

Reminiscences of Juniper Green

Transcribed from recordings of Jean Smart Jones (nee Howitt born 1917) in January 2007. Her father John Howitt was the village carpenter and undertaker and had his Joinery and Builder's business at Fernie Cottage, Baberton Avenue, Juniper Green where Jean and her sister Anne and brothers Jock and Alex were brought up. Jean lived in the village from 1917 until 1948 when she left to be married and moved to Rugby in England.

Village memories

The cattle used to be driven through the village to the market in Edinburgh. This used to happen quite regularly when we were young though of course in later days they went a different way and didn't come through the village. This day, one of the cows got loose and it got into the sweet shop, which was a tiny little place and they couldn't get it out because there was no way of turning it. It knocked all the sweets about the place. Eventually they had to get hold of its tail and the men had to pull it out backwards to get it back out onto the street to join the rest of the herd. I must have been about 12 or 13 years old at the time.

In the summer we used to have a pipe band, who would play at the bottom of our street, Baberton Avenue. And there used to be an old woman who came up from one of the farms to have a drink and she would get tiddly and she would dance to the pipe band playing! But as children we were rather afraid of her because she had a straw bag and she would shake her fists at us and she had a clay pipe in her mouth as well. She and her brother Tam lived in one of the barns on the farm. In later years when she became old she went into a home and Dr Stewart the minister of Currie - a very caring man - used to visit her in the home. Before she went there she went up every Friday to the bakery in the village and was given stale bread. And she would also go up to the manse in Currie every Friday to be given her dinner by the minister's daughter.

Scott's the grocers had two Chinese figures in the shop window and these were quite tall and I used to stand and look at these, they were still there when I left. But years later I heard that one day they suddenly collapsed in dust they were so old.

Jessie Graham and her sister Lily had shops in the village

There were lots of shops, there was the grocers, then the vegetable shop next door then Jessie Graham (the post office), and the policeman's and they had a lock up cell. There was the sweet shop, the Linton's shop. They used to make tea for the children who came down from the hills to the school. They would sit in the shop and eat their sandwiches.

Family history

My mother was Annie Arnot and she was from Currie. She lived at the Riccarton Arms which was run by her grandparents. Her father was very keen on the Hunt.

The Riccarton Arms did the catering for the dances which they had in the hall across the road from there - it wasn't really a village hall - there was a sweet shop in the basement /ground floor then there was a hall where they had their dances. The hunt would meet at the Riccarton Arms and the Hunt ball was held in that hall. When she was a young woman, mother used to walk the hounds for the hunt.

My father's father came from a village in Peebleshire on the borders and he became the grieve at Fernie Flat farm just outside the village. My father did his apprenticeship building the Fever Hospital in Edinburgh with a Mr Lownie who was a very well known builder in Edinburgh.

My father as a young man went out to South Africa and Chile and he went to San Francisco after the earthquake to help rebuild. His great friend Gilbert Meikle had a farm at Baberton Mains. He was a lighthouse builder and he went out to Chile to build lighthouses.

When my father returned to Juniper Green he had made enough money to start a business on his own and he bought the business in the village from a Mr Gibson I think because we called one of the buildings Gibby's shop. So that's how my father started and built up his business and afterwards my brother Jock took it over.

My father and mother were married in 1909 by Dr Stewart at Currie Kirk.

School days

The 'wee school' was next door to us. Anne and Alex went there. There was a hedge between us and the school and when the children were having their lunchtime I used to poke a banana through the hedge for my sister Anne. But when my turn came the school had closed and everyone had to go up to the 'big school' at the top of the road. In the infants class it was Miss Mulholland who kept us all under control! We had slates to write on. The boys went in one door and girls another and we didn't play in the same playground - there was a wall between us. But the classes were all together.

I can remember a picnic we used to go on-it was down at Whitelaw farm and it was in a field where the cows used to graze and they threw out a lot of sweets for us to pick up! My father would take Miss Mulholland and us in the pony and trap down to the picnic.

The pony was kept in the 'wilderness' which was across the street from the house - there was a little opening and you got into a field which was in the centre of the village - and the pony went over to graze there. And when the pony heard the school bell going at 12 o'clock it would neigh that it wanted to come back for its dinner. But the wilderness was a great place and a lot of children in the village played there because there were trees.

Weekends and holidays

My father was a very good walker and we would go up Torphin and over the hills to the reservoir. Every Sunday we would go for a walk somewhere across the fields. In the winter time when the canal froze over he would go down and test it to see if it was safe to skate on, and we would go down there. Douglas Galloway was the son of the Club Master at the Golf Club. He was a very good skater. My father would teach us how to skate.

