of structure on top of the mound, but no dating evidence was obtained.





Greenside Hill was originally felled off in 2007 by Allan Cartner and was then mixed conifer trees, mainly sitka spruce and larch. It was replanted in 2008 with Larch which then got diseased and felled prematurely in early 2021.

## Larch Disease - Phytophthora ramorum

First found in Scottish plant nurseries in 2002 and in gardens and parks in 2007, larch disease is causing extensive damage and mortality to larch trees and other plants, mainly in the wetter west of Scotland.

An area in south-west Scotland at the heart of a major surge of *Phytophthora ramorum* on larch in 2013 was designated as a Management Zone. Within this zone the disease was too advanced to stop its spread within the area, so efforts have been focused on tackling new outbreaks in Scotland outside the Management Zone. At present Westerkirk is outside of this zone, however large areas of larch are being cleared now (2020/21).

Scottish Forestry conducts bi-annual helicopter surveillance and associated ground surveys of larch to monitor the spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* on larch. Outside the Management Zone, Ramorum has not been detected in over 90% of the larch in Scotland, underlining why continued control actions are necessary to slow down the rate, extent and severity of disease expansion.

Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) are issued requiring the felling of larch trees infected with *P. ramorum* plus larch within a 250 metre buffer zone everywhere in Scotland outside the Management Zone. SPHNs for *P. ramorum* are generally not issued inside the Management Zone, in order to allow the phased removal of larch within the capacity of the forestry sector to harvest and process the timber.

*P. ramorum* can also cause disease in *Rhododendron ponticum*. The spread of spores from infected rhododendron, although on a smaller scale than larch, can still contribute to disease spread. SPHNs issued where infection of rhododendron with *P. ramorum* is confirmed require the removal of infected rhododendron plants plus rhododendron within a 2 metre buffer zone.

### Biosecurity

**Phytophthora ramorum can be spread in mud or needles stuck to footwear and machine, vehicle, bicycle or buggy tyres. Please follow biosecurity guidance to help stop Ramorum disease spreading.**







Mid Knock Forest sign



Netherknock



Bentpath sign



Midknock Cottage





Midknock Farm House



Millgillfoot



Midknock Farm and Barn



Bogle Walls





Enzieholm



Enzieholm Cottage



Enzieholm Farm



Enzieholm Farm Sign





Harperwhat



Lyneholm House



Harperwhat - resctored 2002



The Bungalow, Lyneholm





Barns along from Lyneholm House



Bailliehill



Lyneholm Cottage and Penchrise



Bailliehill and Barns





Bailie Hill Barns



Road Sign



View from Bailliehill



Bailliehill Fishing Hut



## Douglen Brae

Douglen Brae is not strictly in Westerkirk and was excluded from Dr Shirley Rodden's book back in 2000. Our house sits a few metres over the boundary, in the parish of Ewes. However, we have always felt part of Westerkirk and we are honoured to be included in this updated, on-line version.

Douglen Brae sits on the slope of Golf Hill and therefore enjoys wonderful views of this section of the Esk valley. The views are constantly changing, depending on the weather and the seasons. Over the past 20 years, some features, like the erection of the Craig Windfarm, have changed our view permanently. Four turbines were sited on Carlesgill Hill in 2007 followed by a further two a few years later. Four of these six turbines are visible from Douglen Brae. Also, to the west of Bombie Hill, the tips of two of twenty-four turbines, which comprise the more recent Ewe Hill windfarm can just be seen.

Another change to the landscape has been the development of the racing stables and race tracks at the Craig Farm, although this has gradually been obscured from view as the conifers bordering the farm have grown up.

Forestry provides an ever-changing view. About fifteen years ago, the 70 year old larch trees below Douglen Brae were felled and the opening up of the view at that time was quite dramatic. Replanting of this area with sitka spruce has given yet another change to the landscape. Over the years, conifers on Burnfoot and Dowglen Hill have been harvested and replanted with a mixture of conifers and broad-leaved trees and this year we have seen most of the larch trees on Dowglen Hill cleared as part of the eradication program of Phytophthora Ramorum, a disease which affects larch trees, with still a few to go above Douglen Cleuch, beside the burn. A few years ago, conifers, mostly larch, on the hillside to the north of the road between Douglen Brae and Burnfoot Bridge were felled leaving, to name but a few, laurel bushes, rosebay willowherb, foxgloves and a scattering of deciduous trees to colonise the empty space and thrive, but also opening up a view of the hill towards Gardener's Cottage. Several years ago, a large swathe of Craig Hill was planted with broad-leaved trees, which are now beginning to show through the protective tubes. The middle and far distant views have seen trees come and go over the years and they will continue to do so in the future, with imminent plans in place to clear a strip of conifers on Craig Hill.

We never cease to wonder at the view, at the sunrises and sunsets, at mist rising in the valley and snow-clad hills. Every day sees something different and even in the driving rain and when the mists obscure the views, we can watch the birds and red squirrels which come to the feeders and the pheasants that wait for the crumbs to fall from the bird table and think how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful setting.

Anne Murray



Douglen Brae



View from Douglen Brae





Douglan Cleuch (just outside the boundary of Westerkirk)



The Pink Cottage



Douglan



The old Gas House (1870) for Burnfoot + Pink Cottage Sign





Wartime tractor 1942 Fordson-N with Ransomes Two Furrow Plough

## Kenneth Irving's Show Tractors

Fordson N built 1942, the first tractor operated at Westerhall Farm for many years. This was the tractor I originally learnt to drive on at 10 years old, and then in 1956 (at 15 years old) started work with. It was our only working tractor until we got our first Ferguson T-20. The Fordson was eventually retired and sold to the Jeffrey Brothers Agricultural Engineers in Langholm. I finally bought it back from them in 1988 and restored it to working condition.

The Ransomes Two Furrow drag plough was bought much later around 2002 from Peter Hannah who ran the Canonbie Vintage Club. He is on the right of the tractor, next to myself, with my grandson Craig Dalgliesh. This photo was taken during a lunch break at a Ploughing match near Longtown in Cumbria. I repaired and painted the plough and took part in ploughing matches around the area. I was approached by Rae Ayres, sculptor at Border Fine Arts, and asked if they could borrow the plough to copy and make a model for sale through their business. They produced a fine replica of plough and a model of a Fordson Major pulling it.

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Massey Ferguson 35h.p.P.P ie TRACTOR VAPORISING OIL.

A more modern tractor at the time, this model was produced in 1962.

By then I was ploughman on the farm of Westerhall and over the years operated a large range of Massey Ferguson models up to June 1990 when I received The Agricultural Long Service medal.

By this date all tractors were run on Diesel.

Around this time I bought a MF35P.P. It wasn't registered so applied to DVLA and received an age related registration XSJ520 which it carries to this day.

I ploughed regular for a number of years and collected various Reds and Blues Rosettes. (Reds - were 1sts, and Blues - were 2nds)

Only once did I receive the Championship Cup at an all Ferguson Match on the farm of Peepy near Hexham. Hexham at this time was farmed by the well known farmer John Moffit C.B.E. who had a large Dairy Herd known as the Hunday Dairy and also had an amazing Agricultural Museum known as the Hunday Museum.



Massey Ferguson 35 1962 with Ferguson 2 furrow plough.  
Photo taken in the late 1990's during a funday with the Canonbie Ploughing Club ploughing Mautwell on Westerhall Estate.





Fordson N, 1942. The oldest tractor in the collection.



Fordson Dexter, 1958, now used as a log chipper.



Ferguson T20, 1946 used with logging saw.



"Little Alice" from the 1940's  
arriving at Westerhall

...and now fully restored.







