

Memories of Elspeth Bell

My Parents took over Cramond Hill Farm in April 1952 with 5 children. I was born in July 1952 the sixth of 9 children.

We had a very free and easy upbringing, playing in the fields and down by the Tweed. There were always older ones keeping an eye on the younger ones, parents were not required to supervise. Often we would play in the Bathing Well before going home from school. Our pocket money (3d) was spent in the Village shop which was run by Mr and Mrs Ford, cinnamon biscuits, black jacks, rhubarb rock were the favourites or we bought a bag of pears from the lady who lived in Carlowrie cottage. Miss Larson was the headmistress teaching 7 - 11 year olds and Miss Nixon the infant teacher. The two classrooms were divided by a sliding partition which was moved back for Christmas Parties.

The W.I. at that time had well over 50 members. Of course there were not the activities for women to go to on their own as there are now. I joined the W.I. at the age of 16. There was a lot to learn from this, basket weaving classes for one. We had a great concert group with our trusty pianist Peggy Allan. I think this inspired me to form Coldstream Concert party many years later.

The W.I. organised Christmas parties for all the village children and these were held in the hut which stood behind where the village hall is now. Father Christmas (aka Colonel Collingwood) always appeared with gifts for the children.

My father Tommy Maxwell, along with Tom Ford, Willie Thompson, Dod Turnbull and many other Cornhill worthies, was the main inspiration for the building of the new village hall. I remember fund raising activities for this venture. We held Clay Pigeon shoots and afternoon teas at the farm as well as bring and buy sales in the hut.

The New hall was completed and opened in September 1963. A concert was put on for the occasion but on the night there was a huge thunderstorm which cut the power. My Dad took a tractor and using the PTO to drive a generator, restored enough power to allow the evening to go ahead. There were dances every Friday night for the younger generation. Stiletto heels were banned as they would damage the floor. Unfortunately because of gang fighting these dances had to stop and old fashioned dances became the norm.

A very successful Youth Club was run by Ken Young, Colin Broadbent and later George McCann.

Members came from Branxton, Etal, Ford, Wark, Carham and all farms in between. We had BBQs in the evening on the beach at Cheswick, we had Badminton teams competing with other youth clubs, we had midnight hikes up Cheviot and through Kyloe woods. We went skiing at Glenshee, camping at St. Mary's Loch, we did a sponsored walk from Berwick to Alnwick. It was a well attended and successful youth club.

The Garden Fete was the highlight of the year, held in the grounds of Cornhill White House, courtesy of Colonel Collingwood, the wheel of fortune was a great money spinner. There were races for the children, bric a brac stalls something you could win a pig for (can't remember what that was.)

Nora Tait organised a bus trip to Blackpool Illuminations ever year; these were great fun, the bus was always full.

Time moved on and in November 1973, My sister Ailsa and I made history by having the only double wedding Cornhill Church has known.

I moved to Coldstream but kept my membership with the W.I. so I still had contact with Cornhill, also my grandparents lived in the village and I was a regular visitor there.

In December 1981 Rob (my husband) and I were visiting my sister in Norham. By this time I had 2 boys and was looking for some way of working but not need baby sitters. Mrs Ford had sold the village shop a few years before but it didn't seem to be doing very well under new ownership and was now up for sale again. By the time we got to Norham we had decided this would be a good venture for us. This was a Friday night and by the following Tuesday we had put an offer in and had it accepted.

We moved in on 2nd February 1982 and the Village supported us wholeheartedly. It was hard work for me and my trusty helper, Mary Black, then Netta Wood, June Halliday, Katy Telford, Victoria Dickson and Sheelagh Hume.

There followed a very enjoyable 20 years in the shop. Rob and I were quickly accepted into village life.

There were many wonderful characters in the village then, I could tell some stories but I think it would be wrong to single certain people out.

Rob became part of Cornhill Social Club, I became a member of the Village Hall committee and St. Helen's Church council. The Social Club ran raft races on the Tweed and Duck races on the Tweed. All great fun and well attended. The Taxi service was Rob Bell with his little Nuffield tractor and a trailer. The money raised all went to various charities.

The Village Hall was very well used, under the watchful eye of Adam Allan. Whist Drives with 20 tables, Dances on Friday nights filled to capacity. No bars in those days, just cups of tea and a biscuit.

The Village Hall socials were well supported with a sketch or two from the W.I. then a super spread of sandwiches and cakes followed by dancing. Almost everyone came to them.

It became apparent we needed to raise a considerable amount of money to repair the roof on the hall and also to convert the back toilets into a disabled toilet.

I had an idea to run an auction where goods were brought in beforehand and logged in. The seller got a percentage and the village hall got a percentage. We actually ran 3 of these and they were very successful, raising over £5,000, enough to put central heating in as well. Always grateful to Brian Woodcock and George Neil who were the auctioneers,

The W.I. was still a big part of my life, we organised Royal Wedding celebrations, VE day celebrations, anything that warranted a celebration, we celebrated.

By the time we had been there 19 years, I decided to sell the shop, (Rob was not keen as it would be a big move)

Eventually we sold it to the Pitman family, who still run it today.

We moved in on 2nd February 1982 and we moved out on 2nd February 2022.

Elspeth Bell, June 2024

Elspeth was awarded an MBE in 2000 for services to the community.