

REMEMBERING THE SOLWAY

A project to collect, share and celebrate memories
of life and landscape on the Solway Plain



solway Wetlands
LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

 heritage
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LOTTERY FUNDED



Filming on Whiteholme



Susan Child



Using the recording equipment

introduction

Remembering the Solway was set up in 2013 as one of 29 projects within the Solway Wetlands Landscape Partnership, a Heritage Lottery supported scheme to restore, protect and celebrate the landscape of the Solway Plain in North Cumbria. A key aspiration of the scheme was to capture and record some of the memories of people living on the Solway throughout the last century, in order to find out what life was like in this area within living memory, and to what extent it has changed over time.

The project started in 2015 when a small group of interested local people came together, who were keen to develop this project and felt it was important to collect these memories before they were eventually lost. We appointed community history practitioner Susan Child to lead on the oral history side, and borrowed some recording equipment kindly loaned to us by Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle. Once the group were trained in the practice of oral

history, they set about identifying people to talk to and set about recording the interviews. The group met fortnightly in the Port Carlisle Chapel.

The area that the group decided to focus on was the central, northern section of the Solway Plain, encompassing the villages of Newton Arlosh, Kirkbride, Bowness-on-Solway, Port Carlisle, Drumburgh and Burgh-by-Sands. This contains the largest concentration of lowland raised mire (Moss) and is an area of low-lying coastal farmland interspersed with small villages and hamlets.

In total, 46 interviews were carried out, recording the memories of 53 people. The recordings were passed to the Cumbria Archive Service and can be accessed at the Carlisle Archive Centre. A short film was made with the help of Red Onion Video and this can be accessed on the Solway Coast AONB website at www.solwaycoastaonb.org.uk and the Solway Wetlands website at www.solwaywetlands.org.uk.



The Banks, Bowness-on-Solway

For further information on the ***Remembering the Solway*** project, including transcripts and extracts from the audio recordings of the interviews, visit **www.solwaywetlands.org.uk**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all the people on the Solway Plain who helped to shape this project. This involves both the local residents of the area who kindly agreed to share their memories and the group members who volunteered their time to carry out the interviews and develop the way forward. Thanks is also due to Susan Child, who co-ordinated the project and Kathleen Brough who encouraged us to use the Port Carlisle Chapel for our meetings and events.

preface

by The “Remembering the Solway” Group

Standing outside the historic castle of Drumburgh, looking down towards the old railway station and canal basin, I can see the haaf nets drying by the Solway shore and groups of visitors walking the Hadrians Wall National Trail.

Fifty years ago it was a very different scene.

The Solway Firth came into the 20th century virtually self-sufficient, with thriving commercial industries, farming and fishing. Over time, new forms of transport developed, eventually to be shared by a variety of armed forces during wartime.

Much would be forgotten but, facilitated by the Solway Wetlands Project, a small group of people came together to preserve and digitally record some of these precious memories.

The aim was to allow future generations to open a window to the past and glimpse a truly fascinating gem of Cumbrian life.

Along with the oral history recordings, we put together this book which will hopefully give you a snapshot of the richness of the material collected.

We hope you enjoy reading it.



THE SOLWAY

The Solway Firth is one of the largest and most important inter-tidal estuaries in Britain. It is a hugely dynamic seascape- the huge tidal range combined with the changing light and cloud means that no two views across the estuary are the same on any day. When tide levels are high and there is a strong onshore wind, the tide can sometimes come right up onto shore and inundate land and property.



The Firth marks part of the border between England and Scotland and historically there are several crossing points, or “waths” that people have used to travel between the two shores on foot, either in times of war or peace. However, the power of the tides means that the nature of the channels and sandbanks change all the time so a crossing is treacherous - many people over the years having lost their lives to the “bore wave” or incoming tidal surge.

“...that tide doesn’t half move. Once the bore wave’s there look out. And you can’t run it. You couldn’t run as fast as it goes along that Solway front. Aye. And there was oh, about maybe seven or eight times in the winter that would happen. And sometimes there was a high tide, a very high tide round about the end of July. The summer tide, they called that one. And that one could come right over the marsh and the road. Oh, aye... they were quite bothersome, these tides.” (Margaret Brown)

“What we used to do was on a Sunday night out was to walk as far out as you could in the sand- you just seen a spot in the distance. It must’ve have been very near Scotland, eh. Very near.



We used to go up to Port a lot with Burgh lads. We used to have a boat and we used to go across there... we made these tin cans, tin cans like a raft to go across on that.”
(Dougie Jefferson)

“No I’ve never been stuck in tides. We know when they’re coming you see. You waited, at night time, if you’re out at night you have to be wary of it. We had some ewes in once though. We got them out like, but bad to get out ‘cause you had to take one leg at a time. Put your hand right down the leg, pull it out and keep it out, and then another leg. Stupid. But there’d been a dog at them like, they wouldn’t be plunging down without dogs chasing them.