Burnfoot Farm and Steading



One side of the steading has been removed in recent years



Wording above the barn entrance says:

HE CAUSETH THE GRASS TO GROW FOR THE CATTLE AND HERB FOR THE SERVICE OF MAN.

1845



Burnfoot steading





Far side of Burnfoot Steading



Burnfoot Farm



Brae Cottage



The Gardener's Cottage





remains of Burnfoot walled orchard



Diseased larch trees are being felled in this forest in 2020/21



Inside remains of Burnfoot walled orchard



View of Hilltop Leaf new greenhouses and turbines



## Mina Malcolm's Cottage

'Beneath thy roof what splendid proofs are plac'd/Of manly enterprise, and female taste!  
How many distant lands have lent their aid/To deck thy walls, sweet Cottage of the shade!'

These words are from a poem in 1833 by poet William Park (1788-1843).

Not much remains of this cottage in the woods near Burnfoot now, other than a pile of stones. The arched window shown in the sketch opposite was still standing up until about 15 years ago and then looked like it was the remains of a small chapel on the hillside with a path leading to it. However this unusual cottage had belonged to Wilhelmina Malcolm (1765-1832). She was one of the sisters of the famous Knights of Eskdale (Sir James, Sir Charles, Sir Pulteney and Sir John Malcolm).

Whilst her brothers were sent to empire to make their fortunes, Wilhelmina stayed at home to help raise the second generation, her brother's children, who were sent back to Burnfoot to be taught by her and her 3 unmarried sisters.

In a letter Mina wrote to her cousin Charles Pasley in 1804 she states 'I have built a Cottage in the Wood for holding natural curiosities and a beautiful Place it is':

The collection consists and is to consist of Stones, Coral, Spar, Pitorfaction, Skins of Animals (have already Leapords, stuff'd Birds, Sea Weed, curious Stones & Plants etc etc. - The four windows are all Shell work in the inside to open latice below, and the Gothic Arch at the top of the Roof is very high the six sides form into a middle about five feet square - It is upon the inside roof that the skins are to be placed.'

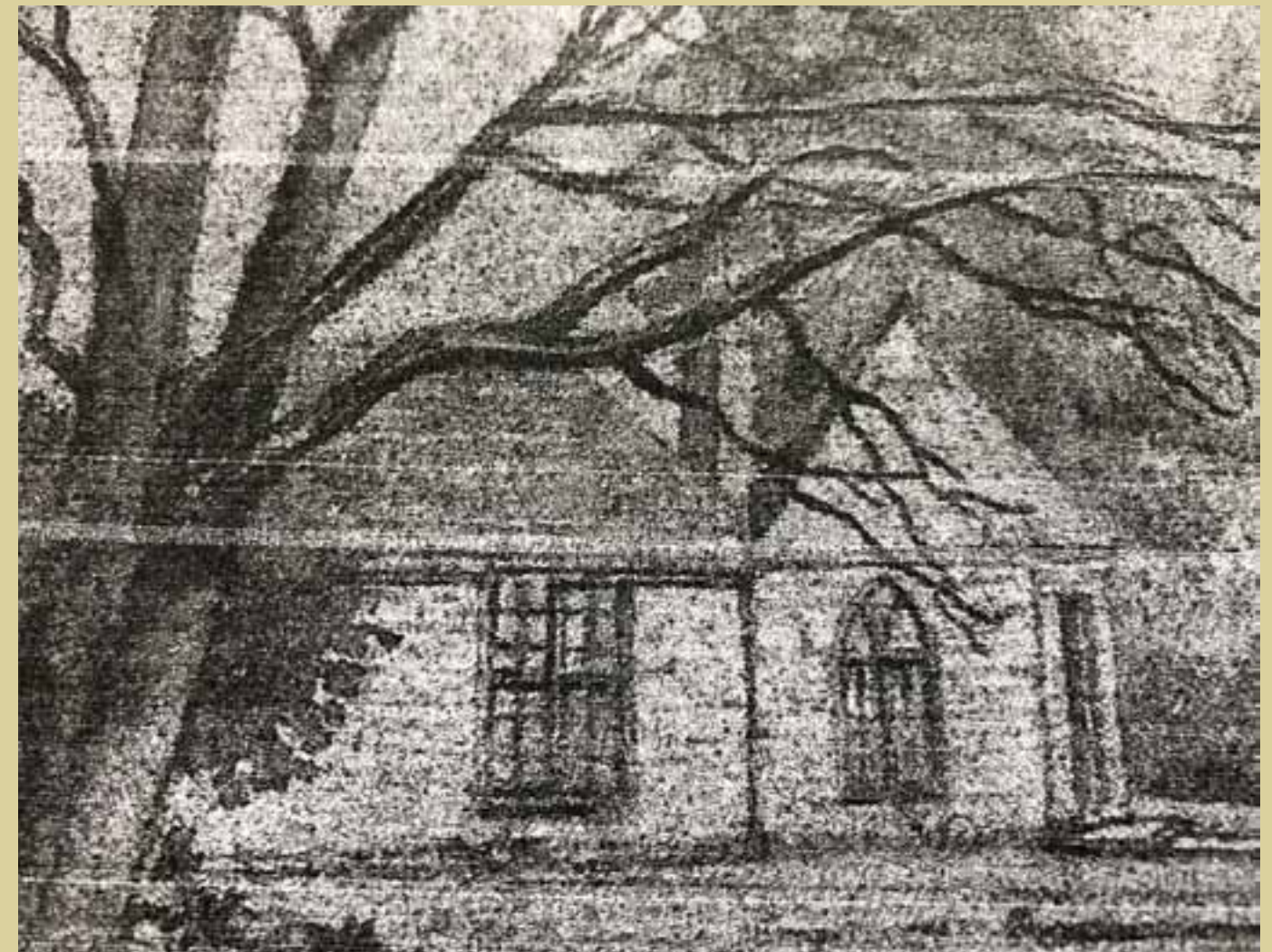
A few years later Mina began expanding the cottage by adding a small library as a place to study and house the many books that her relatives authored. She also collected mementos from various military campaigns. She used her connections across the empire to include and seek out imperial antiquities. In a letter written by Sara Hutchison in 1814, Sara described the contents as 'most valuable and tastefully arranged, from every part of the globe brought by her Brothers and Friends.' The objects included inscribed bricks from Babylon, Mexican hieroglyphics written on tree bark, and inscriptions on the leaves of a palmyra tree from Burma.

Mina used the cottage to teach her young charges and encouraged them to help extend the cottage. In 1811 she wrote to Pasley: 'In our Play hours we are building a Bee House that will be a very fine Place - from Situation, Construction, & beautiful furnishing. Under the same roof is a seat, divided by a solid partition - in which I hope one day to see you seated - and admiring our building. George and Elliot are excellent assistants for their years - has each a little wheelbarrow.' The cottage museum was used to inspire and educate children well into the twentieth century but it was also used as a space of imperial nostalgia, a shrine to and for men, allowing them to recall the doings of their past career.

In a letter from Pasley to Mina he wrote that he was sending her 'two pieces of the Pyramids and a piece of Granite of Cleopatra's Needle, which though ugly in themselves may from their venerable titles obtain a place in your Grotto.'

When Mina died in 1832 the collection at the cottage began to change. Her brother, William, built an annexe at Burnfoot in the 1840s which doubled as a library and museum. Objects that linked closely to his own family history were moved into this new space.

In 1950, twenty-four objects from Mina's collection were bought by the National Museum of Scotland.







Burnfoot



Burnfoot holiday cottage



Burnfoot holiday cottage



Burnfoot holiday cottage





Temporary Replacement bridge at Burnfoot - used by logging lorries clearing Larch.



