

Annie McCann c1880 – 1956

In 1880, Sheffield was a bustling industrial city known primarily for its steel production. The city had a thriving industry, and it was often referred to as "Steel City" due to its significant role in producing the metal, as well as cutlery. The cityscape was dominated by factories and foundries belching thick smoke into the clouds, and industrial buildings related to steel production packed the districts.

The population of the city was rapidly increasing due to the industrial revolution, with many people moving to Sheffield in search of employment opportunities in the steel industry. This led to a rise in urbanization and the development of residential areas to accommodate the growing population. Despite the industrial prosperity, there were challenges such as poor working conditions in factories, overcrowded living conditions for the working-class population, and pollution from industrial activities.

Culturally, Sheffield had its own identity, with a rich tradition of craftsmanship in metalworking and cutlery production. The city was also known for its music scene and had a vibrant cultural life with theatres, music halls, and social clubs.

According to popular historical websites, the 13th of March 1880 was not a significant day in the world, nor Britain for that matter; nothing of real importance happened, unless you count the 5-4 win the Scotland football team had over arch rivals England, and no one of importance died or was born, except in a small house in a district of Sheffield where my great grandmother was born, and without whom I would not be here.

Annie McCann was born to Thomas McCann, and Julia Coffey, both of Irish Catholic descent. They had married in Sheffield on 22nd January 1878 at the newly built church of St Vincent of Paul in the Whitecross area, which is to the west of the city centre and near an area nowadays named Steel Bank. Thomas was from a small townland on the edge of Killala Bay on the borders of Counties Sligo and Mayo to the west of Ireland and his new wife was also Irish.

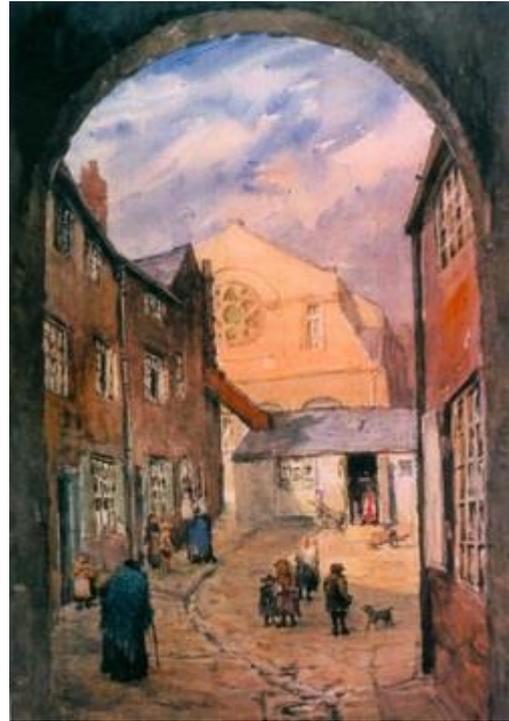
St. Vincent's has an interesting side story. In Sheffield, the steel industry mainly focused on the Crofts, a large urban area with small courtyards and narrow pathways that stretched from Scotland Street in the north to Paradise Street in the south. It covered Solly Street, Hollis Croft, and both sides of Tenter Street and Broad Lane ¹. Many Irish people, especially those who immigrated via Liverpool Docks and were attracted by the growing cutlery and tool industries, settled in this area after walking across the Pennines to reach Sheffield. Most of them were Catholics and two-thirds of the population lived in extreme poverty in crowded houses that were connected back-to-back.

'The dirty, squalid and miserable conditions of their homes, or rather hovels, in back lanes and dark courts (we counted a hundred residents in one small dark court in White Croft) was such as made us come to the saddening conclusion that their pale and wretched looking children must die out in one or two generations. Such was their state at a most prosperous period in Sheffield, when trade was extremely flourishing and in the midst of unusual material prosperity.'

