

Notes on Addiewell history, by Bill Wardrop

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Coincidence has played a large part in the life of the oil village of Addiewell. It was coincidence that first brought James "Paraffin" Young to the area, now known as Addiewell. At that time, there was no Addiewell as such, and the now famous man created the community.

In his search for his oil rainbow, Young arrived in Addiewell from Bathgate, where his effort to secure oil from "Parrot" coal had been successful. But a much larger outlet was required to meet the great demand his product had created. His court case to retain the vast profit had been an outstanding success. The story is now legend, the fame likewise.

It was in the middle of the last century things began to happen in Addiewell: slaty brown shale came under the microscope and this was to be the saviour. Great things were to happen. From 1853-1865, the industry boomed, the foreign competitors had yet to make the discovery and at 3s 6d a gallon, it was a bargain.

Young had no qualms about the vast profit margin, he used it to ensure his workforce shared in the boom, supplying housing, and social facilities that were the envy of the neighbouring coal miners.

The David Livingstone connection

The opening ceremony at Addiewell Works, the most famous of all Oil Works, was performed by Young's lifelong friend, David Livingstone (*in fact, Livingstone laid the foundation stone*). He stayed at Limefield House, Young's beautiful mansion house – now a home for the aged. The tree planted by Livingstone to commemorate the opening still stands in the grounds to this day. Many of Livingstone's African journeys were paid for with oil money.

The Addiewell work, when at its peak, employed some 2,000 men, many arriving by boat from the "Green Isles". This disturbed many locals, they were not amused the local infiltration of the Irish. They eventually did accept the incomers and in fact a large number of the present day inhabitants are third or fourth generation Irish. Addiewell "Irish" is a language known and loved throughout the country; when you meet them, and it can be anywhere, they are unmistakable, the twang is always there.

Houses sprouted everywhere

The growth rate was high, houses simply sprouted, every street being named after a famous, or noted person – Livingstone Street being the largest; Watt, Davy, Stephenson, Graham, Simpson, Campbell, Cross, Bank, Baker, with Faraday chosen for the name of the Gaffers' houses. They are in fact the sole remains of the once thriving community. The "Wee Raws" and the "Square" are famous landmarks. Water was supplied by standpipes and when those were frozen, it was a trek to "Scola Burn", where pure crystal clear water could be found in abundance.

Sport and social activities were not forgotten – with football, cricket and quoits being the most prominent, followed closely by bowls.

The first railway station opened in 1866, and for 2/6, an enjoyable day could be spent in the "Big City". The once famous "Saturday Rattler" conjures up memories.

The Churches

The Church in Addiewell goes back almost a century, and if the Mission Church is taken into consideration, and surely it must, it dates back to 1873. The Parish Church was completed in 1885 as a Quoad Sacra of West Calder Parish Church. The first minister was the Rev. William

McLaren. Many fine clergymen have served in Addiewell, including the Rev. Mr Jamie who held the charge for many years. A Free Kirk minister who served for many years was the Rev. Mr Goldie.

The Addiewell Catholic Parish was started in 1913. The Church School was opened on September 9 1916. The Priest-in-charge was the famous and noteworthy Father Kenny who had been a curate in West Calder under Canon Murphy. Under Father Kenny's guidance and with his enthusiastic example, St Thomas' RC Church was built, opening in 1922. Fr. Kenny lived in Faraday Place, with a family called Aitken, during his search for a suitable site for the Church.

Shops

The first recorded store in Addiewell was known as "Fleming's " Stores". It was a single-storey building. On the site now stands a car repair works and a joiner's yard. Between times it was the Co-operative and before that, the Oil Company added a storey and it became the village's first school. A "fee-paying" school with the fees being deducted from the wages to pay the Dominic. The building was gutted by fire.

Schools

Addiewell Public School bears the date stone, 1896. St Thomas' opened shortly after the R.C. Church. Recently Addiewell added another first, when after the Easter recess, both schools were housed under one roof, the first school to do so in West Lothian. The children are taught in their own classrooms, but they eat and play together, without discrimination. Many well remembered names have taught in both schools – Mr Graham, Mr Jack, Miss McIntyre and Miss Henderson at the public and Mr Brady, Miss Lavery, Miss Fennie and Miss McLinden at the R.C. The present headteachers – Mrs Milhench and Mr O'Hanlon will no doubt be remembered in later years for their invaluable contribution. These are but a few of the many fine teachers, who served in Addiewell.

Decline and fall

The decline of the "Addiewell empire" began in the early 50s. The huge Grangemouth complex did not help matters. Many of the workers moved to Grangemouth permanently, other travelled daily. One famous industry that died was candle making. The craftsmen were the elite of the workforce, their wares were exported all over the world. The Addiewell candle was something special, anyone with a knowledge of candles could choose an Addiewell candle from any given number. The only examples now found are in Liverpool Cathedral and Strathclyde University, pure works of art, hand made, beautiful objects.

They started pulling down the village, moving the residents to new houses in Loganlea and later Addiebrowhill - houses with inside toilets and baths. Slowly the village disappeared, the last street to go was – appropriately – Livingstone Street.

But the story does not end there!

Industry after the Oil Works

The famous works with the exception of a few out buildings had disappeared and the New Town of Livingston was the in thing. Addiewell Industrial site was to be the new saviour. The first industry to arrive was Stanton & Stavely – manufacturer of concrete pipes. The Bonded Warehouse on the site of the once famous "Muirhall Cricket Club" gives regular employment to numerous locals, but the large British Leyland Truck and Tractor Plant in Bathgate employs the majority.

The large building taking shape on the site of Livingstone Street seemed a good omen. Unfortunately, the Pre-cast Concrete Plant, meant to employ 200 never left the ground, the gates never opened and local ratepayers were left with the burden, the local authorities having taken

over the site in an effort to woo prospective clients. It was to be two years before the “white elephant” created another “coincidence”.

John Brown Construction and B.P. Exploration had taken over a site at Guildyhaugh Toll, Bathgate (once again – Bathgate to Addiewell). This site was found to be inadequate, they viewed the site on Livingstone Street, found it ideal for their requirements, and Addiewell was back in the oil race. The consortium required a large area to store and distribute equipment required for the largest oil terminal in the world – Sullom Voe, Shetland. Mr Eric Anderson, a director, and Mr Bryce, plant manager, were delighted with the facilities. The 60 employees are mostly local. Mr Alex Rogers, foreman, is happy to see so many local men being employed in the storing, assembling and distributing of equipment from all over the world. Lorries arrive and leave the plant with monotonous regularity, carrying loads of up to 200 tons. The firms involved, there are four, are hoping to secure a further five year lease on the site and are in fact looking around for a further large site. We can only hope there is a chance that property can be found locally.

This is a different oil industry. The workforce is much smaller, but the coincidence remains, we are in the oil race.

It is appropriate the letter headings on notepaper reads – Livingstone Street, Addiewell.

James “Paraffin” Young started it.

He was, it can be said, responsible for the famous B.P. Company. John Brown is synonymous with Scotland. Three more famous names in industry and hard to find, and all are involved, or have been involved, with the famous Addiewell.

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