South Gates to Westerhall Estate



Burnfoot Bungalow



South Lodge Westerhall





The Rigg



Westerhall Steading



The Rigg



Westerhall Steading





Westerhall Steading



Hydro reservoir - originally built in 1912



Hydro water feature



Navvies hut (for men building hydro) on road to the old The Rigg cottage





Road to remians of The Rigg cottage



Remians of The Rigg cottage



Barns behind remains of The Rigg cottage



Turnip cutter





Westerhall Walled Garden



Westerhall



walled garden



Westerhall



## Westerhall and Gardens

Westerhall and the gardens are continually evolving with many challenges on the way.

In 2001 we were faced with foot and mouth disease and despite a huge effort to stop the government culling our sheep we were taken out in a contiguous cull. Part of the flock was hefted to the hill but fortunately we did not lose the hefts as we had some sheep wintering on different ground away from the farm and were able to split the hefts, add to them, and we had the sheep back on the hill again. Westerhall has won the cup for best Blackface five times since then at the Bentpath Show.

In 2002, we had a flash flood on the Rigg burn which flooded the farm and two cottages up to a level of 43cms, and the following year the Kirk burn flooded damaging the bridge on to the drive and altered the course of the River Esk below Bentpath.

The garden is flourishing with a wonderful collection of Rhododendrons, Azaleas and a myriad of other plants and shrubs and trees not forgetting the follies, vistas and the walled garden, which has been re shaped including rebuilding part of the wall.

We have had to fell some of the larches within the garden because of Phytophthora disease, but this opens up opportunity to plant up new areas that one might not have been brave enough to do otherwise. The garden is open in May every other year through the Scottish Garden Scheme, and at other times when groups can come and walk round or have a guided tour.

Mary Buckley







Westerhall Redwood Tree



The Kennels (Mid Park) - Westerhall



Westerhall Estate road through ancient site known as the Hizzie Birren



North Lodge - Westerhall





Bridge to Westerhall



Cragview



Kirktonhill (was Westerhall's Laundry house and previously the old school)



Westerkirk Church, Mausoleum and White House





Barns, minister's bothy and site of stables for the church goers.



Westerkirk Old Church Yard



The White House



In Memory of  
John Telford who after  
living thirty three years as  
an unblameable shepherd  
died at Glendining Nov r  
1757: his son Thomas who  
died an infant

Thomas Telford's father's gravestone





Johnstone Mausoleum



inside the Johnstone Mausoleum



Johnstone coat of arms



carving inside Johnstone mausoleum



THE JOHNSTONE MAUSOLEUM

One of the most notable buildings in Eskdale is the Johnstone Mausoleum in Westerkirk old churchyard. It was commissioned by John Johnstone of Alva in Clackmannanshire, the fourth son of Sir James Johnstone of Westerhall, sometime member of parliament for Dumfries burghs. John Johnstone was one of a family of eleven children, four daughters and seven sons. Six of the sons were involved directly or indirectly with slavery, though as owners rather than traders. John latterly became a keen abolitionist; he subscribed to the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, founded in Edinburgh in 1788. Both John and his brother George made their careers in the East India company. As advocates of free trade they used their connexions to the numerous Indian princes to sign lucrative contracts, thereby incurring the wrath of Sir Robert Clive, whose policy was to transform the East India Company from a vehicle of commercial exploitation into an instrument of government and guardian of the law. John Johnstone had in fact faced prosecution for restitution of the presents which he had received from the princes.

When he returned to Scotland in 1765, with a fortune estimated at close on £30 million in today’s money, he cast around for a suitable property to acquire (as a younger son he could not inherit Westerhall), eventually in 1775 buying the estate of James Erskine, lord Alva, where he planned extensive outbuildings (though never completed). What survives at Alva is the mausoleum which he erected to commemorate his wife, Elizabeth Caroline Keene, whom he had met shortly after his arrival in India, but who died in 1778. As patron he chose the most famous architect of his day, Robert Adam, to design not only the memorial at Alva in 1789 but then a second mausoleum in 1790 at Westerkirk in memory of his parents. Adam entrusted George Malcolm of Burnfoot (the father of General Sir George Malcolm) with the supervision of its construction. These buildings followed Adam’s classical architectural style, with garlanded bucrania (ox-bows), a common Grecian motif. Adam died in 1792, to be followed by his patron in 1795. The Westerkirk mausoleum is the only Robert Adam building in Dumfriesshire and indeed one of the few such commissions in the Borders, aside from Dumfries House at Cumnock.

John Johnstone sat for Sir Henry Raeburn in a fine conversation portrait (now in the National Galley, Washington DC) depicting Johnstone alongside his wife Betty, and their grand-niece Miss Wedderburn. In 1821 his daughter, Anne Elizabeth Gordon, erected a white marble funerary tablet in the mausoleum at Westerkirk to her father, extolling his many virtues and generosity. John Johnstone is buried at Alva next to his wife. The mausoleum was restored by Solway Heritage in 1998.

[Details of the Johnstones may be found in Emma Rothschild’s exemplary study, The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History (2011), a copy of which is contained in the Westerkirk Parish Library.]



IN MEMORY OF  
JOHN JOHNSTONE OF ALVA  
FOURTH SON OF SIR JAMES JOHNSTONE  
OF WESTERKIRK, BARONET, AND OF THE  
HONOURABLE DAME BARBARA MURRAY, HIS WIFE.  
HE WAS BORN 25TH JUNE 1734, AND DIED 10TH DECEMBER 1795.  
IN EARLY LIFE HE WENT TO INDIA, WHERE HE SERVED  
WITH DISTINCTION, BOTH IN A CIVIL AND MILITARY CAPACITY.  
HE MARRIED ELIZABETH CAROLINE KEENE OF NORFOLK,  
WHO AFTER A LIFE OF UNAFFECTED PIETY  
DIED AT ALVA 16TH DECEMBER 1778,  
LEAVING ONE SON AND ONE DAUGHTER.  
AS A SON, A BROTHER, A HUSBAND, AND A FATHER  
HIS CHARACTER SHONE WITH DISTINGUISHED LUSTRE.  
HIS FRIENDSHIPS WERE WARM, DISINTERESTED, AND LASTING.  
HIS GENEROSITY AND CHARITY WERE ALMOST UNBOUNDED.  
HIS SENTIMENTS ENLIGHTENED AND INDEPENDENT  
DURING A LINGERING ILLNESS.  
HIS ARDENT MIND ROSE SUPERIOR TO THE PAINS OF NATURE  
AND HE CLOSED A LIFE ON HONOUR AND VIRTUE  
BY A DEATH OF FORTITUDE, RESIGNATION, AND HOPE.  
HIS MORTAL REMAINS WERE INTERRED AT ALVA  
NEAR THOSE OF HIS WIFE.  
AND WITHIN THE MAUSOLEUM WHICH HE ERECTED  
OVER HIS PARENTS AND BROTHER THIS TABLET IS PLACED  
TO EXPRESS THE VENERATION AND FILIAL PIETY  
OF HIS DAUGHTER  
ANNE ELIZABETH GORDON





Westerkirk Church



Westerkirk New Church Yard



Tree in church grounds



Commonwealth war graves are in the old church yard





WW1 side of memorial



View inside church



WW2 side of memorial



church organ



## WESTERKIRK in 2020 ADDITION to CHURCH

Services are held on the first Sunday of each month, and at Christmas there is a well-attended Carol Service. The church is included in the book Sacred South-West Scotland, published by Scotland's Churches Scheme, whose patron is the Princess Royal. The Trustees commissioned postcards of the new windows and were able to present a set to the Princess Royal at the annual general meeting of Scotland's Churches Scheme held in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Given its beautiful location the church regularly used for weddings.