Aye with the cattle like... they used to walk out onto the sand on a hot day. And then the tide comes in so they go with the tide don’t they, they go away around by Glasson or somewhere, about 50 of them. So I realised, I’d forgot about them really, about the tide. And I went around that corner and just shouted them and they came in. And their tongues were hanging out and they’d had to swim part of the way. They were all right like, but it’s a big effort you see. But they listened to me and they come in.”
(Harry Hodgson)

“And the high tide - I remember it once at Dykesfield... there was a blacksmith’s shop and I remember it once putting the blacksmith’s fire

out, it was so high. In later years, this couple came to live there. They had a little shop and they came from Glasson and knew



nothing about the tide. Well, the tide came up through the night. John Percival, the boss at the farm, and Albert moved all the calves out the calf hold 'cause it used to come so far up the yard, you see. And then Albert said to John, 'Eh, what about that woman now, that's come into that house?' And so he went across and sure enough, the water was about two foot in the living room and kitchen. And so Albert shouted and shouted till he got them wakened and you know, she didn't know what he wanted! She came downstairs, flying down the stairs right into the water. And all the freezers and everything in the shop, the little shop, was ruined and oh, it was awful for them really."
(Margaret Brown)

"Sometimes the tide was just coming in. We would stand in the bore, which was quite interesting. Sometimes it was quite strong, you know. You were probably going in at that height, sort of, almost fit enough to wash you down but you used to feel the fish hitting your legs, flounders and that. We used to experiment by going away across the sand when the tides were low. I've seen probably a mile across that sand and then it suddenly dawned on us, probably, I don't know what time the tide comes into, Bryan, but I think we'd better be heading back." *(Geoff Hodgson)*

GROWING UP

The Solway Plain is a long way from any large town or city. Without regular transport or technology, the children of the Solway Plain had to make their own entertainment, and this was often out on the marsh, in the mosses or the fields, encountering many memorable local characters along the way.

School provided some structure, and various small means of income would supplement the family budget. The demands of the farming year meant that families would come together to help their neighbours.

Eventually, the outbreak of war meant that new encounters were made with children from far off places with very different lives.



Kirkbride School, 1950

“We played in the old engine shed, which was in the station yard and on wet days that was great, ‘cause it was quite big and we could all get together, the boys and the other girls in the village, and we played all sorts in there. I can’t remember what but it was dry and we weren’t supposed to be there really, but we climbed in through a window. And I remember we had a donkey- we kept it on the railway and I think, we didn’t know then, but donkeys aren’t supposed to be on their own and it used to go to Glasson for company!”

(Daphne Hogg)

“I don’t really know whether I’d be termed a railway child or a moss child, but I think I would have been quite happy with both. The place,



Anthorn School, 1921

as a small child, was wonderful. It was idyllic. The railway workers were our friends and they'd get off the train and come and buy my baby rabbits and my little dungarees I used to wear were continually covered in creosote from sitting on the British Rail gates, waving at the steam trains... If I could bottle the smells, the scent of Whiteholme in the '50s and '60s, I'd be a millionaire, and if I had a recording of the birds and the grasshoppers and the sway of the cotton grass... I mean, I know it sounds passionate and maybe like a dream, but in a way it was. To recapture that, it would be heaven."
(Jean Graham)

"We'd play rounders at the area that's known as the Barracks at Glasson, which is outside of the Highland Laddie. We would play games in between the walls of the pub and the house opposite, things like, 'What Time is it Mr Wolf?' And all the child's sort of games, hopscotch, all things like that."
(Kathleen Rook)

"Aye, there was tin whips. And there was hounds and hares... we hadn't a very good supply of [horse] chestnuts really, had to rely on somebody else getting them. Then there'd always be somebody with a conker that they'd roasted that was harder than everybody else's!" *(Richard Wills)*

“This was our little pet thing that we used to enjoy, fireworks. We put a lot of effort into building the fire, bonfire, Bryan and I. We worked hard, every night, ten days or a fortnight before bonfire night, down at Moss Lane. We once got into trouble, Bryan and I for we got some stuff which apparently is poisonous to stock. Of course, all hell let loose. The bonfire was all pulled to pieces. The cattle were coming up and eating some of it, so he made us take it all to bits, which was kind of against the grain, but oh we had to do it. So that kind of spoiled it there, so we started putting it down the lane. The one at the marsh was more convenient ‘cause it was on the roadside. Oh, we used to get these Catherine wheels and they were all different in those days. There was the bomb and there were jumping jacks. Rockets, we had the odd rocket now and again. I can’t remember the names of them all but I think when we were boys, they tended to have a tremendous crack. They were quite powerful. They kind of calmed them down a bit later on.” *(Geoff Hodgson)*