Father Michael Burke – The first parish priest of St Vincent's church in Sheffield

In 1853, a Catholic revival started with Father Edmund Scully leading the way. He was in charge of the Sheffield Mission at the newly constructed St Marie's Catholic church in the city centre. A school-chapel was also built in the middle of the Crofts. This made it easier for Irish Catholics to go to Mass and fulfil their religious duties once again.

When Thomas and Julia met, Thomas was a Private in the 45th Regiment of Infantry at Nether Hallam Barracks, to the north west of the city centre. He may have been one of the lucky ones to have a married quarter for the family or he might, as many young married soldiers did, have had to take his chances in the Crofts, or somewhere similar. The 45th had been garrisoned in Burma and India before it was eventually amalgamated with the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment in 1881 to form The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment).



The Sheffield Crofts watercolour by Alwyn Holland c1910



The 45th, Nottinghamshire Sherwood Foresters Regiment: officer and sergeant, review order 1878

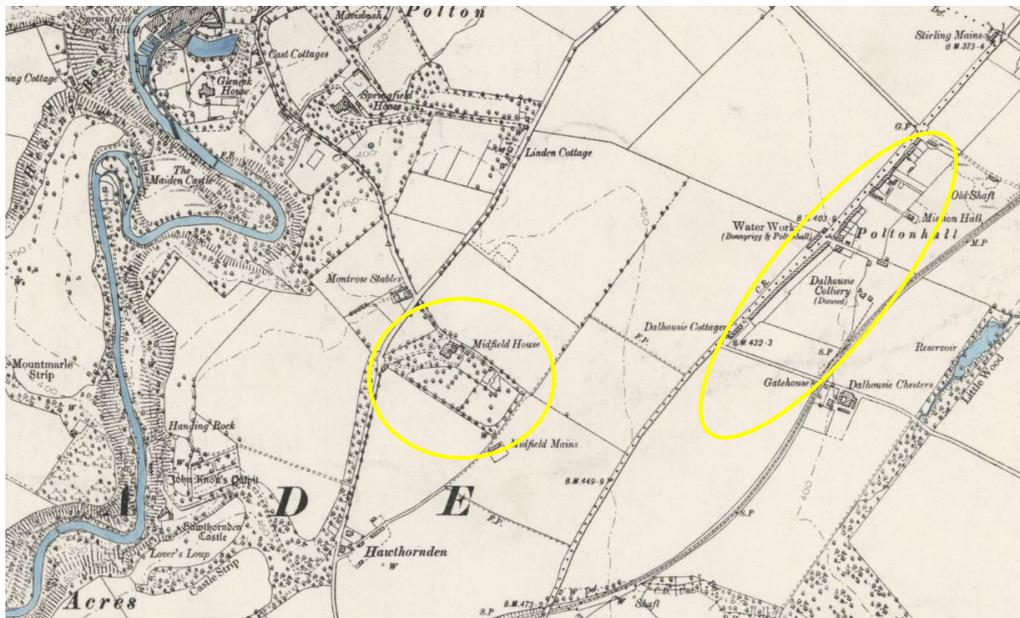
Thomas and Julia already had one child when Annie was born. Son Thomas, named after his father and grandfather, had also been born in Sheffield about the 2nd of May 1878 but their younger sister Mary, was born on 25th October 1881 and registered in Carrington, a small and timeless village to the west of Dalkeith, part of the county of Midlothian, in Scotland, and home to a Church of Scotland parish church.

In 1881, it was not uncommon for births, including those of Catholic children, to be registered in a Church of Scotland parish. During the period, the civil registration of births in Scotland was managed by the state, and individuals were required to register births at the local registrar's office. The Church of Scotland, being the national church, often served as a convenient and accessible place

for the registration of births.

The family moved sometime between March 1880 and 3rd April 1881 when they all appear in the census at Midfield Lane, Lasswade in Midlothian. According to the census, none of the family were noted as deaf, dumb, blind, imbecilic, idiotic or lunatic. Thomas was documented as a brickwork's labourer and Julia, his wife. Why did the couple and their children move over 200 miles to the north? When Thomas left the military, he was not yet thirty so could have had a much longer career but perhaps family came first, or Annie persuaded him, or maybe the lure of Scotland was greater than his prospects in Sheffield?

