

KIRKCUDBRIGHT HISTORY SOCIETY

An update on a study of the Region

A fascinating update on a current pioneering study of the “ethnology” of Dumfries and Galloway was described at the November meeting of Kirkcudbright History Society. Ethnology deals with the detail of life at different times and in different places. Typically it is done by using documentary sources of different kinds like diaries and letters. It also makes use “oral” evidence based on interviews and discussions.

Mark Mulhern and Caroline Milligan, based at the University of Edinburgh, and Alison Burgess from Dumfries separately described different aspects of this major current project in which they and others are involved.

After detailed preparation and planning involving meetings and discussions 136 in depth interviews have so far been undertaken in Dumfries and Galloway involving 27 fieldworkers. All the interviews have been recorded and are being transcribed.

An analysis of the content of the interviews so far has revealed over 300 “themes” like farming life and practices, school life, wartime experiences, shops and shopping and the railways and effects of closure of certain branch lines.

The audience of over 60 members and guests heard some interesting short recorded clips from the interviews exploring a variety of themes. An important strand from all the clips was the voice, language used and rich variety of local accents captured.

Copies of the interviews will be made available locally for future generations. The interviews capture a small part of the vast knowledge a community possesses and make local and regional knowledge and history an accessible resource.

It is a living project and an exciting project partly because the researchers never know in advance what they are going to hear and record.

Some gaps in knowledge have emerged from the work done so far and it is hoped that these can be explored in future work. They include things like local music, games, historic traditions, supernatural beliefs and the kelp industry.

It was emphasised by the speakers that an important aspect of the research is that results obtained and outputs are made available. The project has set up a web site, and publications are regularly produced like the “flashback” series of short books. Two larger volumes of work are planned (Dumfries and Galloway in the 18th and 19th centuries and Dumfries and Galloway in the 20th century). These will have a similar structure to a series of 14 volumes already printed on Scottish Life and Society covering things like working life, community life, domestic life, cultural life, people and places and buildings.

It is also anticipated that an archive of all material obtained will be made available hopefully online to make it accessible to the community.

It was emphasised by the speakers that the research has been made possible by the contribution of the people of Dumfries and Galloway, it belongs to the people of Dumfries and Galloway and should be given back to them.

The next meeting of the Society will be on December 11 when Architect Luke Maloney will be talking about “Buildings at risk in Dumfries and Galloway.”