“There was a lady that lived down the lane just on the edge of the moss, and she kept greyhounds, but when they died she kept the skulls as well and there was sort of a shed to the side of the house with all these skulls, and she used to scare us witless. She seemed to be quite a ferocious lady but she liked

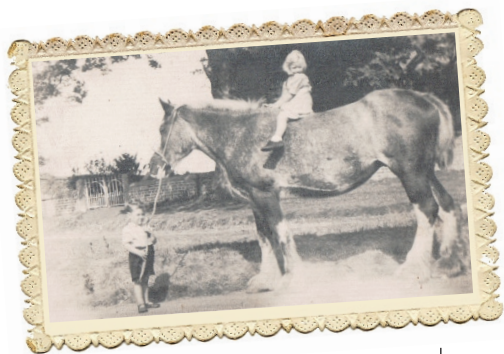


my mother and my mother would go and get damsons from her and she’d come back laden with damsons.” *(Maureen McKenna)*

“...there was a lovely old man that used to come and stay, an old sea captain. He was employed by Babycham. He used to winter at Whiteholme in one of the small cottages. A tremendous character. He entertained me as a small child with exciting tales of his trips on a catamaran down the coast of Africa, and I was absolutely enthralled. He would play his fiddle and I would dance and he was just an amazing old man. One thing that he always said was Whiteholme was a little bit of heaven on earth and he was right.” *(Jean Graham)*

“Drumburgh School was the first school I went to. The teacher...

caned me on my arms and my legs every day I went to school because I couldn't do arithmetic. And I used to go home at night and cry and Auntie would say to me, 'What's the matter?' And I would say, 'Well, I had the cane today,' and she would say, 'Why did you have the cane?' And I said, 'Cause I couldn't do sums. I couldn't do long division.' And I just hated school and you see Joe was there at the same time as me. He lived in the village and so he was at school but he was two years older than me and he had a photographic memory so he knew everything and so I used to cry at night. And Auntie would say, 'What's the matter?' 'I wish I was a good sum-er like Joe Bell,' I used to say. And when I said sum-er, you know, I meant good at sums like Joe Bell!" (*Bunty Bell*)



"Everybody had clogs on, children six years old with tiny clogs, but there were two girls from Thurstonfield... they wore shoes, they were rather posh,

the only ones that wore shoes."
(*Richard Wills*)

"Cut Gate, opened and shut Sunday... got quite regular for your pennies. Sometimes you would get a tanner or two, sometimes a shilling. But that wasn't very often. Times were hard, eh."
(*Dougie Jefferson*)

"And we sometimes used to bike along and across the marsh. There were gates and we would bike along to the gates and close the gate, and when the car came we would hope that they might throw out money, and, which they very often did. We didn't make a fortune but it was still exciting."
(*Maureen McKenna*)

"And in the autumn school holidays we would go rosehipping, even out of the holidays, in the season for rosehips, because we could take them to school and the first thing you wanted was a badge. After you'd picked so many you got a badge. And then you were paid per pound after that. At the end of the season, I think it was a firm called Scott's that used to collect the rosehips from the school, and obviously they were making rosehip syrup, you used to get a bottle of rosehip syrup."
(*Kathleen Rook*)

"And of course in the autumn holidays, the October ones, it was



Bowness School, 1928

known locally as tatie picking week. I used to always go to Thompson's Farm at the bottom of Water Street. It was a great time. We loved it because we used to get our lunch as well, and it was nearly always tatie pot and rice pudding, and I loved Mrs Thompson's rice pudding. And all the children did this in various farms. They went to different farms, but that's the one I always went to. And that's the main thing that I remember really about all the things we did in Glasson. Everybody got on... you know, it was safe. You could go out and play. We used to go along the old railway banks and make dens. Nobody worried about what's going to happen to you then.

People didn't lock their doors, anything. It was a good life really."
(Kathleen Rook)

"...there was evacuees in the village I think, there was a lot, some of them stopped, they never went back home, aye, were they from Newcastle I think. I can remember there was two POWs, whatever they called them, and they come to help us at the farm to pick tatties with Bob. I think they were, I don't know whether they were Poles or what they were, but they used to go round the farms and help- they used to carry me about. And when I went to school they used to come round in a big van with canvas sides on, they were prisoners of war, aye.

They must have been working somewhere, on farms I think, because Cedric, he asked, 'How many English men did you kill?' They were just little. 'Oh,' he says, 'Dozens!' They were all nice fellas, there was a big sign on the back, I don't know whether it was POW or what it was, you know. We used to see them when we went to school." (*Patrick Oprey*)

"... the war came when I was about seven... I can remember the declaration because we had a radio then... And the first I knew of evacuees was going into the orchard and seeing these two boys on my swing. And I didn't think I was going to like them very much. They were nice boys but, you know, it was my place. It wasn't theirs at all. So that was wartime... They lived in the house. God knows where they slept because we had about four bedrooms but there



Drumburgh School, 1958

was a hired man in the house and Granny sometimes came to stay because she went from place to place to stay... They came from the North East... And the mother of one of them lived next door with a younger child. They were very nice people. And some of them stayed over and they shared the school. So it must have been jolly squashy in the school. And of course you didn't know what they were talking about because of their different accents. But it would be the same for them because they wouldn't know what we were talking about. And they used to tease me. And my mother was given... money to care for them. And I think she didn't really know what to do with it and she bought them a lot of comics every week. And so I benefitted from that. So I got to see the comics too."