### List of Ministers

John Jameson Glover 1951-1973

John B Cairns 1975-1985

John Watson 1985-1987

Iain McKenzie 1987-1997

Robert B Milne 1999-2009

I Scott McCarthy 2010-2018

Robert Pickles 2020 -



Geri and Hamish Batchelor - 22nd June 2019



Andrew and Clare Johnstone - 20th October 2012



Sophie and Mike Rickner - 22nd August 2015







Christening of Martha Jane Johnstone - 4th May 2014



Church lit up for NHS 2020



Christening of Ashley Rae Johnstone - 2nd April 2017



Christmas 2020



## DONORS OF WESTERKIRK CHURCH WINDOWS

### January

Shirley Rodden was an archivist with AKZO Nobel, then a division of ICI. Her family had acquired a holiday home at Shielburnfoot, and Shirley became deeply involved in the restoration of the Library with Arthur Bell. With her professional knowledge she contributed significantly to organizing and updating the Library catalogues, as well as being the compiler of *Westerkirk In The Year 2000*, in which she took the photographs of all the houses in Westerkirk.

### February

Sir Hector Monro was Conservative MP for Dumfriesshire for 32 years from 1964 to 1997. On his retirement he was ennobled as Lord Monro of Langholm and Westerkirk and sat as a life peer. His family were descended from General Sir Spencer Ewart, and his early life was spent at Craigcleuch, though he moved to take up farming at Williamwood by Brydekirk. He was directly involved in the aftermath of the Lockerbie Air Disaster of 1988, working tirelessly to help the families of those who perished.

### March

To mark HM Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee in 2002 a collection was held in the parish for residents to contribute to a window. The modern crown was approved by the Property Services Agency. The windows were dedicated at a special service conducted Very Rev John B. Cairns, former Moderator of the General Assembly, in the presence of HRH the Duke of Gloucester as the Queen's representative.

### April

Jamie Little of Craig hailed from a family long established in the valley. He was a well-known sheepbreeder who began farming at Capelfoot in Tundergarth before taking over Craig after World War II. On retirement he and his wife Ann moved to St Mungo near Lockerbie.

### May

The window was dedicated to the memory of Heather Buckley, the daughter of Sir August Cayzer Bt., a Glasgow shipping magnate, by her son and daughter-in-law (see under October). The Buckley family bought the Westerhall estate in 1960 and under Heather, a noted horticulturalist, developed its much-admired garden.

### June

Dr Michael and Mrs Carol Palmer bought the Gardener's Cottage, Burnfoot in 1980 as a holiday home, though it has since become their principal residence. Both keen gardeners, they have progressively improved the cottage's walled garden. Carol Palmer serves as a Trustee of Westerkirk Parish Library.





## July

From a Langholm woollen manufacturing family, Tom Scott is an economic and social historian of Reformation Germany, and is currently Honorary Professor at the University of St Andrews. With Ron Addison he edited Arthur Bell's *A Short History of the Woollen Industry in Langholm, Dumfriesshire* (2018). He is a Trustee of the Westerkirk Parish Church Trust and also of Westerkirk Parish Library Trust.

## August

Much of Eskdale is owned by the dukes of Buccleuch. John, 9th duke († 2007) subscribed this window depicting the Malcolm Monument on Langholm Moor (once a famous grouse moor). He was a committed conservationist and countryman. Part of the Moor has recently been acquired by the burgh of Langholm as a community buy-out to sustain and develop the Moor as an environmental and tourist resource.

## September

Members of the Clan Little Society under its founder, J. C. Little of Morton Rigg, commissioned this window to commemorate the men of Clan Litill of Eskdale, Ewesdale, Wauchopedale, and Sark who under their chief, Simon Litill of Meikledale, followed the Earl of Morton to the raid on Stirling in 1569, later pardoned in 1585. (Brochure in Church.)

## October

Peter Buckley of Westerhall was chairman of Caledonia Investments and like his mother a keen gardener, served as President of the Royal Horticultural Society. He pioneered the restoration of Westerkirk Church between 1996 and 2002. His widow, Mary Buckley, is Chairman of the Westerkirk Parish Church Trust.

## November

John A. Packer OBE was chairman of Reid & Taylor and a director of Allied Textiles. He purchased The White House (the former church manse) in Westerkirk in 1961 and lived there with his wife Carol until they moved to Canonbie in 2004. As the then secretary of the Westerkirk Church Trust he was heavily involved in the church's restoration in the 1990s, and remains a Trustee of the church.

## December

The Clan Paisley Society commissioned this window in memory of General Sir Charles William Pasley KBE, born in Eskdalemuir. After serving in many campaigns in the Napoleonic Wars he composed a treatise on military policy in the British Empire, and went on to found the Royal School of Military Engineering.











## History of the Westerkirk Bell

(some notes put together on the history by Ron Addison)

“The Covenanters were the Scottish Presbyterians who in 1638 signed the “National Covenant” to uphold the Presbyterian religion.

Some were, in the time of Charles II forced to leave their parish church and their living.

The Scottish Reformation had led to a demand for church bells to summon the faithful.

James Monteith of Edinburgh, a pewterer, was certainly working as a bell maker during this turbulent period.

It was thought that the earliest “Covananter” bell so far discovered was cast in 1642, and is in the ruined church at Auchinleck, Ayrshire.

However, a recent rummage in ‘Langholm As It Was’ reveals that Westerkirk Church has a Monteith bell dated 1641.

Monteith cast bells for a number of churches over the next decade or more.

His last recorded bell is at Alloway in Ayrshire and is dated 1657.

Robert Burns parents grave lies in the shadow of the bell.



The first road into the Ewes valley wasn’t made until a 100 years after the Ewes bell was ordered, made and delivered.

“the comparatively small amount of merchandise carried was transported on horseback in creels slung across the horses back.”

The round trip alone for the delivery must have been more than a fortnight.

Having a bell delivered must have been difficult, dangerous and expensive.”

The Westerkirk bell has been long cherished. In the early 1900’s it fell and was damaged. The congregation felt that it warranted repair and it was sent off to a foundry in London. It still bears the imprint “London 1902”.

James Monteith always signed his work.

Jacobus Monteith Me Fecit Edinburgh (and the date) in this case 1641







Bats in the Belfry





Bankend



Old footbridge to Midknock Farm



Bankend Barns



Waulkmill Cottage





Cabin behind Waulkmill Cottage



Georgefield



Waulkmill



Georgefield bothy





White peacocks at Georgefield



Alpaca at Georgefield Farm







Georgefield cottage - Copper Beech



Damhead



Georgefield Cottage



Stennieswaterfoot





Crooks



Stennies valley



Stennieswater



Stennies valley





Upper Stennieswater



Effgill Gate



Upper Stennieswater



Effgill Gate



(taken from)

## Spring Fling 28-30 May 2011

Scotland's premier art and craft open studios event.

East red route artist 81.

### Elizabeth Waugh - sculptor

My work is figurative with both animal and human forms as subject matter. The sculpture is built in plaster and then cast in either foundry or resin bronze. On show will be over 30 pieces of sculpture in a range of sizes. I will also have around 20 different complex lino prints for visitors to see.



### Elizabeth Waugh Sculptor, Langholm

Born in 1929, Elizabeth Waugh won a scholarship to Reigate Art School at the age of just 15. She then specialised in sculpture at Goldsmiths and the Anglo-French Art Centre in London.

Her great love and fascination for human and animal forms has driven her creativity and her bronze sculptures have won her an army of fans all over the world.

