

Three Month Tour: Canada - Europe - and not forgetting Kirrie!

It was a privilege and pleasure last week to accompany two members of John and Archie Beaton's family around Kirriemuir. Doug Beaton and his wife Louise are even now continuing their lengthy tour of Europe. They'll be home in Ottawa, Ontario by mid-August.

Built into their tour programme was a wish to visit the Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries in Belgium where Doug's great, great Uncles were buried. They also hoped to visit Kirriemuir where the family had lived in Mill Street, Southmuir.

In addition to Doug's memories of his visit here I wish to add just a few more thoughts of the day – Wednesday 9 July 2014. Great weather by the way - sunshine all day!

We got off to a fine start as my son-in-law (Thanks again Gerry) collected Doug and Louise at the Caledonian in Princes Street. "Fabulous Hotel and wonderful outlook on Edinburgh Castle" said both Doug and Louise. "One of the best rooms ever" on their QM tours. (Thanks Caledonian Hotel). Quick handover from Gerry to Brian and I at Queensferry and we were off to the Black Watch Museum and a personal tour by Major Ronnie Proctor. The visit is well documented in Doug's account and Brian and I thought it was absolutely first class too (Thanks Ronnie) NB. For folk interested in visiting the Museum be sure to include a visit to the lovely Café.

There is no better approach to Kirriemuir and the Glens than by way of Lumley Den but to ensure enough time in town we approached from Glamis. We indicated Northmuir, Westmuir and Southmuir from the route – also the Airlie Monument which seems to beckon the way to the Glens.

Mill Street was the first stop, to view the cottage where the Beaton family had lived and where the Beaton brothers and sisters had walked each day to Southmuir Primary School (later Webster's Seminary). As it happens' my granddad 'Gamie Phillips' (later of Lindertis) and his siblings would have been walking the same route to school. They also lived in Mill Street and Archie and my grandfather were the same age. We passed the location of the school, saw the Wilkies factory from Bellies Brae where members of the Beaton family had worked then we moved on to 'The Square'. Kirrie looked well - it always does in the sunshine! The red sandstone looked especially bright and the recently restored stonework of the old North Free Church (corner of Glengate and St Malcolm's Wynd) is immensely attractive. Lunch time had passed – so there was every good reason to go to McLaren the Baker for bridies and a pie!

We drove past Platten House where John was chauffeur until 1914 although the original Platten house has long since gone. Doug and Louise were intrigued by the houses where J M Barrie's mother moved to in Southmuir and by the Barrie family home in Brechin Road. Louise was quite taken too by the fact that my mother's name was Gladys Mary Barrie Mills.

This was because an Aunt of Barrie's was a friend of my maternal Grandmother. Mum - well, a special lady – one of those people you always miss having around.

After Brechin Road there was just enough time to reach the Hill, grab a picnic table and eat our bridies. The pie was for a special reason.

.....

Lance Corporal John Beaton mentioned in one of his poems that

"O' a' the comforts that I lack - I miss my 'ginger ale'.

For as reg'lar as the clock ga'es roun' – be the weather wat or fair

I hed my "Barrie an' a pi"e - or twa (or maybe mair).

So we enjoyed the sunshine on Kirrie Hill, ate our bridies whilst Doug held a Barrie (a substitute Barrie Ginger Ale) and a Pie, for a special photograph. (Thanks Louise).

The popular 'Ginger Ale' was (I think) produced by the Barrie's lemonade family?

.....

At 3.00 pm we made our way to the War Memorial. Time now to look at the names on the Memorial. So - we had a quiet reflective wee spell at the Memorial.

Thanks to everyone. Your presence made the visit to the Kirriemuir War Memorial all the more special.

George Milne, Jim Miller and Douglas Loomes - so helpful with the Westmuir village website and the production of photographs and having the Beaton family and other stories online. **Brian Forsyth** (our Wizard website man) could not be with us as he was up north in the beautiful Hebrides.

David Orr, Kirriemuir Heritage Trust - who brought along a photo of Platten house and how it would have been pre 1914 War when John Beaton was chauffeur for the Wilkie family. Prior to emigrating to Canada Archie too had worked for the Wilkie family in the Linen Works at Marywell Brae.

Ruth and Rachael from Kirriemuir Museum - brought new information along for Doug including a copy of a photograph which had appeared in the Courier in 1917. This will be the only photograph of either of the two soldiers in uniform so a very special gift for Doug's father back in Ottawa. Ruth found the photograph when she was researching details of another WW1 soldier from Kirriemuir.

Catriona Rowan – whose husband is descended from the Wilkie family. Catriona brought along details of James Adams McLeod of Woodside, Northmuir and also of two great, great Uncles who lived at Platten and were both killed in the War. This sharing of information proved to be enormously helpful for the Museum staff Ruth and Rachael.

Robert (Bob) Stewart- the 2013/14 President of the World Robert Burns Federation - it was Bob who (in 2011) facilitated the transfer of books and Burns memorabilia to the Southmuir Primary school just a few years ago from Bill Beaton in Canada.

Mrs Angela McGeachan, Headteacher at Southmuir Primary – who attended with her son Craig. Mrs McGeachan was there to represent the school and visitors were most interested to learn that Craig had recently returned from a tour of the Battlefields and Commonwealth War Graves near Ypres in Belgium. He said he hoped to visit the Normandy Beaches next year.

We walked down to see Sir J M Barrie's grave in the Cemetery. He chose to be buried here with his Barrie Family rather than in Westminster Abbey. We pondered again over the coincidence that in those early days there were two 'JMB's in Kirrie - Sir J M Barrie and John McHardie Beaton.

Back to the car now - appreciating the views of the Glens and the Barrie Cricket Pavilion on the way. We managed a 'circular tour' of Poplars Row as this was where Doug's grandmother (Helen Peters) was raised. After that we headed for a very special 'Tea'!

We had been invited for Afternoon Tea to the home of Bob and Frances Stewart (Bob of the World Federation of Burns fame) and 'my oh my' what a delightful visit that was. Is there any more welcoming sight than a table richly set with lovely china, perfect choice of cakes and shortie and goodies. Wonderful! After Tea Bob told us about an Uncle of his who was killed in WW1. Bob still had lots of his Uncles possessions including the Uniform Kilt which he had worn in wartime. The Uncle was one of seven children, the remaining six all being girls. Bob said his grandmother never recovered from losing her only son.

After that –there was only one more visit to make before heading back to Edinburgh. This was to visit Kathleen Harris and her family in Victoria Street, Southmuir. Kathleen's parents were Mr George Herd, the well known Southmuir Baker who married Helen Beaton, a cousin of Doug's father Bill. So Doug was able to meet a 2nd cousin he didn't know he had. Kathleen had been unable to join us at the War Memorial but managed back home to Kirriemuir in time to meet Douglas and Louise.

Time to set off again for Edinburgh by way of Westmuir and a wee celebratory drink or was it a dram!

A great day - in the best of company. Thanks Doug and Louise - and friends.

Bye, Helen and Brian too