(*Margaret Parkinson*)

FARMING

The Solway economy has long been underpinned by farming. The Cistercian monks of Holme Cultram Abbey, Abbeytown, came here in 1150 with huge farming expertise, and set about improving and grazing the land and over time, the farming community has introduced on-going improvements to make a living from the land.

Within living memory, these changes have been immense, fuelled by many factors, but especially changing equipment, transport and technology.



“The first tractors were coming in. We always had an old Fordson before I left school, but it was the only one we had and it was put into the barn for winter, because it was too wet for the workers, the tractors. It did too much damage, so it was all horses. We had turnips and kale and a few potatoes, for our own consumption. There was always hens and a few pigs, one to butcher every winter or two.” (Allen Hodgson)

“We hadn’t made silage at that time. We were still making hay and that was never easy. Bad summers, some years we wasted a lot of hay. Occasionally, we got a lot of good hay. Harvest was always very hard but we had taken on another farm then at Easton



and that was really good ploughing land, some of it, and we had a lot of corn. There was a ten bay Dutch barn and it was full of straw every winter....Threshed most every week or every fortnight, through the winter. I can't remember what year it was but dad eventually bought our own thresher from Lanark... The thresher was at Easton in the big timber Dutch barn. It was mobile. We could move it about... Then they were always keen on draining and doing the ditches in Drumburgh. We tried to keep things maintained, something I've always been interested in and still do it today." (*Allen Hodgson*)

"Robert Percival was hired at Longcroft, and he was ploughing

with this Nuffield, and they had big mudguards on them like that. So he took us with him and I was sitting on the mudguard. I would have been eight, something like that. And there's right boggy bits... and he's ploughing along and the whole tractor went like that and I landed on the ground. Aye Robert Percival. It was happy days." (*George Hill*)

"Well, he had a double furrow horse plough and he had three horses in it, and I went to help him out a bit and it was good at getting the ploughing done but if you turned too fast and it tipped over, I couldn't lift the plough. I used to have to lose the horses off the front and pull the plough back on its wheels and off I'd go again. I

had three horses of a morning and fresh three in the afternoon. But we were always finished at six o'clock at night, like... six to six."
(John Baxter)

"Jackie Bell... he had the threshers, and the steam engines was on this side... There was three threshers and three big track and steam engines, aye, and they used to go round threshing and everything. They went to the farms 'cause there'd have been stacks, and they used to thresh it, and all the farmers used to go help one another, aye."
(Patrick Oprey)

"You'll have heard about farms and how, you know, there were no milking machines or the milking was done by hand in the early days. And the milk used to be put through a strainer called a sile. And this was done in the byre. And then it was carried and put through a cooler and oh, it used to be lovely watching the milk going through."
(Margaret Parkinson)

"Aye, I helped father to milk, aye. No, it was bucket units... We just had them ordinary paraffin lamps and you just carried them about as you were working like. Some dropped and the glass got broken out of them and sometimes maybe somebody chucked some water on them or something like that, but it was just the way things were in them days. Then... electric came



in about 1962, maybe would it be? ... Tilley lamps were outside and then we had a gas cylinder, an old fashioned gas cylinder that lit a light... in the kitchen in the house, but it was a fairly good light but it was, you know, just one; and then I think there was a light in the front room off it, and a gas cooker. We had three wells... but we never used them... We had water because I think they put a water main through until Bowness in about 1947." *(John Harrington)*

"They used to take bulls up at Annan and they used to walk them over the bridge... They would put them on the train I would think, at Bowness to the sale... They put them on the train to go to Annan... And of course a lot of the farming



produce went to Annan to sell, because it was easier across the bridge to Annan from Bowness.... They'll be shorthorn I would imagine." (*John Hewson*)

"I was always taken to see the foals. I loved the foals. If there was a new foal I'd be taken out to

see that. And one day I was taken out to see twin foals. Oh, this was incredible. I think my father probably paid far more than the value of the horses on vet's fees because they had various problems but it didn't matter because they were... twin Clydesdales. And they were lovely. And they became rather pets." (*Margaret Parkinson*)

"And the men always had to be fed. And it was breakfast and that was a cooked breakfast and then



ten o'clocks and then they would have dinner and then they would have tea. And this was often taken out to the fields or wherever they were. And then they'd have supper and there would probably be something else after that. But since they worked very hard anyway, they probably needed all that food."