Midfield Lane where they lived is no longer a local street name in the Lasswade area and details of its exact location remain to be confirmed on old maps. Midfield House however still exists on current maps and is shown just off Polton Road, at its western end, near a road named The Cast. This is believed to be a Roman Road running from Montrose Stables at Lasswade to Roslin Road at Polton. On the map below it is shown lying between Springfield Paper Mill on the river North Esk down the hill passed Cast cottage then on by the



Edinburghshire Sheet VIII. Six inches to one mile – published 1892 – National Library of Scotland. Midfield House (left) and Dalhousie Cottages (right) are circled

Springfield and Glenesk Houses before seeming to disappear at the driveway at Mid Field House. A further field to the east of Mid Field House lies the Polton Road and the Dalhousie Colliery which backs onto a row of cottages, known simply as Dalhousie Cottages which will feature later in this story. A detailed map is at appendix 1.

There was more than one brickworks in the local area including the Polton Colliery & Brickworks and the Whitehill Colliery Brickworks (also known as Rosewell Brickworks).

Such was the requirement for bricks at the end of the nineteenth century that the small village of Rosewell just a mile to the south grew from a population of 133 in 1846 to 2129 in 1881, with the majority of its population being miners requiring housing. Many of the newcomers were families who had left Ireland in the years after the famine. By 1885, Rosewell had a church, a school, a Post Office and a Savings Bank.

Although Thomas was noted as a brickwork's labourer, the specifics of his job are unknown but may have included any or all of the following; digging or mining clay to be used as the primary raw material then moving it to where it was needed and forming bricks by placing the clay mixture into moulds before arranging the moulded bricks in drying areas. He may also have loaded and unloading kilns and maintained the kiln temperatures but this task was usually undertaken by a brick-burner specialist.

Brickworks labourers often worked in physically demanding and sometimes challenging conditions including exposure to dust and extreme temperatures and many workers held only seasonal roles so pay was generally low whilst management expectations were high.

As Annie grew, so too did the family with brother Patrick arriving on Christmas Eve 1883 and another brother, Charles, on Christmas Eve 1885. Annie was five years old by then, and was one of five McCann children. She was likely to have started school locally and there were Primary Schools in Rosewell, about a mile distant, and another, shown on 1890 Parish maps, at Parsons Pool in the Parish of Cockpen, some 1¼ miles to the east, towards Burnbrae.

About this time Thomas was employed, for a short period, as an Engine Fireman before reverting to labouring role again. An Engine Fireman had a crucial role in the operation of steam engines and in Thomas's case it was probably an industrial engine at the brickworks and may have meant shovelling coal into a firebox, monitoring and regulating the heat or generally assisting the engineer.

By the time Annie completed her primary education, her parents had produced two more children, a sister for Annie, Jane, on 3rd April 1888 and another brother, Martin, on 2nd April 1890.

Thomas's career took another turn when he gave up mining in favour of general labouring once more.

The family also moved home. With seven children they needed more room and the house at 32 Carnethie Street, just inside the boundary of the growing town of Rosewell, gave them that. Eldest son Thomas,

Annie's oldest brother, was leaving school to begin work at the brickworks as a pony driver, although at just thirteen this was a challenging job. Simple as it sounds, the Shetland and Welsh ponies generally in use, had stubborn streaks a mile wide. Pony driving was often seen as one of the first jobs for young boys who



Pony Drivers – Courtesy the Blantyre project

were starting work in the brickworks or local mines.

Thomas was killed on 16th October 1891 aged just thirteen. His death certificate notes his 'sudden' death was caused by a 'fracture of skull from kick by a horse' but this was challenged and through the process of precognition; in Scots law '*a preliminary examination of possible witnesses or other informants in order to prepare the case for the prosecution or defence in a trial by finding out the relevant facts from them*', the death certificate was amended to read 'injuries caused by falling from a pony's back and being dragged by it along the ground'. Not a quick death for anyone, let alone a young boy. The family was devastated.