Her work is found in highly esteemed galleries and private collections. In 2010 a small piece 'Highland Mare & Foal' was bought by Her Majesty The Queen.

Elizabeth has won many awards including The Powderhall Foundry Bronze Award at Visual Arts Scotland 2008 and the A4A Art Foundry Prize for 'Godiva's Day Off' at the Royal Glasgow Institute.





Effgill Farmhouse



Bridge to Megdale



Effgill Cottage



Megdale Cottage



# Farming in the Meggat Valley in the Early 21st Century

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## Community and Agriculture

A casual traveller passing today through the Parish of Westerkirk could be forgiven for thinking the scattering of dwellings belonged to a small rural community suspended in time. But today's diverse population is very different from the pastoral inhabitants of bygone times where whole families would have been connected in some way to the land. By the turn of the century the Parish had already seen some significant changes in land use and demographics, and 20 years on it's clear that nothing ever stays completely the same and some major events in the intervening years have changed the way we farm, and the landscape and communities around us, forever.



In 2001 the Foot and Mouth epidemic devastated livestock farming throughout the UK but Cumbria and South West Scotland were hit worst, with many farms in this area losing part or all of their stock either to the disease or as part of the 3 km. fire-break cull. Farming families tried desperately to protect their animals, some refusing to leave their homes for months. As the ruthless cull continued, great pyres were built to dispose of thousands of carcasses while other animals were buried in mass graves and a terrible silence fell over the countryside. There can be no doubt that the events of 2001 are etched indelibly on the memories of everyone farming at that time.

Following the epidemic most farms in the area were able to restock fairly quickly, but under strict new regulations which required every farmed animal to be identifiable by an electronic chip, and every movement on or off the farm to be recorded to a central database. Quarantine periods for livestock movements were imposed, the intention being to improve traceability in the event of any future disease outbreak.

But for a number of reasons since then Scotland has seen a sharp decline in the number of farmed animals, with 20% fewer cattle and an even greater reduction in breeding sheep numbers, particularly hill sheep, and few areas have witnessed this decline more keenly than here in this region. Locally several major flocks have gone from the hills in recent times including Georgefield, Mosspebble, Bush of Ewes, Old Irvine, and Cleuchfoot and more will follow.

Mirroring this trend we have seen many of our small rural schools, churches, village shops and post offices closing their doors for the last time with a consequent fragmentation of the rural communities they once served. Westerkirk School closed in 2000 when the roll fell to only 5 pupils, and the Post Office in Bentpath has since also closed. Following the closure of the village school in Eskdalemuir, the building was successfully converted to provide a community hub with café and exhibition space. The Hart Manor Hotel - once a popular meeting place for local farmers and rural dwellers - called last orders before being sold in 2007, and in 2020 due to a dwindling congregation, the Church of Scotland took the difficult decision to close the church at Eskdalemuir for worship. And social events that once used to draw communities together – ceilidhs, Burns Suppers, whist drives and dances – have become less common as people increasingly conduct their social lives over the internet.

## Farming and Forestry

At the turn of the century sheep farming in the Meggat Valley was a precarious way of making a living and 20 years later little seems to have changed. But in spite of this sheep numbers in the valley are similar to 20 years ago, while elsewhere the Scottish Government's woodland expansion policy is encouraging landowners to replace the sheep on less productive ground with trees. The intention is to increase forestry cover across Scotland from the estimated 17% of the early 21st century to 21% by 2032, with Dumfries and Galloway well ahead of this initiative with 28% tree cover recorded over the region in 2013, a figure which continues to increase year on year. The expansion of woodland is to be achieved by raising the annual planting target across the country from 10,000 hectares per year to 15,000 hectares or even 18,000 hectares every year by 2024.

Generous forestry grants are making this change of land use an attractive option for landowners, with the farm tenanted sector being particularly vulnerable as we have already witnessed across this area. Recent farm sales have attracted huge interest from big forestry investors which has pushed the value of hill land way beyond the reach of most farming buyers. Cleuchfoot, Bush of Ewes, Glendivan, Old Irvine, and now Murtholm have all recently seen the sheep stock going off the hill ground and the expectation is that these sheep will be replaced predominantly with Sitka Spruce. More farms are likely to follow and the big forestry companies have their eyes on the Meggat Valley too.





But in spite of this, agriculture is still thriving in the valley and the traditional hill farming practices which defined the way our ancestors farmed in the past, have remained little changed over the years. At Megdale and Glendinning the hill ewes are all bred on the farm and hefted to the hill where they were born. In the autumn the 5 year old ewes are sold to go on to breed for someone else in a less harsh environment and the best ewe lambs are kept to replace them so that the correct number of ewes, acclimatized to local conditions, are always maintained for this type of ground.

All ewes are now pregnancy scanned in February for management purposes and all are lambed outside in April and May. Ewes that are nursing single lambs are returned within a few days of lambing to their hill. But there are dangerous crevasses on the hill, deep fissures formed naturally by water seeping through peat and rock, and so nursed twins are kept in the enclosures until after the ewe clipping in July when the lambs are strong enough to cope with hill conditions. The wedder lambs are sold in the autumn through the auction mart to low-ground farms where there is sufficient grass through the winter to take these lambs on to the required specification for the prime market, and the best of the surplus ewe lambs are sold for breeding or for conservation grazing by the RSPB or Natural England, many of them going to Wales or East Anglia for this purpose.

But the economics of farming are putting pressure on all sectors of agriculture to farm more efficiently and more sustainably. The more intensive agricultural systems further down the hill have moved ahead by adopting precision farming techniques enabling an information-based decision-making approach to farm management. The arable sector was probably the first to embrace smart technology by gathering data on crop yield

and soil variations by aerial drone surveys and analyzing the information to enable precise application of inputs such as fertilizers and seed by smart tractors with GPS controlled steering. The livestock sector has also entered the big data era with electronic collars and sensors providing a variety of information about the location and the health and wellbeing of livestock conveyed from the animal to the farmer by text. And the vast bank of data collected can now be stored in the cloud.

In the context of hill farming where there is only the most basic connectivity, improving efficiency means producing more or better lambs without increasing costs, and advances in technology have had little impact on the way we work. Traditionally a hill shepherd would have looked after a hirsell of 300-400 ewes whereas today each shepherd must care for 1000 ewes or more. Fewer people are able to cover more ground and do more work with the help of quad bikes and all terrain vehicles, but in the hill environment the challenge to become more efficient is mainly met through a combination of the right animal nutrition, the best disease prevention measures, the best hardy genetics and the most dedicated shepherding, and success still largely depends on the skills of the shepherds and their dogs, and their knowledge of the sheep in their care.

### Climate Crisis and Weather

There is no doubt that over the past 20 years Climate Change has impacted on all of our lives and in many different ways. Extreme weather events are not a new phenomenon in the area with major storms recorded locally as far back as 1674. Few residents can now still recall the harsh winter of 1946-47 and the great hardship suffered during this terrible storm as the country struggled to recover from the Second World War, but others still remember with great clarity the extreme cold and massive drifts of snow experienced during The Big Freeze of 1962-63. More recently as the polar ice-cap melts and the sea warms we have experienced episodes of drought, flood, storm force winds and heavy snowfall with increasing frequency.





The hardy sheep that graze these hills are bred to survive harsh conditions and many winters pass with no significant weather challenges, but on February 27th 2001 the area was engulfed by severe blizzard conditions which cut off many hill places. The Meggat Valley filled with massive drifts of snow which buried scores of sheep, many of which perished. The drifts were far too deep for the snow plough to venture up the valley and it was over a fortnight before a snow-blower was brought in to open up the road and many more weeks after that before the snow melted and the full extent of the loss became apparent.