In the winter time if the Harper Rigg reservoir had frozen over for long enough we were allowed to have a skating holiday. That was when I was at George Square (School) in Edinburgh. A lot of schools got the day off for skating. We would go up to Harper Rigg - take the bus up to Balerno and walk up to Harper Rigg where we skated. It didn't happen terribly often.

Brownies

In the summertime we would have our meetings at Baberton House on the lawn. In winter we had it in one of the church halls. The wedding of Miss Graham -Watson was a very grand affair. We were all invited to the wedding in Edinburgh and brought back to Baberton House where we were given our wedding breakfast.



Back Row: Edith Bryce, Jean Howitt, Ruth Law, Miss Graham-Watson,
Anne Howitt, Mary Bryce, Helen McKay

Middle Row: Majorie McKay
Rest unknown

The Mills

There were many mills on the Water of Leith. My Mother's sister Auntie Liz was married to Gordon McNeill whose father was the manager of the Balerno Paper Mill. Mother's brother Jim went out east to sea as an engineer on the Ben Line before the war. Then he came back and went as chief engineer to a paper mill outside Edinburgh and then went as chief engineer to Croppers paper mill in Burnside (Cumbria). His eldest son (also Jim) had had polio and had a lot of trouble with his leg. The story is that he said to the surgeon 'take the damn thing off' and they did!

When I was a child the mills were still making snuff. I think it was used in the linoleum trade Dundee way, by the people working there to clear their heads. You would see heaps of coloured snuff around the mill. One of the men used to play the fiddle.

The Kinleith chimney was one of the tallest chimneys in the country you could see it for miles around. My father did work in a lot of the mills.

My father the undertaker

We would wake up in the middle of the night with all the banging and he would be making a coffin. Someone had come to the door in the night.

Before the war for a funeral, Cramond would come out from Edinburgh with the black horses and their plumes and wait outside our house. Only the men went to the funeral and they would walk down behind the horse to whichever church it was - in pouring rain sometimes. It was very impressive.

Our car

After our pony died my father bought a car from the doctor. It was a 1905 Renault and the doctor had a chauffeur who kept a log of every mile he drove. My father used to take the car to go down to Leith docks to get the wood - it only had 2 seats so the wood stuck out over the roof. It had brass lamps and a handle to turn at the front - it was difficult to start. At the back it had a place you could lift up and you could put your luggage in.

Wartime

At the top of the village they built tank traps in case of invasion. You had to zig zag through them.

That first Sunday after war was declared all the sirens went, we had such a shock. You were supposed to get under tables. Some people had Anderson shelters in their gardens.

I was at Atholl Crescent in Edinburgh studying domestic science when the war started. I remember all the soldiers lined up along Atholl Crescent where we were at college. They were going to Redford barracks where a lot of soldiers were stationed.

My first job was at the Women's Hospital in Archibald Place in Edinburgh as Assistant cook. Then I went to the Church of Scotland Missionary College. I worked in hospitals and various schools.

During the war a proper school meals service was set up to supply all schools to make sure all children had a meal. Where we cooked for the schools we used mobile cookers that could be taken out into the fields in an emergency. I wanted to join up but emergency feeding was a protected occupation. I got a job in Juniper Green in the school meals centre near the tennis building from where we sent meals out so I was able to live at home then.

While I was in school meals I went to Scone Palace when the school from Edinburgh was evacuated. Then a lot of Polish soldiers arrived as well to a camp in the grounds. Their daughters were at a school in another part of the palace.

The woman in charge used to cycle along the corridors of the Palace and she had a basket in the front. She had a pug dog which she had in the basket and she used to ring her bell as she went.

When the war started lights had to go out. No street lights whatsoever. You were allowed a torch with a sort of hood on it, there were no lights at all - it was very difficult. Some places had dimmed lights but Edinburgh was blacked out completely. How we saw to get about I don't know. I don't know how we survived.

We got a tin of syrup once in a blue moon. When you got sugar you got only a half pound, you got very little, 2 ounces of butter in the week and 2 eggs, but people who were working physically got extra cheese and some extra things. Because I was working by this time in school meals and I could get a mid day meal there was more meat for Pop to have, so that was a saving. But father was always hungry, that's why he smoked.

There was very little fruit, for bananas and oranges there would be great long queues waiting for them. Living in a village you were better off really than living in a town. And Pop would get things from Fernie Flat from the farm - vegetables and such like and he could go and get rabbits as well. In a lot of the restaurants at the time you'd ask for chicken and it was rabbit most of the time, tasted all right. There was still rationing in 1953. Mind, I think in many ways we were all healthier. We didn't get a lot of sugar!