Annie, at eleven years old, was now the eldest child in the McCann family.

Did Annie have a secondary education? The school leaving age in Scotland in 1893 was just eleven and records of school attendance are sparse. Annie was certainly still attending school in April 1891, just a month after her eleventh birthday and as noted on that year's census return. On the same document, Mary aged nine, Patrick seven and Charles at just five are also attending school and Jane, three and Martin at one year old are at home.

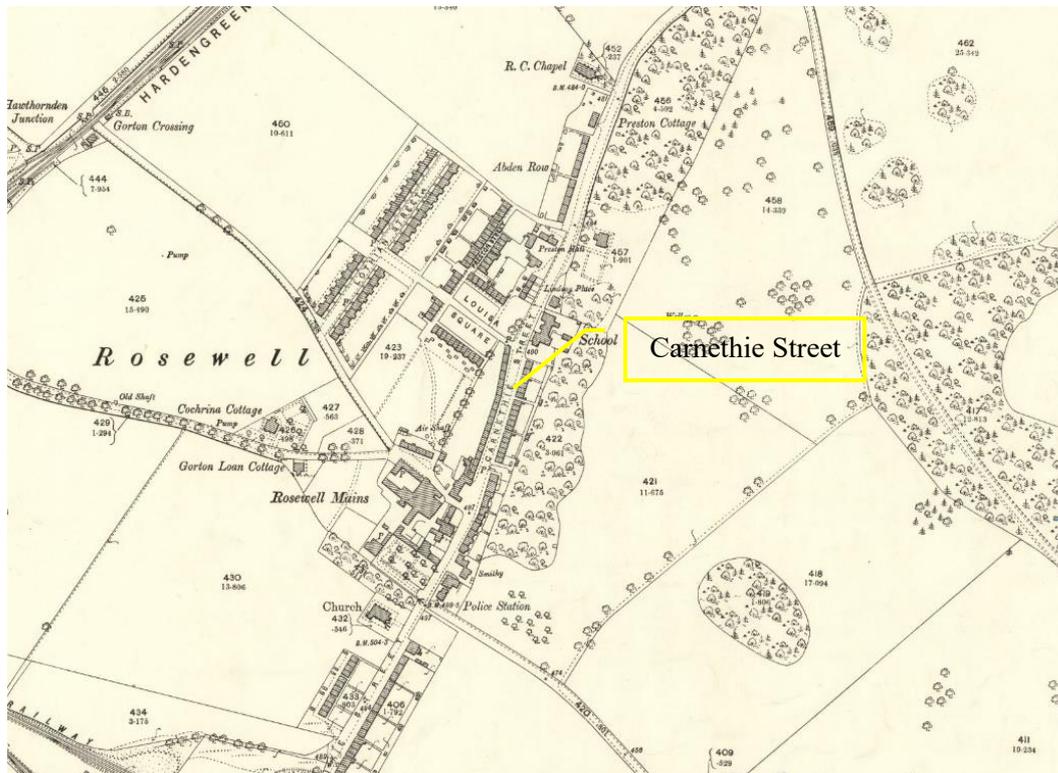
The Ordnance Survey map shown below of Edinburghshire, XIV.1 published in 1893 does not show house numbering but Carnethie Street, where the family lived, is shown running from the police station in the south of the town, generally northwards through the rows of cottages fronting the street on both sides, passed Louisa Square and the school then on to the Catholic chapel. Number 32 is on the left as you move north. Today the house has long been demolished and re-built upon and the address now belongs to St Matthews RC Primary School, much further north than the original number 32.

In 1893 aged four, little sister Jane succumbed to kidney disease. The family was again in turmoil.

In 1894 on the 22nd September, yet another brother, James, appears followed two years later by one more sister, Julia, on 6th December 1896 and eventually the last but by no means least sibling, Alice, on 3rd March 1900, by which time Annie was just ten days off her twentieth birthday.