Heavy losses of sheep were also recorded in March 2018 when the aptly named Beast from the East raged across much of Europe. Driven by gale force winds originating in Siberia, heavy drifting snow and freezing temperatures caused widespread disruption across the country. Here in the Meggat Valley snow filled the gullies and piled up behind the dykes and gates to such a depth that it was impossible to carry feed to the ewes on the hill where they soon grew weak with hunger. It was estimated that many thousands of sheep were lost throughout the area during this terrible storm but an accurate count was never possible as the drifts lay in the cold hollows for several weeks, and many of the carcasses were taken by predators or swept away in the floods as the snow thawed.



Flash floods caused by torrential rainfall have also become an increasingly regular feature in recent years. The water in the Meggat can rise very quickly - by as much as 3 feet in just 10 minutes - during heavy rainfall. The water, fed by the sykes that cascade down off the hills, is capable of sweeping away everything in its path - fences, floodgates, dykes and livestock. In October 2005 the Esk burst its banks and flooded the homes at Waulk Mill, the force of the water flattening the fences and dykes in the fields below Georgefield. Other major floods have occurred further up the Meggat Valley, most notably in July 2008 when torrential rainfall caused the Meggat to swell to dangerous levels, threatening buildings and infrastructure, and another particularly violent electric storm in July 2012 when tons of rock and rubble were swept down off the hill, demolishing fences and dykes and blocking the road, and a similar storm in August 2013, these always necessarily followed by a costly clean-up exercise in shifting debris and reinstating fences and dykes.



Long dry spells present challenges too as our grazing systems depend on a moist temperate climate with average rainfall. Of particular note was a long period which began in February 2013 when a relentless coarse wind blew out of the north east lasting for many weeks. All the grass was killed and there was not a green blade left in the Meggat Valley – even the moss was brown. Animal feed became scarce throughout the country, and ewes grew lean as we struggled to provide for them in the critical build-up to lambing.

It takes many years to rebuild ewe numbers after these major weather events and unsurprisingly some question why we continue to farm in the face of such adversity. There are rewards too though and these come from continuing a centuries old practice of grazing the hills, and working with like-minded people in a natural environment to produce something of worth from a piece of land of otherwise limited agricultural value.

### Climate Change and Politics

In the year 2000 global warming was still only just beginning to grab the attention of the public and the media. 1988 had proved to be the critical turning point when widespread drought and wildfires during the hottest summer up to that date in America turned the spotlight onto the changing climate, and in 1997 the Kyoto Protocol placed an obligation on developed countries to meet agreed targets for reducing carbon emissions. This was followed in 2015 by the Paris Agreement where an undertaking was agreed by 196 parties to put in place measures to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a figure that currently stands at 1.2 degrees C. And since then the UN has urged the world to go further and faster in tackling the climate crisis.



The Scottish Government has responded to this by setting ambitious targets to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. The science of climate change is complex and still very much in its infancy, but it's generally thought that planting trees, particularly fast-growing non-native sitka spruce, is the cheapest and most effective way of offsetting carbon emissions, and to this end the Government has set challenging annual planting targets supported by generous grant payments, that can only ever be met by taking less productive land such as we farm in this area out of agricultural use.

But there is also increasing recognition that Scotland's hills and moorlands already store vast quantities of carbon in their peat soils and blanket bogs, and new evidence is emerging all the time that untouched lands actually store greater quantities of carbon than areas planted with trees. As more is understood about the relationship between the way land is used and global warming, and as governments rush ahead with high-profile vote-catching policies based on scant science, it would seem to be crucial going forward that a careful balance of land use is maintained.



The farms in the Meggat Valley are already surrounded by many thousands of hectares of forestry, much of it monoculture commercial spruce planted in the 1970s and 1980s on land that was once grazed. The forestry is now managed under a 20 year plan of felling and replanting and current regulations require a percentage of the replanted areas along the watercourses and forestry edges to be of native broad-leaved trees, the intention being to achieve a more diverse range of species and habitats, to lessen the impact of monoculture planting on the landscape, and to leave open spaces. Recently the highly destructive plant disease *Phytophthora ramorum*, to which Larch trees are particularly susceptible, has been found in Westerkirk and this will necessitate the removal of all affected larch trees in the area in a bid to reduce the spread of the disease.

There is already growing pressure on all of us to get greener which means adopting advances in technology which encourage smart homes with eco-friendly heating

systems, electric cars and a circular economy of recycling and eliminating waste. We need to reduce both our emissions and our reliance on fossil fuels, and other sectors – transport, aviation, business and industry – will all be under pressure to play their part too. Already huge strides are being made to produce energy from renewable sources – wind, water and tide – and Eastern Dumfriesshire has been identified by the Local Authority as a suitable location for wind farm development with its high wind speeds, sparse population and access to the national grid at Hawick, Moffat and Gretna. 20 years ago wind turbines had not yet found their way onto our horizons in Westerkirk whereas now, from the top of the Meggat Valley, at least 35 windmills can be seen – a number that is likely to be doubled or even trebled over the coming years as many larger and more ambitious projects come forward.

But it seems that even windmills have a carbon footprint as hundreds of thousands of tons of concrete must be used during wind farm construction and recent proposals for new wind farm developments in the area have sparked strong and conflicting views among the community. The position at the beginning of 2021 is that the Ministry of Defence is blocking the current proposal for developing a 315MW wind farm of 45 turbines called Faw Side between Bentpath and Teviothead due to its proximity to the seismological monitoring equipment at Eskdalemuir. The equipment is important because it detects global nuclear activity but the energy companies dispute whether the actual impact of turbines on the equipment is as great as the MOD claims. Other developments at Ewe Hill, Crossdykes and Hopsrig are either already operational, under construction or awaiting consent. If the political issues surrounding Faw Side are resolved then the wild unspoiled landscape that many of us grew up with will change beyond recognition as great floating roads invade the hills and massive turbines become an integral feature of our landscape. And as time moves on future generations will doubtless see these developments as progress towards a greener future as the global battle to save the planet is played out in our back yards.

### Biodiversity Crisis

Alongside the climate crisis declared in 2020, the loss of biodiversity is increasingly gaining recognition as another crisis of equal magnitude both globally and here at home, with an estimated one in nine species in Scotland at risk of extinction. These include the red squirrel, black grouse and hedgehog, all of which can still be seen in the Westerkirk area. Recently a disease known as ash dieback or *Chalara* has been responsible for the loss of an estimated 80% of Scotland's ash trees, and this is another species now also at risk of extinction.

In the hills there has been a noticeable decline in some of our most iconic ground-nesting bird species, particularly the curlew, snipe and black grouse. Here in the Meggat Valley it's difficult not to link this with the increase in the number of protected predatory species such as ravens, buzzards and badgers which are all skilled scavengers likely to eat the eggs and chicks of ground nesting birds. Traditional badger habitat was once deciduous woodland, copses, hedgerows and cultivated farmland whereas badgers can now be seen co-existing with foxes in setts on exposed hill sites up to 1500 feet above sea level. New born lambs and ewes giving birth are always vulnerable to attack from predators and this is one of the most disheartening aspects of farming sheep in the hills.



Recently the biodiversity crisis has attracted a greater share of media attention and the Scottish Government has now issued a Statement of Intent that 30% of Scotland's land area will be protected for nature by 2030, and post-2020 the Government will launch its Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan which must be welcomed in this area which already boasts a rich ecological diversity.

