



The Ayton Family Society

President – Pieter Cor Aitton



Convener's Letter

It is with the deepest sadness that I have to report to the society the death of our Convener, Jim Eaton. Jim died peacefully at The Knoll Hospital in Duns, Berwickshire, on the evening of Sunday 9th May, 2010, after a long illness which he bore with courage and as much dignity as his condition would allow.

Jim was the backbone of our society, always ably supported by his wife Alison, whom I am sure we all send our sincere sympathy too.

Jim wrote of the founding of our society in his Convenors letter in "Newsletter" No.8, December 1999. He told us how he had responded to a letter he read in "The Berwickshire Evening News" of 15th November 1990. This letter, also published in the November 1990 "Scots Magazine" was from Pieter Cor Atton from Groningen in The Netherlands. Cor was informing the readers that he was descended from an Ayton whose Jacobite connections had forced him to flee to Holland after the failure of the first Jacobite Rising. Just as importantly he was asking for information about the community of Ayton in Scotland at the present time.



Jim and Cor corresponded quite frequently over the next few months and it was arranged that Cor and his wife Fok would visit Scotland the following year. Jim did not want this to be a personal visit as he saw the potential to create a small Ayton gathering. To this end he contacted Mr David Liddell-Grainger the laird of Ayton who gave his support and invited the group to meet at his home, Ayton Castle. Jim then went through the local telephone directory and invited as many Ayton's, Aytoun's, Aiton's and Eaton's as he could muster. The meeting took place on a warm sunny day with Mr Liddell-Grainger showing us round the castle.

The following year Jim invited those who had attended, together with any new contacts he had made, to a small gathering at his own home at Cranshaws in the Lammermoor Hills and Alison performed a splendid job as our hostess. A small nucleus of like minded "cousins" now having been brought together Cor suggested that an Ayton Society should be formed and suggested we draft a constitution to that end.

Again Jim was the one who took the lead and so a second approach was made to Mr Liddell-Grainger, who this time did not only offer the castle for the event but put adverts in several English newspapers and invited his friend Sir Malcolm Innes of Edingight, Lord Lyon King of Arms, to attend. More phone books were scoured and invitations sent out resulting in the meeting, which was held round the large table in the ground floor hall of the castle, becoming the inaugural meeting of The Ayton Family Society. Advice was given to us by the Lord Lyon and a small committee elected to carry forward the fledgling society, Jim being elected Convener, a position he held with pride until his recent death.

Through Jim's leadership, and the late David Liddell-Grainger's generosity, the society has established a small museum at Ayton Castle. It has held an annual gathering each year since its foundation in 1995, these have taken place at Strathaven in Lanarkshire, Burntisland and Balgonie Castle both in Fife, George Heriot's in Edinburgh and Ayton in Tyne & Wear, England, all places with Ayton connections, as well as every third year at Ayton Castle, Berwickshire.

The society will not be the same without him but I sincerely hope that the members will pull together and make sure that what Jim has created will not lapse and will be a credit to his memory.

David Eaton

Tribute to Jim Eaton

The following tribute was read by the Minister, Ann Inglis at Jim's funeral on Friday 14 May at Cranshaw's church.

"As most of you will know, Jim's father was Minister here, and so Jim's early years were spent in the Manse - our bathroom was Jim's bedroom. As a baby he was brought to church and lay in a Moses basket beside the organ. (And now he lies in a different kind of "basket" beside the organ.) He came back to Cranshaws which he loved for the last 25 years of his life. His life was a complete circle - he was born in the Knoll and on Sunday he died in the Knoll.

Jim shared his early life with his brother David. He began school in Cranshaws and then the family moved to Newton and Danderhall - a country parish just on the edge of Edinburgh. He attended primary school there and then attended the Rudolf Steiner school in Edinburgh - something he kept quiet about! The family would return to the Lammermuirs camping each summer. They camped at Kingside (now under water) behind the school, and Mrs. Gilchrist, the teacher, would - quite illegally I am sure - allow them to stay in the school if the weather was wet. These were memories which remained as precious times for both Jim and David.

Now, it's at this point that my chronology of Jim's life gets a bit hazy. The other evening Alison and David - and Anne too - had so many interesting stories to tell me that, when I was walking home, I felt a slight panic of confusion coming over me. Then I decided you didn't need an exact chronology - just a flavour.

Jim was an art student and later an art teacher. Now the words "riotous student days" were not used but I think he enjoyed those days - perhaps as much socialising as studying. And many of the friendships made then were kept in good repair. After college he toured Spain painting and he needed to work night shift in a garage to enable him to do that. He had a number of jobs - driving a lorry and picture framing among them, before going into teaching, first as an uncertificated teacher on short-term contracts, and then, after a year at Moray, he taught at various Edinburgh schools and then South Queensferry and West Lothian. During this time Jim and Alison bought a cottage in Blakerstone. Jim got a job in Berwickshire, and I often meet people who were taught art by him - indeed one of the nurses on duty on Sunday night in the Knoll was taught by him at Logformacus. In the mid 1980s Jim and Alison moved to Cranshaws.