Annie was likely to have been working for at least a few years by the turn of the twentieth century and certainly within the 1901 Census Annie, aged twenty-one, was confirmed as a carpet factory worker and the family have moved house again to 32 Dalhousie Cottages, which was closer to their first house at Mid-field Mains.

Carpet making in Midlothian started ² when Richard Whytock and Co, who were located at Queensberry House in the Canongate, Edinburgh, moved to St Ann's, Lasswade and



Edinburghshire XIV.1 Revised 1892, Published 1893 - National Library of Scotland

established a carpet mill between 1833 and 1834. St Ann's was a failed distillery which they converted into a carpet factory, employing 100 people in 1834 but by 1857 the company had evolved and was named Henderson & Widnell and manufactured 10,000 yards of carpet per day. In the 1870's The St Ann's carpet factory closed and a new factory opened in Bonnyrigg. The factory, long replaced, is where in 2024, Bonnyrigg Bowling Club has its green

Richard Whytock evolved the idea of using a large drum onto which worsted yarn could be wound so that colour could be applied across the width using a stick with a felt end. Large drums loaded with yarn were then used to produce the same-coloured thread for several hundred carpets so involving bulk production of each design. These drums could be anything up to 72 feet in circumference. Almost unlimited colours could be used which was an advantage at the time since only Wilton and Brussels carpet types were known and the colour choice was very limited. The process invented by Mr Whytock was very labour intensive but continued largely unchanged until its demise in 1957.

alongside the Council Depot and King George V Park. The company later became Henry Widnell & Stewart with operations continued at the Roslin factory until 1969. The Bonnyrigg factory lingered until 1978 and finally the Eskbank factory closed in 1982.

Workers in the factory, including Annie, had a myriad of jobs to apply for but those held by the majority of female employees included wool scouring or washing, which is the first mechanical process that wool goes through to remove grease and dirt from the fleece. Or perhaps Annie was employed in the colour shop, where wool was immersed in barrels of dyes



Henry Widnell & Stewart Ltd, carpet manufacturers, Bonnyrigg and the Wool Scouring room at Roslin

of various colours, leaving workers with stained arms and clothes. There were also jobs of wool winding or printing, pattern setting and carpet dressing.

Michael Murphy was a twenty-one-year-old mining bachelor who lived in the Campview area of Bonnyrigg about one and a half miles from Annie's home. His father, also named Michael, was a carpet labourer so perhaps young Michael met Annie through his father? Michael had three older brothers and two younger ones as well as a younger sister. The eldest, Patrick, who was born in Ireland, had married Bridget Byrn eight years his junior at St David's RC church in Dalkeith in 1897 and, after trying his hand at joinery via an apprenticeship, drifted into coal mining.

All the others were born in the Bonnyrigg area. At the turn of the century, at least Patrick, Martin and Thomas were miners and Mary was married to one.

The Victorian era had come to an end with the death of Queen Victoria, who died at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight on 22nd January that year after reigning for almost sixty-four. Although the new King, Edward VII had not been crowned yet, and wouldn't be until August 1902, he was an immensely popular and affable sovereign and a leader of society.

In the press in August, the Factory and Workshop Act raised the minimum working age to twelve years old, the Boxer Rebellion ended in China and Irn Bru, Scotland's favourite soft drink - brewed from girders, was invented.

What might Michael Murphy have wanted from life? The average age for men to marry in the early 1900's in Scotland was twenty-eight so at just twenty-three he had years of bachelorhood ahead of him but maybe he was not your average young man? His employment prospects were reasonable but miner's wages at around six shillings a day, about £43.89p pence in 2024, were not great when you consider a pair of heavy shoes cost³ the same and

house rent was about ten shillings, the equivalent of £73.14 a week.

At some point Michael and Annie met and fell in love and after just a short time, decided to marry. Preparations for the big day in May, which would take place initially in Dalkeith, began. Perhaps both mothers, Julia and Mary, became involved in the planning?