(Margaret Parkinson)

"Newton Arlosh and Saltcote Marsh is... eleven hundred acres... My grandfather was involved with it, my dad was and I've been involved with it since I was a child,... And there's so many grazing rights and they belong to different people.... My grandpa had some, my dad bought some and my mother bought some, so--, and my sister and I have quite a few... Originally the marsh rights were all attached to farms in the parish but at various times they were sold off and now have some owners living as far away as Carlisle, Silloth and Wigton... And of course my father went into it (the Marsh Committee) and then my mother was secretary, then



my sister was secretary, I'm now secretary and my husband is chairman... It was grazed by sheep in the winter and cattle in the summer... and during the summer, I don't know where these people came from, they used to come and take grass seeds from the marsh and also we used to sell turf for the finest bowling greens and lawns, tennis courts... That went on for a long time and they lived in tents down on the, on one of the accesses to the marsh... They used to cut turf.... for tennis courts, there's crack that they went to Wembley and Wimbledon at the time." *(Eileen Bell)*



FISHING

Haaf netting is a traditional way of fishing for salmon and sea trout on the Solway estuary. It is said to date back to the Vikings who settled in parts of Cumbria over 1,000 years ago. The haaf net itself is a beam and three legs with a net mounted across it.

The fishermen stand in the Solway with their nets upright in the water, and as the tide comes either in or goes out, the fish carried through the flow of the tide meet the net and become trapped and caught. During the season haaf netters can still be seen along the shore carrying out the tradition today.



“I fished for 19 seasons but I loved every minute of it, every minute. I could not leave it alone... the fishing was so enjoyable. But because 1984 [the haaf net fishing season] was so good I actually made more money fishing than I did with the landscape gardening. And then in 1997, I qualified as an MOT tester. My brother had a garage and he wanted an extra tester and I just left the fishing that year. Not only that, the season was cut in two in 1999. In other words... we couldn't fish until 1 June, so we lost half the season. The following season I think the price of the licence went up almost 40-50%. And now of course they can only fish from ten o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, so the seasons have been cut to ribbons. So it was just as well I'd left anyway. But it was a lot more



lucrative and that's why I stopped haaf net fishing." (Roger Brough)

But [my grandfather] he also did haaf net fishing, as my father did, and they would catch trout, flounders, grilse and salmon, and of course this meant you were fairly self-sufficient for part of the year... My father would spend the winter knitting haaf nets, or repairing them, and this was done with a wooden needle that threaded the twine that they used to use through, and they had a block to measure the squares they did. It was all sort of knotted in a square. I haven't a clue how it was done but it was quite clever. He would tie it to a door handle or something and just knit away until he had his nets for the following year, or repaired ones that were damaged." (Kathleen Rook)

"And before my time, some of the fishermen, they weren't employed or anything so what they used to do was to go over to Scotland, when at low tide and then thin turnips and work on the Scots side and then fish their way back on the ebb tide, try and make money. So it must have been hard for them."

(David Humes)

"One day I was fishing... west of Bowness and it was a very big tide coming in and it was running hard. Instead of getting out I thought I'll... give it another two or three minutes 'cause there was a fair few fish about. Anyway, a grilse hit the net, I lift it and it snapped. I lift it quick. The net went right round behind my legs and I was stuck and away I went. Those two are what's known as floaters, where you're washed away."



Not very nice. Nothing to be proud of. Everybody's saying, 'Look at the greedy fellow. That's what you get with standing in the deep end too long.' Anyway, of course on a flood tide, there's no need to worry, it washes to the edge, so about 150 yards further down. It washed away and got tangled and I walked out." (*Roger Brough*)

"Right, one morning on the way to school on the bus we got on to the Glasson Marsh bit and Ernest Percival was the driver and he spotted this black thing bobbing up and down in the water, which he knew was a fisherman who had been washed away. He'd happened to be Robert Bewsher. So he stopped the bus and... Ernest... went to

Bowness, got his motorboat thing, rescued Bewsher, three salmon on his back, spitting water but he didn't let go of the salmon. And so he was continually getting washed away... I was fishing one place where I normally didn't fish and I heard this coughing ahead of us and seen the black thing coming down, it was Bewsher. He got washed right beside me and he's started fishing next to me. We both got a salmon at the same time. I killed mine and he let his off. He said, "Isn't it a caution?" Which was his favourite words. He said, "If you killed your fish, if you killed my fish before your fish," he said, "We'd have both had fish." So that was Bewsher." (*David Humes*)