### Rewilding Scotland

Many hundreds of years ago wolves, lynx and even bears roamed the forests, mountains and glens of Scotland, preying on deer, rabbits, hares and domestic animals. The remains of fortified livestock enclosures can still be seen in the Meggat Valley and elsewhere today, built long ago to protect sheep and cattle from predators. From time to time controversial proposals are put forward by re-wilding groups to re-introduce species such as lynx and wolves in both England and Scotland which have thus far been rejected by Governments both north and south of the border. Unsurprisingly, the proposals have been met with dismay by today's sheep farmers who see them as another grave threat to the welfare of their flocks.



### Tourism

Since the demise of the textile industry in Langholm which, in the past, provided employment for so many, the area has struggled to find a new and meaningful identity. But over the past 20 years we have seen new micro enterprises and artisan businesses emerging, many of them with strong connections to the history, culture and landscape of the area.

With the successful community buyout of 5200 acres of the Langholm Moor and Tarras Valley in October 2020, and a wealth of wildlife on its doorstep, Langholm is set to reinvent itself as an ecotourism destination. Many redundant farm cottages and buildings in the area have been converted to provide holiday accommodation including several in Westerkirk. Jamestown Cottage and the Old Schoolhouse at Megdale - both built in 1793 - have been successfully converted to provide 4 star self-catering holiday homes which attract tourists from all over the world. Visitors come to the area for its history and archaeology, its culture and wildlife, the landscape and dark skies, but most of all for the complete solitude and escape from urban bustle.

### Brexit and Agriculture

Following the referendum in 2016 the UK's decision to leave the European Union caused bitter division among families, communities and the four nations of the UK. The farming community was divided too, some wanting to cling to the security of existing European trading partnerships and support mechanisms and others preferring to move away from the burden of regulation and heavy-handed bureaucracy.

The decision in 2016 to leave was followed by 4 years of negotiations on the terms of departure and future relationship between the UK and EU before the UK's formal departure from the European Union under Boris Johnson on 31st January 2020. A transition period was agreed and negotiations continued to within days of the scheduled end of this period on 31st December 2020, with an eleventh hour trading agreement signed between the UK and the EU on 24th December 2020. Many Scots were opposed to leaving the EU and remain unconvinced by the promise of new opportunities to be explored. But sheep farmers were relieved that the negotiated deal ensures tariff-free trade can continue in the future.







## The Covid-19 Pandemic

It would be wrong to conclude this review of farming in the Meggat Valley in the early 21st century without recording some impressions of the Covid-19 pandemic which has touched all of our lives in some way over the past 12 months.

Looking back, nothing could ever have prepared us for what we are now witnessing in one of the greatest public health emergencies of all times. The Covid-19 pandemic has eclipsed all other events in recent times and no individual, community or nation has been left unaffected.

First identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the virus spread quickly and was declared a pandemic in March 2020. Many countries, including the UK, imposed full lockdown restrictions in a bid to slow the spread of infection, and this meant shops, schools, public buildings, cinemas, theatres, bars and sporting venues all closing as the NHS struggled to cope with hospital admissions. Care homes were particularly vulnerable and large numbers of care home residents died. Big gatherings for social events, including weddings, were banned and even attendance at funerals was severely restricted. Preventive measures introduced to try to slow the spread of the virus included social distancing, hand washing and the wearing of face masks, and all events large and small that risked close human contact were cancelled.

A furlough scheme was introduced to help protect jobs during the lockdown but many slipped through the cracks and found themselves facing debt and hardship. Businesses tried to function from home with meetings held on zoom, and video chats became almost the only way for families and friends to see each other. Meanwhile unemployment soared as businesses folded, and governments ran up huge debts trying to cope with the economic disruption. By late summer 2020 as the rate of infection gradually dropped, restrictions were eased and some cautious normality resumed.

But towards the end of the year the rate of infection increased alarmingly again as new and more aggressive variants of the virus took hold and new lockdown measures were once again imposed. Some hospitals became overwhelmed and the daily death rate soared to previously unseen levels. By the end of January 2021 the number of deaths due to Covid-19 in the UK had exceeded 106,000. On a world-wide scale by early 2021 nearly 100 million cases of coronavirus had been confirmed across 190 coun-

tries and over 2 million Covid-related deaths had been recorded. The economic fallout has resulted in the largest global recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s with a long and slow recovery forecast.

The ongoing human cost of the pandemic is immeasurable as individuals and families cope alone with loss and loneliness, anxiety and family breakdown. Health professionals up and down the country continue to do everything in their power to save the lives of seriously ill patients, while communities have sought ways of supporting the most vulnerable in their own homes.

The beginning of 2021 looks bleak but hope has come in the form of a number of vaccines developed and trialed over the previous 12 months, with millions of doses now being manufactured and distributed from several different factories and a vaccination programme being rolled out with promises that all adults in the UK will have received the vaccine by September 2021. And to allow us to move on access to vaccine will need to be extended to protect the global community.

Investigations and recriminations will follow as we emerge from these dark days and there will come a time to acknowledge the mistakes made and learn from them. As Covid-19 takes its place in the history books we must go forward with renewed resolve and determination to look after this fragile planet and all who share it.

Lorraine Luescher

Megdale

31 January 2021







Megdale



Megdale Old School



Barns behind Megdale



Glenshanna





Old Glendinning Hope derelict bungalow



Glendinning Hope



Jamestown Holiday Cottage





Jamestown Farm Buildings



Telford Cairn



Telford Plaque



Telford Cairn Plaque





Antimony Mine entrance



Old mine wagon



Spoil heap from Antimony mine





Road to Corlaw



Corlaw



Approach to Corlaw



Corlaw





Greensykes Bothy



Greensykes facilities



Greensykes



Greensykes setting





Westerkirk Mains Barns



Westerkirk Mains



Westerkirk Mains Cottage



Shielburn Cottages





Shielburnfoot



Billholm old steading



Billholm Shiel



Billholm Cottage





Billholm



Bankburnfoot



Billholm Cattle Sheds



another "Benty Banksy" slate



## Loganhead

In the course of preparing this book Mr Robbie Scott advised us that Loganhead should be included in it as it was in the parish of Westerkirk. It was not included in the 2000 book.

The best way to access this old cottage is from the other side of the hill however due to the plantation of conifers. To get there you need to head out of Langholm on the Lockerbie road, the B7068 and turn left at the old Wauchope schoolhouse and go up beyond Arresgill and park. You can then walk up the right hand fork of the forestry road for approximately 3 miles and then a field and the ruined cottage will be on your left.

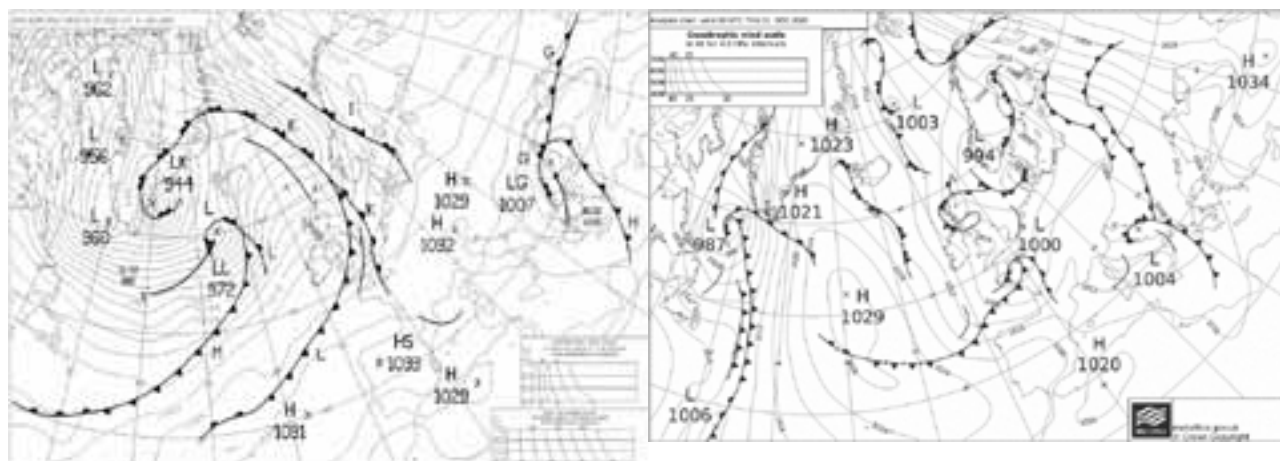
The young folk who used to live there walked over the hill to catch the school bus at the road end (Hopsrig bridge).