As the occasion drew closer and the happy couple finalised preparations for their wedding, disaster struck. Michael's mother Mary died suddenly after receiving fatal injuries at Bonnyrigg Railway Station.

The North British Daily Mail reported on 29th April, two days after the accident;

TWO PERSONS KILLED AT BONNYRIGG.

John Dinnet, 34, a potter worker, residing in Leith, and Mrs Murphy, wife of a Bonnyrigg, labourer, while hurrying to the railway station at Bonnyrigg on Saturday night, were knocked down by a passenger train as they were crossing to the platform from the Campview Roadway. The woman was frightfully mangled, and had an instant death. Dinnet had his skull fractured, and expired within 10 minutes

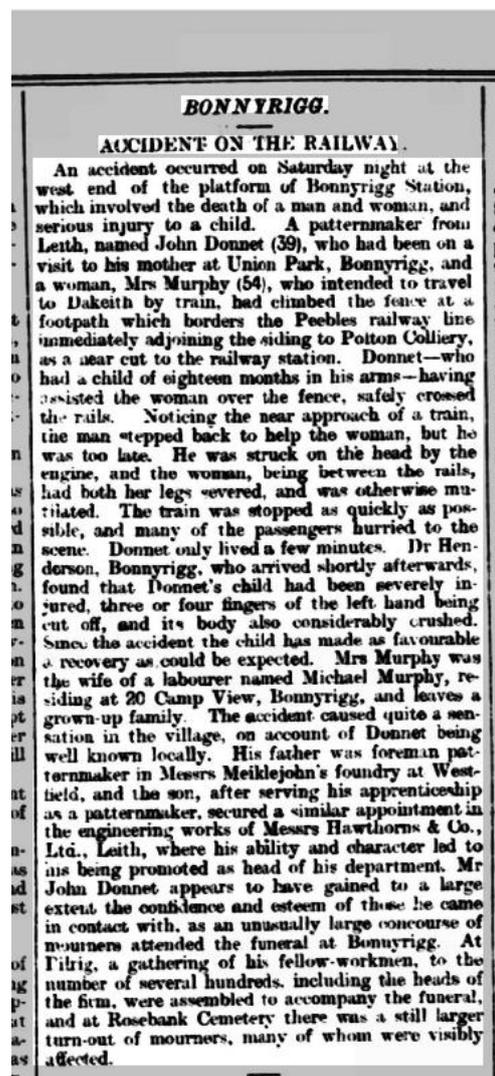
Whilst the Dundee Evening Post reported;

KNOCKED DOWN CROSSING THE RAILS.

The quiet village of Bonnyrigg, a mile west of Dalkeith, was on Saturday night the scene of a melancholy accident, by which two persons met their death under shocking circumstances, and a child lies in a precarious condition.

For years past the inhabitants of the Union Park District of Bonnyrigg have used the Polton Colliery crossing as a quick way to Bonnyrigg Railway Station. John Donnat, a Leith patternmaker, who had been spending Saturday afternoon visiting his mother, started out to catch the seven o'clock train, and a Bonnyrigg woman of about 50 years of age – Mrs Murphy – was also making for the station. A wire fence had to be climbed, and this the man assisted the woman to do. They then proceeded to cross the rails to the platform side, when a train swooped down upon them.

Donnat, seeing the approaching engine, stretched out his hands to assist the woman, holding at the same time a child in his arms. Unfortunately, he was too late, as the engine buffer struck him on the head, badly mangling



The Midlothian Journal, 3rd May 1901

his body. The woman's legs were completely severed from the body. Medical aid was summoned, but both Donnat and Mrs Murphy were found to be dead.

The child was alive last night, but its recovery is doubtful.

Mary's death certificate, witnessed by eldest son Patrick, noted her age at 49 and the death caused by '*fractured skull*' but because of the circumstances, an investigation or precognition was to be conducted.

Three months later, the death was investigated by Deputy Procurator Fiscal William Blane who after questioning witnesses found, on the 22nd July 1901, that Mary's death was caused by being '*knocked down by train on a line of railway*'.