“But the ebb tide, a lot of Glasson fishing was at the Purleys which is a backwater way round between Drumburgh and Glasson and... was a very famous place for catching fish, especially when there was fresh water and high tides... The stones was out like a jetty... but you weren’t allowed to build them up again because they’d been there that many years and it was supposed to just die away with natural wear and tear but they never did. But they’re completely gone now. And there was only two places... the front and back Purley as they called them. And behind that sometimes there was... what they called a neb hole, which is... when the tide was coming straight at you instead of around in the Purleys. Some people



could fish that. But it was a notorious place for danger because it was blue clay and it was very slippy. And before my days they used to fish with clogs on and tie their selves to a stake to make sure they didn’t get washed away, it was that dangerous.” *(David Humes)*



PEAT

The Solway Plain contains the largest area of relatively intact lowland raised mire in England. Locally referred to as “Mosses”, these are areas of deep peat which have developed in hollows over several thousands of years. As a result they are special habitats which are incredibly fragile and easily damaged. The Solway Mosses are now all National Nature Reserves. The four most important Mosses on the Solway are Wedholme Flow, Glasson Moss, Bowness Common and Drumburgh Moss.

Used as a source of fuel as well as in gardening, peat has always been a valuable resource on the Solway. Individual farms had “stints” or peat cutting rights on their local area of Moss, and whole families used to go out and cut and stack the peat for drying and later burning on their fires. Eventually, several of the mosses were milled commercially, and the companies were significant employers, recruiting both local people and workers from other countries and regions.



“I do remember playing on the moss, and when I think back it was really quite dangerous ‘cause we just wore sandals and would poke about looking for adders. Now I’m absolutely terrified of them and wouldn’t dream of doing that, but I also remember the not so good bit of the moss fires, which were enormous and really very frightening, ‘cause you could see the glow at night time. After a few years you’d then probably hear the fire engines coming if somebody was going to do something about them, but they were pretty spectacular. I don’t think anybody was ever hurt but it must have done quite a lot of damage I would imagine.” (Maureen McKenna)



Old workings on Glasson Moss

“...peat... well it was just hand tools, a special spade. Now, you had a special board you nicked it wid, and then you had a flatter one that you cut them out and different way to what they did for them on the mosses, aye, but you would cut them about ten inch wide. And they always liked the black ones out of the bottom, and when you went and got right down into the bottom, you know, maybe digging a face out about six foot high, and right down in the bottom they were black. And then when they dried they were just about half the size of what they came out, aye, and the brown ones never shrunk as much, aye.”
(Johnny Bainbridge)

“We were cutting the peat up on the moss, at Cardurnock. That was a hard job. Margaret never went up but Mother and Father used to go, and Father used to cut it and Mother used to wheel it and I used to have to stack it. Two barrows, nine peats on each barrow. They were heavy things... Mother did most of the wheeling, like. And we could cut peat to last us all winter, and burn nothing else.”

(John Baxter)

“But we also used to burn mainly peat—, a little bit of coal but we did burn peat, which would be frowned upon now, but it would be my grandfather and father who cut the peat on Glasson Moss. They brought it home. It would go into a big shed, and it had to be very dry before you could burn it. But I do remember it had a distinct smell.”

(Kathleen Rook)

“And if it was winter and the moss froze... your wrist used to go because you would have that much pressure to get the peat up. And if you made a mess of them when you were cutting them and broke them in half, when you come to stool them you had twice as much work to do. So you had to make sure that you laid them where it was level to stop them from breaking.”

(David Humes)

“When we were on the Moss there was two or three different places it was where we cut the peat and worked the peat. And one was

Rogersceugh. But that moss was a lot lighter than the one we were on and the Glasson Moss. And it were a big benefit for anybody who was cutting the peat because it was that much lighter and it dried quicker. But on the Glasson side it was heavier and harder, harder on your hands. But it was good for what the gardens and whatever they run the racehorse stables and all that... And the deeper you got with the cutting the peat, as a rule, it was good for burning it. It dried very, very hard and when you fired it, it was very, very hot. On the softer side like the Rogersceugh thing, it was just mushy and there was no heat whatsoever. It... would just smoke and smoulder.”

(David Humes)

“I used to stack it [the peat] up to dry and then when it was dry, he [my grandfather] had this big pram, you know with the big fancy wheels and the springs on them?... He used to tie a bit of rope onto the thing and then round his waist and then, ‘cause he wasn’t that good at walking, and sometimes he used to



let us sit in the pram and pulled us up How Flow to Low Flow and then we went across and filled it up and then back down, you know, but as I say when it was really hot weather, he used to take us up to the Moss and I’ve seen, well there might have been a hundred, there might have been even more, adds, on this bank here. He used to take the poison out of them and pickle them in big bottles... there was bottles of them in the shed in Lazonby Row... Often, when we used to come from school... I used to have a dog



called Sweep and it was barking and here's adders curled up on the step." (*Jimmy Rayson*)

"The name of the firm that we both worked for was the Cumberland Moss Litter, and then another firm took that, this... I... think his name now was Howlett. And later on that was taken over by Fisons and it's been Fisons ever since. I used to work inside on a bagging machine for a long while, and I came a chargehand like, later on, to see that everything went all right, like. It wasn't a very clean job 'cause the peat had to be dry like, you know, and you needed a bath every night, sort of thing. It was dried out on the moss, when it was cut in sections and it was fed through an elevator crusher and then up an elevator... we used to bale some, different sizes of bales, and it all went away on local wagons like, you know."

