



Currie Toll 1897

**Currie & District  
Local History Society**

**CURRIE CHRONICLE**  
(The Journal of the Society)

**SEPTEMBER 2013 - No. 80**

*Dear Friends,*

I write this introduction with some sadness as I am reminded of the loss of a good friend, and a stalwart member of the Society, with the death of Honorary Life member Betty Dagg on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2013.

Betty was a main driving force in the Society in its early years and I thought it would be appropriate to ask another dear friend of Betty's, our Honorary President Hamish Coghill, to write an Obituary outlining her most varied life and I am honoured to include this on the following pages.

The Committee have again this year produced another excellent series of talks to be presented over the winter months.

I do hope you will support the speakers in the same number as last session. We kick off in the same venue - on 7<sup>th</sup> October - when Hamish Coghill will tell us (in his own inimitable way) about a 'Life of Leisure'.

See you all then, bring a friend, neighbour etc. as I am sure they will enjoy the evening.

*With kind regards,*

**Ronnie Dickson,**  
**Editor.**



## BETTY DAGG ..... 1933 -2013

Betty Dagg was a chairman, committee member, bibliographer and above all a great enthusiast for our History Society and her service was recognised in the bestowing of Honorary Membership on her some years ago. She was one of the early members, backing John Tweedie in his determination to make people aware of the rich local history of Currie and Balerno and the surrounding area.

As a committee member she was ever ready to put forward ideas, based on long experience of reading and studying history. Coming to a small primary school in Balerno with a Moray House rural teaching certificate, she remained for some 40 years and became the infant mistress of the biggest primary school in Midlothian, and one of the great characters of the district.

During her time as chairman, she demonstrated the drive she put into everything she took up, and committee meetings at her home in the old Schoolhouse beside Currie Kirk were eagerly looked forward to. A roaring coal fire, freshly baked scones and cake, a room packed with books and pictures and Betty's entertaining talks regaled the company, if occasionally drifting away from strictly Society business!

For many of us our last meeting with Betty was at the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary garden party in the garden of Malleny House on a lovely summer afternoon. She was brought from the care home in which she spent the latter years of her life, and was quickly surrounded by old friends wanting a chat. She was in good form and blethered away happily, remembering names and recalling old times.

Over the years she gave a number of talks to the Society and as you would expect they were meticulously researched, and delivered with confidence, panache, and humour. Her interest in railways particularly came from the fact that she was a railwayman's daughter. She moved around the Borders and other places as her father was posted from station to station by the old LNER, before finally coming to Currie as the stationmaster. She loved her Borders roots, her father Tom being born in Roxburgh and her mother Mae coming from Hawick. Two other very important people in her life were her Armstrong grandparents who moved in to help after Betty's birth when Mrs. Dagg was very ill for a long time.

Betty had a fine collection of railway lore and paraphernalia and she knew every intricate detail of each item, whether it was a company brass button, a signalling lamp or whatever.

The high standard she set for her talks and for everything in which she was involved reflected the brightness she showed as a youngster, and from a youngster she absorbed knowledge quickly. She also acquired a real gift of mimicry and the ability to entertain others, ideal for her life-time devotion to her chosen profession.

Betty, of course, was universally known as "Miss Dagg" to the countless children who passed through her care at Balerno (latterly Deanpark) primary. She had the remarkable facility of never forgetting the name of her pupils, she knew their families, and she taught the children of men and women who had been her pupils. On her retirement day the face of one small boy lit up on hearing that she was getting a Yamaha as a farewell present, only to be disappointed when he found out it was a keyboard and not a motor bike!

She had a great love of books which she devoured, and she was a talented cook and baker. She was also a keen knitter, sending off literally hundreds of brightly coloured baby jackets by the boxful for various charities. She revelled in a wide circle of friends, and entered fully into the life of her Currie Kirk where she was a demanding floral convener - standards again!

Betty died on June 29 in her eightieth year, her latter years sadly being restricted by failing health. The Service of Thanksgiving in her Kirk was an occasion of much laughter, joyful singing and sharing of memories of a wonderful person.

As one of her close friends Norma Ronald said in her tribute at the service: "When the Lord made Betty Dagg he made someone quite unique. Not sainted, but loyal. Helping people on the quiet, generous to a fault, sharing her hospitality. Just being herself."

The Society owes much to Betty Dagg and, as in many other circles, she will be greatly missed.

**Hamish Coghill,  
Honorary President, C & D.L.H.S.**



Betty Dagg was a prolific researcher on Scottish and local history and she was often called on by other researchers (especially on the local history of Currie and Balerno) for information.

In November 2002 she was interviewed by Sarah Bromage of SAPPHERE (Scottish Archive of Print & Publishing History Records).

I have selected some interesting snippets, from that interview, on early school life in Balerno and 'the Mill' - Galloways Paper Mill in the village.