Mary was actually 56 and was buried in nearby Lasswade cemetery.

Perhaps the family considered postponing the wedding, which was just over a week away but it went ahead, maybe not as planned with the reason becoming clear as the story unfolds.

Michael and Annie married on 10th May 1901 at St David's RC church at Eskbank. In 2024 the church is bounded by the King's Park on one side and a guest house on the other and in 1901 the only difference was the guest house was just a house and on the opposite side of the Eskbank Road, the railway line run up to Dalkeith Station, is long gone.

Only ten weeks later, on the 24th July 1901, Annie gave birth to daughter Julia at 34 Dalhousie Cottages, in one of the two houses shared by the family of Annie's mother and father, Julia and Thomas.

With a baby in tow, it was easier for Michael to move into the already busy McCann household and whilst it's not at all clear from the census of that year, who lived in which house, it must have been crowded with Julia & Thomas, daughter Annie plus Michael and baby Julia, daughters Mary, Julia and Alice and sons Patrick, Charles, Martin and James. Who slept where is anybody's guess and if you shouted 'Julia', three people might have replied...

Even after the birth of a baby, daily life continued apace and Annie went back to work just a few months later in the Winter of 1901 but this time, to a local paper mill.

The first paper mill was built in Lasswade in 1750, and papermaking remained important until the start of the 20th century. St Leonard's Paper Mill in the town was founded in about 1792 by William Simpson to make hand-made paper. A paper machine was installed in 1832. The works was latterly owned by John Tod and Co Ltd. The mill's location, approximately 100 metres upstream from the Lasswade Road bridge and The Laird and Dog Inn, as at 2024, was chosen because the mill was originally water-powered, and also because the paper-making uses a great deal of water. The mill closed in 1966, and the machinery was sold off. The buildings have since been demolished and new housing built.

There were closer mills to Dalhousie Cottages where Annie was living including the Springfield Mills, who supplied paper for the ‘The Edinburgh Courant’ and ‘The Caledonian Mercury’, both popular newspapers of the day. Springfield Mills was just over a mile, or about 35 minutes’ walk away from Annie’s, as were the Polton Paper Works, the Kevock Paper Mills and St Leonard’s Paper Mill. A map showing all their locations is at the appendix. Annie might have worked in anyone of them.



St Leonards Paper Mill, Lasswade before demolition but after closure in 1966. Photograph was taken from the bridge over the river at Lasswade Road – Courtesy Canmore

The paper the mills produce was initially made from rags. Esparto grass became the preferred raw material from the mid-19th and mid-20th century, eventually giving way in the final years of operation

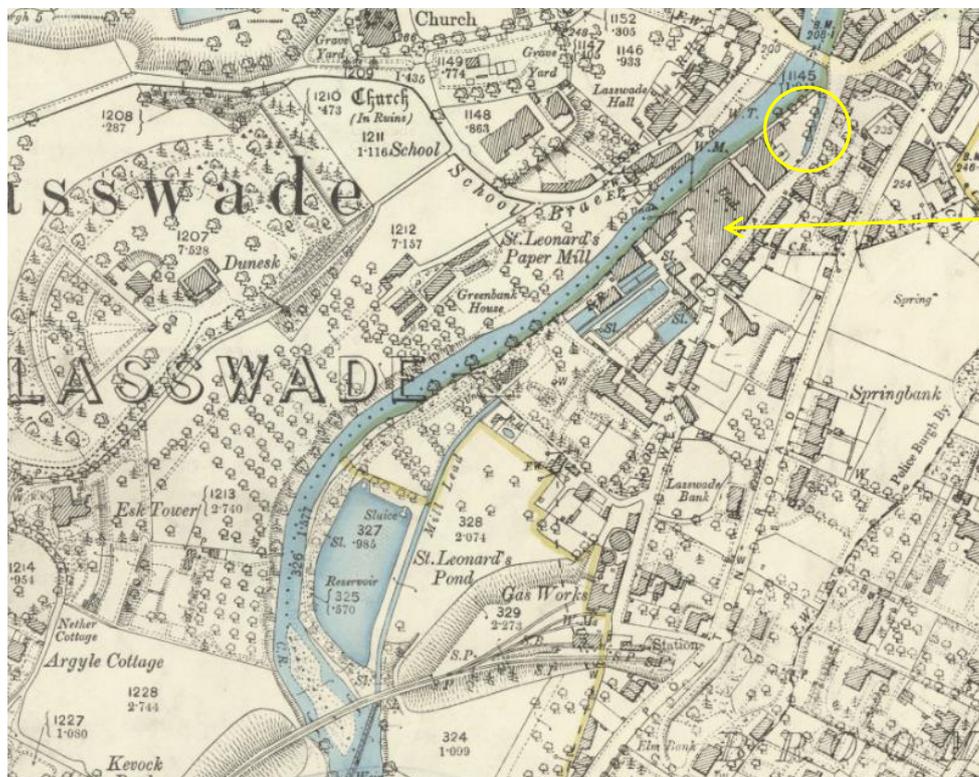
to straw and wood pulp. Paper making was not a glamorous occupation as one child labourer, Elizabeth Carmichael, put it. She was 11 in 1842 and was a rag cutter who wrote;