(*Tommy Atkinson*)

"I started in 1970. By that time there was a lot of automation on the moss. Before then the peat was all cut by hand and then they got two peat cutting machines, which cut it a lot faster, and they needed more staff there. The men used to stack the peat so that it dried with the wind. They used to put it in low walls first of all and then it was put into big peat stacks, and always with the air going through it to dry it... The mill gang- these were the men that loaded the buggies with

peat to take it down to the mill. And these buggies, there were maybe about eight or ten wooden trucks on railway lines and they were pulled by a small railway engine, and they ran up and down onto the moss to take the dried peat down to the mill. There were four or five of these small locomotives working backwards and forwards on the peat moss to feed the mill." (*Margaret Sharples*)

"I come to know some of them [the workers], who were born in this country as well as foreigners, and when they came to this moss here in, the firm put a transport van on to bring them from another moss because they thought they had better conditions here... they brought their families with them... I come to know some of them. They built four houses, the firm... they were wooden huts, you know, they weren't like permanent buildings... four buildings for anybody married, like, and their families. I think they've just been bought this last year or so."

(*Tommy Atkinson*)



RAILWAYS

In 1823, a new harbour was built at Port Carlisle, and canal was constructed between here and Carlisle. The canal was short lived, and was filled in to create the bed of a railway in 1854. An extension of the railway from Carlisle to Silloth was constructed in 1856, running south of Drumburgh via Kirkbride and Abbeytown.

In 1869, an impressive one mile long iron viaduct was constructed across the Solway Firth between Bowness-on-Solway and Annan. It was damaged by ice several times and eventually demolished in 1935. The Carlisle to Silloth line was closed as part of the 'Beeching Cuts' in 1964.



“We did play a bit along the sidings at Drumburgh. There was always a lot of coaches parked up with maybe coal in them or other goods. They were safe enough just to play about in. We could crawl about underneath them or anything and even the blackbirds and other birds used to nest in them. There were... not many passengers at Drumburgh but it was always a very tidy station and there was always lengthsmen in those days, kept the railways and the ditches and everything, fences, well looked after.” *(Allen Hodgson)*

“The engine shed was used for the steam engine... that ran on the railway at Port Carlisle. That finished in 1932 and the shed and tower that held the water tank, they were all left in the station yard, and the only thing that had gone was



the booking office and the waiting room, that seemed to have been demolished. But the platform was there with the way for the railway still left and all the lines had been taken up.” (*Daphne Hogg*)

“I left school on the Friday night and I started on the railway at Kirkbride on the Monday... I started in August- in October the train came off the line at New Dykes Bridge killing the driver and fireman.... we went down to where the train had come off at New Dykes bridge. Dr Macdonald was down there... and they said, ‘Do you know how to knock the... steam off?’ ...it was on its side so I put my hand in and I never forget I got hold of one of their hands and that was it and the train was on the side and the coal was all in among them and the steam, they got

scalded to death. And the coupling broke and if the coupling hadn’t have broke all the coaches would have gone... over and it wasn’t far off hitting New Dykes village... I think he had been going too fast and he was on a bogie bit and all of a sudden it rolled... [The] coal waggon brought the bodies up to Kirkbride and we put a sheet in the ladies waiting room and they put the bodies in the waiting room... And we worked on the Sunday all day... getting the engine and the tender back on the line. They put special trains from Crewe and I was on the phone taking messages down at New Dykes bridge. And it was light when I got finished after the train came off that night.” (*Cedric Hunter*)

“Well Father and Mother would be at Easton before I was



born, and he had been to Roger [Rogersceugh] to his father's... and he was walking back when it was snowing and he said he was getting farther and farther near home, the roads were filling up like, yeah. Then after the snow got finished, the milk wagon couldn't get round... So there was a train that came out from Carlisle to Drumburgh station. They took the road out from Easton to Jim Hopes, then down and... they took all the milk to the station and the train took them into Carlisle.”
(John Harrington)

“We used to wave at them [the trains]. My uncle... Uncle Frank, he was a fireman on the train to Silloth and on a Sunday, you would

know he was working because he would start blowing the whistle as he left the station at Drumburgh and when he got as far as our house, he had a great pile of coal, which he used kick off and we had to go and gather it up. We'd get locked up now!” *(George Brown)*

“There was adders on the rail as well, you used to see them on a sunny day, sitting on the rails. They were lying on the rails, they were lying on the sleepers... with the heat off the steel.”
(George Brown and Jimmy Rayson)



HOME & LEISURE

Life on the Solway was one of hard work. Many people were employed in farming, which in its very nature could be tough and unrelenting. Traditional Solway buildings often presented their own challenges, and the lack of utilities such as running water and electricity could make the daily tasks we are used to now very difficult and time consuming.