But I haven't got Jim and Alison married yet. And I have to tell you this story. Alison was working in the pipe shop at the top of the High Street in Edinburgh. In came Jim - several times - and he eventually asked Alison if she would like to go to a dance. Not a man to do things in a hurry. This was in May - the dance was in January! However, they fixed another date sooner. Jim described Alison to David as "the girl of my dreams". They were married in August 1970 (so they were just 3 months off their Ruby wedding) and shared all these happy years together - in Edinburgh, in Blakersone and in Cranshaws. They enjoyed holidaying together, they loved the countryside, they had dogs - they took the first "Blake" to Church although he didn't always appreciate the music! - and one of my earliest memories of Jim is him walking along the road in all weathers with the second "Blake".

Jim was an elder in Cranshaws - in the Kirk of Lammermuir and then linked with Langton and Polwarth. When I came he was Session Clerk. Jim and I didn't always agree but we always listened to each other. The Minute books were kept in his beautiful copper plate handwriting. When he was able he was at all the hill churches in turn - unless he was away piping at a Masonic service or some other event. His faith was a vital part of his life - a strong traditional faith.

Which brings me to piping. Jim joined the Boys' Brigade to play in the band. They didn't have one! Perhaps he should have checked. When the family went to Newton a local Pipe Major gave him lessons and he learnt quickly. He joined the OTC at Art College - to play in the band. He joined the Royal Scots - to play the pipes - but he had to do soldiering too. He was proud of that time all his life and he remained a member of the Royal Scots Association all his life. He played in the Bilston Glen Pipe Band. They won a championship and somehow this involved him going to Holland - not to pipe but to dance - because he had a kilt. Later he played with the Merse pipers and the Duns Pipe Band who honoured him by beating retreat a couple of weeks ago. He was a patient man and he enjoyed teaching others to play the pipes. He took up the Lowland pipes and the accordion. What a sadness it was when he could no longer play. (Our Sarah's wedding was the first thing he declined) but he still liked to listen - and we have all seen THE DVD - at least once.

Jim founded the Aiton family society 10 years ago and looked forward to the gatherings. And he was so pleased to be able to go to France to visit his uncle's First World War grave.

Jim was a quiet man, never selfish, always thoughtful, artistic in the widest sense. He was only 69, but none of us who saw him as this terrible illness gripped him would have

wanted him to live longer. He was lovingly cared for by Alison at home and by so many professionals, and then latterly in the Knoll. On Sunday he died peacefully. We can rejoice that his time of pain and suffering is over, but he will be missed. Our loving sympathy goes out today to Alison, to David and Eileen and James and Ronald, to Anne and to the wider family in their loss of a loved and loving husband, brother, brother - in - law, uncle and friend. And we give thanks for Jim's life, well lived in service and in love.

Thanks be to God"

Dorothy Sayer

Sadly we have also have to report the death of another of our members. Mrs. Dorothy Sayer, who was connected to the Aytons through her grandmother's family, passed away on 30th May 2010.

Her daughter Rowena says that Dorothy always enjoyed the Newsletters and derived great pleasure from the couple of times she managed to attend the AGM. Rowena especially has very happy memories of of their attendance together at one of the Ayton Castle events. "I know she would want me to thank the Society for the enjoyment it gave her over the years", writes Rowena, who is intending to continue as a member of the Society herself.

The 2010 Gathering

Enclosed with this newsletter is information regarding this year's AGM and Gathering on Sunday 15th August, a day not be missed. We hope as many members as possible will take the opportunity to come along and enjoy the day.

Lady Christine De La Rue has kindly agreed to us holding the AGM at Ayton Castle in the main hall after which there will be an opportunity to visit the Ayton room at the castle.

We will then travel down to the nearby fishing town of Eyemouth for lunch at Oblo's restaurant on the harbour front. After lunch members can visit the excellent new Maritime Centre which has been built in the former fish market. The current exhibition focuses on "The Smugglers" and is extremely innovative and interesting.

As we need to advise the restaurant in advance of numbers, we would be grateful if you could complete the enclosed form and send it into Hamish Neilson as soon as possible, certainly by the deadline date of 31 July 2010. Lunch will be approximately £15 per person and entry to the Maritime Centre is £3.75 (£2.75 concessions), both payable on the day.

The Scottish diarist and author James Boswell, biographer of Samuel Johnston passed through Ayton on his journey to London on 15 November 1762. In his London Journal he recounts "...We did very well till we passed Old Camus, when one of the wheels of our chaise was so much broke that it was of no use. The driver proposed that we should mount the horses and ride to Berwick. But this I would by no means agree to; and as my partner let me be the principal man and take the direction of our journey, I made the chaise be dragged on to Ayton, where we waited till the driver rode to Berwick and brought us a chaise. Never did I pass three hours more unhappily. We were set down in a cold ale-house in a dirty little village. We had a beefsteak ill-dressed and had nothing to drink but thick muddy beer. We were both out of humour so that we could not speak. We tried to sleep but in vain. We only got a drowsy headache. We were scorched by the fire on the one hand and shivering with the frost on the other. at last our chaise came, and we got to Berwick about twelve at night. We had a slice of hard dry toast, a bowl of warm negus (drink) and went comfortable to bed."

Rest assured the standard of catering and hospitality is of a much higher calibre today!

Editorial

The past year has been a sad year for the Society. Jim's passing is a great loss to us all. I certainly will miss his leadership as Convenor. His attention to detail was the stuff of legends and his memory encyclopaedic.

The committee also recognise and apologise that some mistakes have been made particularly regarding membership over the past year but urge everyone to renew membership and support the Society on-going.

Your aye,
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