BALERNO PRIMARY SCHOOL (now Dean Park)

- (1) In 1955 when Betty started at the school someone said to her that she would never leave Balerno. How right that person was as all her working life was spent at Balerno Primary
- (2) In her early days she taught pupils aged 4 - 7 years and the average class size was 22 - 30 pupils
- (3) Children of 'Mill' managers attended Balerno till they were aged 7 or 8 then they went to private school in Edinburgh. Left school unbalanced
- (4) Classes in her early days were made up of 40% children of Mill employees 40% of farm workers children, and 20% of top level Mill management
- (5) Balerno Primary was most grateful to the Mill management for endless supplies of paper off-cuts; especially after the Second World War ended
- (6) If village children wished to continue in tertiary education after primary they had to travel to West Calder High School in West Lothian

BALERNO PAPER MILL

- (1) Galloway's Mill mainly produced high quality glossy paper much sought after by the top magazines of the day - Tatler, Queen, London Illustrated News etc.
- (2) Most of the paper made at the Mill was developed from Esparto grass from Spain. The grass being shipped to Granton Harbour in Edinburgh and brought out by goods train to Balerno

If an east wind was blowing, residents could smell Esparto grass from the Mill chimney - it had a silage pong !!

- (3) Paper-making was not a noisy operation - it was more a vibratory hum. Employees could hold conversations next to one another at the machines. It had a good accident rate despite the slippery floors - only the very occasional broken leg
- (4) Mill employees had a one week Trades holiday but not many went away during the summer. Their highlight was the September Autumn weekend when 5 or 6 buses left the Mill on Friday heading for Blackpool and the illuminations, returning on the Monday. Most of the Mill families went on this trip - the only real holiday away they had in the year
- (5) Balerno Village Gala restarted on its own in 1969. The Mill loaned a number of its lorries for children and others to use as decorated 'Gala floats'

~~~~~



By coincidence I was reminded of a poem Betty Dagg composed in the 1960's entitled "Balerne" - a cleverly written (and friendly view) of the then village, giving mention to different aspects of 'Balerne' life. Betty very kindly presented this poem to Balerno S.W.R. I. in 1966 for inclusion (if required) in their History book "Balerno, the Village & District". Only the last verse of the poem is published in the book. The complete poem is printed below which, I hope, you will enjoy.

BALERNE

Take a ride in a bus numbered fifty twa  
And gang tae the end o' its trip  
Past Slateford Village and Juniper Green  
Till ye come tae the Pentlands fit.  
It's there ye'll find a village sma'  
Spelderin' up tae the hills abune  
An' gin ye spear on the name o' it,  
An answer ye'll get richt sune,  
It's Balerne.

There's a schule of course where bairnies learn  
Jist how many beans make five.  
Twa Stores and twa Pubs, tho yin's a hotel,  
Jist manage to keep it alive.  
But if ye rin oot o' knitten wool,  
Or tatties or maybe tea,  
Johnny Wynne or Jock Noble will see ye richt  
Whatever the 'oor may be  
In Balerne.

Three .....

BALERNE

Three Kirks, a Rural, and Boolin' Green,  
Look efter the recreation.  
While the Bettin' Shop, for it's up tae date,  
Guies a wheen folk expectations.  
The muckle Mill chimney towers up abune,  
An the Horn has sic a blaw,  
That the folk who live in Society  
Thinks it's comin in through the wa'.  
In Balerne.

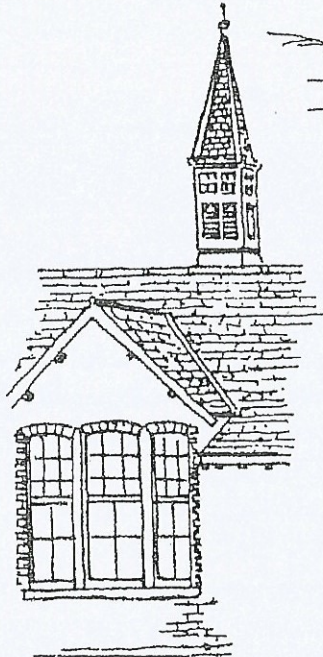
In Spring, it's bonny doon by the Burn,  
It's lovely in Autumn tae,  
When the colours are up in Ravelrig woods  
And the sun shines bricht a' day,  
But in Winter when bitter wind and weet,  
Come sweepin' doon frae the hill,  
Ye can hardly breathe for the awfu stink  
That comes waftin' doon frae the Mill  
In Balerne.

Tae some it's no much o' a place tae bide,  
They'd leave it as quick as flee,  
But I like it fine and I've got attached  
Tae the hale clamagery.  
Lang may it sit at the Pentland's fit,  
Couthy and sma and grey,  
Wi' it's kindly folk and reeking lums  
As it's din for mony a day,  
Balerne.

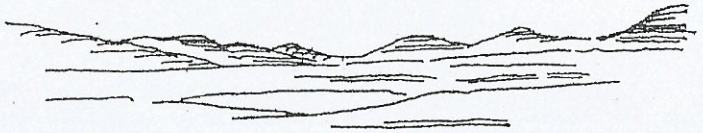
~ ~ ~ ~ ~



# BALERNO



THE OLD SCHOOL  
DETAIL



PENTLAND HILLS  
FROM THE RED ROAD

DAVID MACMILLAN - 1988