However, it is evident that the people of the Solway Plain are very passionate about their area and have a strong sense of community- and this is reflected in the time they spent with others carrying out duties at home and leisure activities.



“Living on a farm was, well, I thought fairly ordinary. The farm was an old house made of clay dabbin and there was not a straight line in it. I didn’t think of that at the time, although going from one part of the house to another, instead of a step there was a slope. I haven’t come across another house with a slope in it. The main part of the farmhouse was the kitchen, which opened straight into the sort of courtyard surrounded with animal places round it... And so in the bedrooms you would have beams shooting up. There was one came through the middle of the window where I used to sleep and you didn’t think anything of it. That was just life. And as I say, there wasn’t a straight wall and I remember my mother using



a plumb line to keep the wallpaper as straight as you could... And the stable had an interesting stone on it that... had inscriptions on it. Archaeologists... used to come and see that but to me it was just a stone that was in the stable. And at the bottom of the yard there was another cruck barn and that was the lower part was for animals, the middle part was for storing the carts and the upper part on each side was for storing hay. And then you went through there into an orchard with the two-seater lavatory... closets we called them.”
(Margaret Parkinson)

“We never had piped water, it was all out of a well and the only light we had was Aladdin lamps and candles, we went to bed with a candle, the last word before I went through the door to the stairs was,

‘Don’t spill any wax on the steps!’
(Richard Wills)

“I started music lessons when I was about twelve. I was always fascinated by the piano accordion and, when the school dances were in Drumburgh School at Christmas, there was two accordionists in the Homeowners Band- I just used to stand and watch them. So I eventually persuaded Mum to get me an accordion and I went to lessons for quite a few years. I managed to master the basics of the machine and quite enjoyed entertaining myself. We had a little band for a little bit in the village, there was a lad playing drums and another old chap played the trombone.” *(Allen Hodgson)*

“We used to collect brambles to take to a chap called Nichol Hill at

Kirkbride, he used to use it for dye or something for his leather. That was another escapade, plus we used to do rosehip picking, which was collected at school, and it used to be made into rosehip syrup. We walked up the [railway] line... up to Kirkbride with them.”
(*Geoff Hodgson*)

“My mother and one of our neighbours, Mrs Carter... used to make their own rug mats, and they did them together. My dad made them a frame, which they would sit in the room... and they used to have like a needle that they pushed through with pieces of rag on, and when they pulled it out it knotted behind. And I think most of the country ladies had their own patterns, which often consisted of diamond shapes. These would go round the edge and be various colours in the middle. But, you know, your rugs were all homemade in front of the fire... your old clothing went to make your rag rugs. And that’s what they used to do in the winter.” (*Kathleen Rook*)

“But then after I left school I just came home, as I think most of the farmers’ daughters did then, a lot of my friends, and helped on the farm, and then got involved in Young Farmers’ clubs and all sorts of things like that... Oh, what did we do? Field days, all the girls just did the industrial



things then. Handicrafts and cookery and all sorts of things. Drama, yeah. We won the drama competition one year. But Bowness WI now, it’s the oldest in the county. Started in 1919, Bowness... so being the oldest, but we’re struggling now for to keep going. We don’t seem to get any younger ones. They’re all involved with other things, I think, carting the next generation about and picking them up, yeah. But we did, we’ve had some good entertainments and good things, yeah. Mrs Mitton, who was the rector’s wife, she started it off and she was president for a good long time.” (*Margaret Wills*)





“In Burgh there used to be four pubs, you know. There was the Rat Trap at Longburgh, there was the Greyhound, there was the Pack at North End and the Lady Lowther at Old Sandsfield. Well, there was no licensing hours on a Sunday then in Scotland and they all used to come over to the Lady Lowther in boats, on a Sunday especially. And to this day the old bar is still in at Old Sandsfield. And the crockery, it was there until recently anyway, because the men that manage the marsh always have a dinner in July, the first week in July and they use the crockery that was left there from them days.” (Margaret Brown)



“I lived in the school house at Bowness... there were... a head and three assistants there... It was a case of going there at the end of the war and the children hadn't enjoyed any real freedom... because everything was so limited. And the main object in those days was to bring them into the world and let them see beyond Bowness because they'd been tied down there and because of the conditions that we were living in... I felt that the headmaster, as well as being headmaster of the school he had to sort of lead the village and the area as well. And a lot of my time was organising things for the adults in the evenings, drama classes, producing plays, getting tennis courts revived and starting badminton in the village hall you see. And we didn't have any playing field but just below the school, down the road of course there was the beach and the sandy area down there which we used as our playing fields and getting a football team.” (Joe Rawlings)



REMEMBERING THE SOLWAY

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