

# KIRKOWAN STREET EXHIBITION

A collection of photographs can record the identity of a place and become a kind of village family album that stores stories from the past.

Local historians have gathered an extraordinary selection of photographs of Kirkcowan and there are sure to be more pictures lurking in the backs of drawers or boxes in the attic.

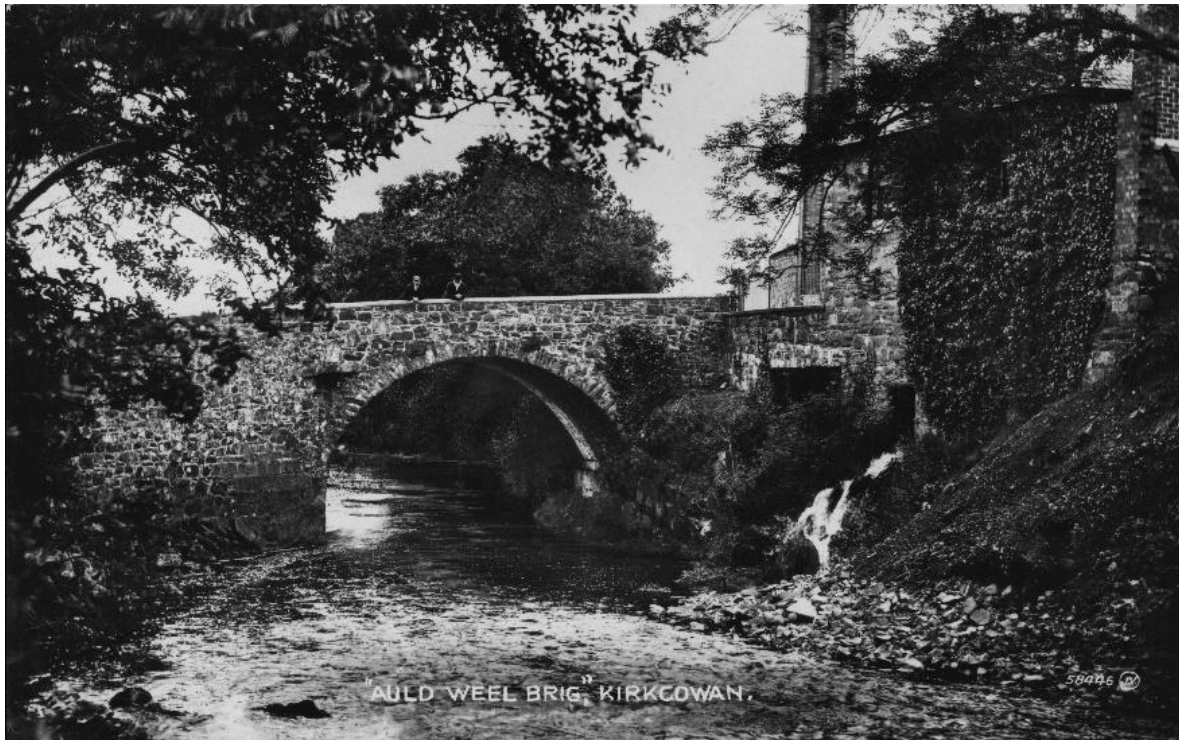
But time dulls memories of the past and a lot of information about the people and places captured in the photographs is only remembered by a few or has been forgotten altogether.

The Kirkcowan photo-sharing detectives project aims to encourage the collection of photographs of the area and help track down the stories behind the faces and places.

Enlarged photographs have been exhibited in village windows and will be added to as more images are collected. The PLACE in the Biosphere has ambitions to turn the results of the street exhibition into a publication to reveal the heritage of Kirkcowan to a wider audience.

The following pages show the photographs that have been exhibited in the village.





### **“Auld Weel Bridge”**

This 1907 post card captures much of the history of Kirkcowan in one image. Kirkcowan church was sited near river crossings above the confluence of the Tarf Water and River Bladnoch. Maps surveyed in the 1500s show the bridge, also known as Lincowan Bridge, at this narrow point on the Tarf Water. The construction of the semi-circular bridge we see here suggests it was rebuilt in the late 1700s.

The Tarff Mill in the background was established in 1880 as part of the water powered industrial development in the village. The chimney in the background shows steam power had been adopted before this photograph was taken. It is generally thought the “Weel” in the name refers to the water wheel that powered the woollen manufactory.

#### **Salmon pool**

A description of Galloway in 1684 mentions ‘Lincuan’ as a place where salmon were caught. The name is likely to be derived from the Gaelic *Linn Comhgain* meaning St Comgan’s pool, associated with Kirkcowan - St Comgan’s Kirk.