## Weather Report over last 20 years

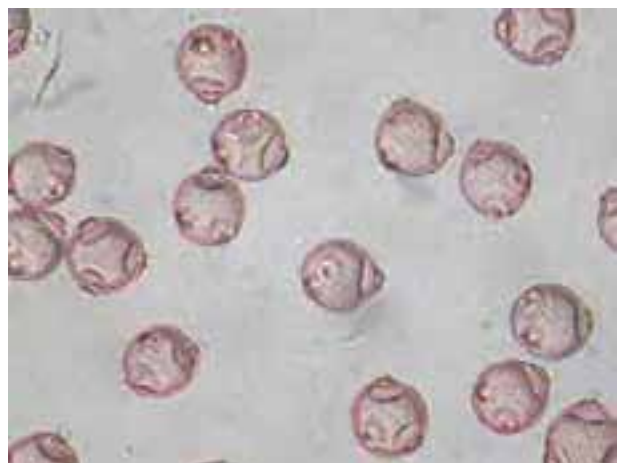
While we were all running around like headless chickens worrying about the impact the Millennium bug was going to have on our computer and electrical systems, mother nature carried on as normal. The new century started in quite a stormy fashion with a series of deep depressions crossing the country in the first half of January, but soon settled down with high pressure dominating for the second half. Thanks to our position in the north Atlantic, we get to see it all, from record breaking heat, to torrential downpours, to Beasts from the East!



Surface pressure chart: 0000GMT 1st Jan 2000

Surface pressure chart: 0000GMT 31 Dec 2020

With the rapid development and popularity of mobile phone technology and social media platforms, there were more opportunities to get the weather message out to a greater variety of people. In the early 2000s, the Met Office underwent a rebranding exercise to turn it into the “5th emergency service”. Various new forecasting services were developed including Space Weather, the Flood Forecasting Centre, and our National Severe Weather Warning Service was improved to give prior warning of any severe weather events such as strong winds, heavy rain, frost, snow, thunderstorms, fog, and so on. We also teamed up with the Irish Met Office to start a Storm naming service.



Betula (birch) pollen, one of the most allergenic pollens in the UK

At the Observatory though, we were to take on something completely different. Pollen collection and analysis.

So, in 2011, we became the only Met Office to actively participate in the National Pollen Monitoring Network, providing our own samples, and data from other sites around the UK, to the Pollen Forecasting service at Worcester University, a service we're still involved in today.

Perhaps one aspect of the weather that has become more focused in our minds over the past 20 years is global warming or, more accurately, climate change. I knew already when I took over the Met Office manager's job at the Observatory that I would be dealing with some extremes of what Mother Nature could throw at me. Never in a month of Sundays did I think that, within the first 6 months of my tenure, I would have been part of 2 record setting events.

Firstly, 3rd November 2015 saw our warmest ever November day with a maximum of 16.3°C (61.3°F). Such was the interest in this record that I ended up being interviewed by BBC Radio Scotland.

The very next month, another, perhaps, not quite so pleasant a record was set when, throughout December, the heavens opened and dumped an incredible total of 568.8mm (21.4in) of rain, nearly 200mm (8in) more than the previous highest December. To put that into some sort of context, December 2015's total was the same as the normal average rainfall for March, April, May, June and July put together! It was the rain aspect of the weather in Dumfries & Galloway that prompted a call from ITV's Border Life producers, who deemed it necessary to visit the Observatory twice just for me to confirm once and for all that we weren't living in the wettest part of the country! Somehow, I can't help feeling that they weren't totally convinced!

Another aspect of the changing weather to note is that the 7 warmest months ever recorded at Eskdalemuir have occurred in the last 20 years.

On a more cheery note, I was delighted to take part in the centennial celebrations at the Observatory in July 2019. This was to honour the fact that there have been over 100 years of continuous manual weather observations at Eskdalemuir, one of very few sites around the UK to have such longevity.



Photos courtesy of BGS/UKRI

BGS, the landowners, local dignitaries, together with representatives from the Met Office, and former Observatory staff (including some who were at the Observatory in the 1950's!) all came along to celebrate and reminisce. The caterers even provided a cake! It was an absolute joy listening to the memories of past employees. If anything, it highlighted just how little had actually changed over the years.

Looking to the future, the Observatory will continue as too will a Met Office presence there. Don't think I'll be there in 2119, but whoever is will be able to put 3 photographs together from 1908, 2019 and 2119, and say “spot the difference!”, but most likely just indulge in the bi-centennial celebrations, complete with cake!

Peter Harvey, Senior Met officer, Eskdalemuir.



## The plight of red squirrels

Red squirrel populations have seriously declined, with only around 120,000 remaining in Scotland today. In some places they have not been seen for many years.

The greatest threat to the red squirrel's future in Scotland is the invasive non-native grey squirrel. Larger and more robust, grey squirrels out-compete red squirrels for food and living space, making it difficult for red squirrels to successfully breed and for their young to survive. When grey squirrels move into a new area, red squirrels can be completely replaced within 15 years.

The grey squirrel is a North American species that was first introduced to Britain in Victorian times, to decorate the gardens of large stately homes. They soon expanded their range, completely replacing red squirrels in most of England and Wales, and many parts of Scotland. The competition between red and grey squirrels is an unnatural, man-made problem that we have a responsibility to manage.

Some grey squirrels also brought Squirrelpox, a virus that they carry without harm to themselves. Red squirrels have no natural immunity to Squirrelpox, and the disease is usually fatal within two weeks. When Squirrelpox is present, grey squirrels can replace red populations around twenty times as fast as they can through competition alone.

The destruction of woodland has also contributed to the red squirrel's decline. Habitat fragmentation, when areas of woodland become separated by development and changing land-use, is also problematic. These isolated areas are often too small to support healthy and sustainable populations of wildlife, including red squirrels.



[www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk)

## How can you help?

Everyone can help easily by  
simply reporting both  
red and grey squirrel sightings on  
[www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk)



The Esk Valley Red Squirrel Group was set up in partnership with Wild Eskdale; a project under the Langholm Initiative.

The group is coordinated by a core team of volunteers and consists of both active and corresponding members. *Membership is open to all.* The group is affiliated to and guided by Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, a national project coordinated by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, via their standard MoU (signed 13th August 2019).

The Group's goal is:

- Long term conservation of red squirrels along the Esk Valley, focusing on an area covering the Esk Valley Priority Area and extending further up the Esk Valley to take in Eskdalemuir. This area was chosen as it incorporates centres of human population; Langholm, Canonbie and Bentpath, and also an important area for red squirrel conservation; the Esk Valley Priority Area.

If you would like to find out more about how else you can help our red squirrels, or join the Esk Valley Red Squirrel Group, please contact us via [www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk).





## Wanderings through Westerkirk







Photo taken by Glen Laidlaw from Sherra Craig looking back down at Bentpath 2020



# Westerkirk Parish

to be continued...  
in 2040?