Weel is also a Scots word for pool so it is possible the bridge was named “Auld Weel Brig” after a pool rather than the mill wheel.

With thanks to Dumfries and Galloway Council Library & Archive Service for the photograph.



## **WAULK MILL**

The strong flow of the Tarf Water made the site near Kirkcowan a good choice for Robert Milroy to start a waulk mill around 1779 with his father, John Milroy. Robert had served his apprenticeship with John Falconer in Mochrum and must have recognised the value of a waulk mill in an area where wool was plentiful and weaving was a cottage industry.

A waulk mill converts the power of running water to drive large wooden hammers to pound wet woollen cloth to tighten the weave and thicken the fabric, a process known as waulking or fulling. The soft water from the river was ideal for scouring or cleaning the cloth of natural oils and greases.

The early waulk mill became the centre of mechanised woollen manufacturing by the Milroy family who added a carding mill to prepare wool for spinning in 1814, enlarged and rebuilt in 1821, extended in 1835 and again in the 1880s. This successful business employed many people in the village and ran for 175 years before closing in 1954.

With thanks to Alix Parker for photograph and information.



### **Woollen Mill Workers**

This photograph of workers standing in front of the Waulk Mill woollen manufactory was probably taken in the 1890s or early 1900s – judging by their clothing and variety of hats.

The mills provided an important source of employment for the village. Occupations identified in census records for Kirkcowan include:

Wool carder – untangles and cleans wool

Wool sorter – graded wool

Wool spinner – spun wool into yarn

Woollen dyer – dyed yarn

Bobbin winder – transferred yarn onto bobbins

Bobbin carrier – supplied bobbins to weaving machines

Wool weaver – operated weaving machines

Woollen or yarn piecer – pieced together broken yarn

Mill overseer - supervisor





### **WILLIAM MILROY, WAULK MILL OWNER**

William Milroy, born on 15th March 1864, was the great grandson of Robert Milroy, the founder of the Waulk Mill. As a young man a wool bag fell on him while he was working in the mill paralysing his left arm and side for the rest of his life, which meant he had to employ a valet to help him dress.

William expanded and modernised the mills during the 1880s when new weaving sheds were added and the water wheel was replaced by a coal fired steam engine. In 1929 he acquired the Clugston Estate and was deeply involved in the Kirkcowan community as well as a keen church goer. He was a Justice of the Peace for Wigtownshire and took an active role in many local committees including the school management committee, the sub pension committee, the war weapons committee, the evacuees committee and the roads committee.

William did not marry or have any children, which meant on his death at the age of 81 in 1945, the Waulkmill woollen manufactory was passed on to his eldest nephew, Dr Robert Glen Parker.

With thanks to Alix Parker for photograph and information.



### **D CROZIER TAILORS, 16 MAIN STREET**

John Loundon McAdam championed the construction of roads using crushed stone bound by compacted gravel, a system that became known as "macadamisation". The method spread very quickly and most roads were subject to the McAdam process by the end of the nineteenth century.

The invention of steam powered road rollers by a Kent based company in the 1860s made the operation much easier and soon they were being exported far and wide. This Aveling & Porter road roller dates from about 1892.

Onlookers include two men in the doorway of D Crozier Tailors may be David Crozier, (a master tailor although he seems to have spent most of his life also working for the Post Office), and his son John who also took up the trade. David died in 1901 so if it is him in the picture then the photograph is likely to have been taken during the late 1890s. John Crozier is well known in the village for forming and conducting the successful and long running Kirkcowan Musical Society.

With thanks to Alix Parker for the photograph.



### **Craighlaw Arms Hotel**

This photograph was taken in the late 1860s when the Craighlaw Arms Hotel was one of three hotels in Kirkcowan, the other two being the Kirkcowan Arms Hotel (later renamed Tarff Hotel) and the Commercial Hotel. Located on a route between Glenluce and Wigtown, near river crossings over the Bladnoch and Tarff, there will have always been a demand for lodging places for travellers. When this photograph was taken the village was growing, the railway had arrived a few years earlier and the Waulk Mill woollen manufactory was expanding. At the entrance of the hotel is Agnes Milligan, who by this time was in her late 50s and had been the hotel keeper for over 30 years. Standing next to her is a younger women, probably Margaret Hamond her servant.

### **Agnes Milligan 1811 - 1882**

Agnes McKean married Robert Milligan in 1833 and together raised a family and ran the hotel which they rented from Alexander McWilliam. After Robert died in 1857 Agnes continued to run the hotel and by the early 1860s she had also become the owner.

With thanks to Dave & Debbie McBain for historical information and Andrew Gladstone for the photograph.