“I began to cut rags two years ago. I liked it guid. The stour [dust] doesna’ disagree with me, it does with some lassies. I can weave like my father but don’t earn so much as I can by rag work. I can cut 1 hundred weight [50 kilos] a day, each cwt [hundredweight] earns me 1 shilling [0.5p]. We get our pay monthly”.

The paper mill job was short-lived because on a blustery, rainy 20th October 1902 Annie had a baby boy, Michael.

Still living at 34 Dalhousie Cottages, husband Michael was still in the mines but with the house full to bursting, a move was needed and, in the Spring of 1904, they moved to 59 Sherwood, Cockpen, which is just off today’s Cockpen Road and was the home of Michael’s mother and father. The move may have co-incided with the birth of their third child, Thomas, on Friday 11th March of that year.

As the family's life evolved, so too did Lasswade and Britain. Advances like electric trains were being introduced; new cars had numberplates, Charles Rolls and Henry Royce met for the first time and newspapers had photographs



Ordnance Survey Edinburghshire Published 1894 – 25 inches to 1 mile -National Library of Scotland. St Leonard's Paper Mill (arrowed) below the existing (in 2024) (circled)Paper Mill restaurant

During the following five years, Michael continued working as a miner and the family flourished. Daughters Mary arrived on 3rd April 1906 and Annie [I knew as Aunt Nana] on 14th August 1909. On their birth certificates, Mary was born at number 25 Dalhousie Cottages and Annie at 40 Sherwood. Neither of these particular addresses have appeared before and don't again. There were 48 'Dalhousie' cottages plus a colliery that belonged to Lothian Coal Ltd.

Annie's mother Julia saw many of her grandchildren but did not live to see daughter Annie's fifth. She died of Bronchitis on 22nd January 1907 at home, 14a Monkswood, Newbattle, which was south east of the town of Dalkeith, three miles from Annie and Michael's own home.

The Dalhousie Colliery was owned by Archibald Hood and its miners mined the Parrot, Rough and Jewel seams. Mining was still dangerous and in October 1909, Michael perhaps learned of a young man named Boyd who had been killed at the pit at Newcraighall just a few miles away.

Pit Sinker Killed at Newcraighall - Yesterday morning a young-married man named Boyd, a pit-sinker, engaged at the new shaft of Newcraighall Colliery of the Niddry and Benhar Coal Company, fell from the "kettle" down the shaft, and was so badly injured that death was

practically instantaneous. Boyd belonged to Polmont.

Scotsman 12 October 1909

Annie was now twenty-nine and Michael three years older. They had five children, all under eight years old with Julia, Michael and Thomas attending a local school.

There was no sign of Annie returning to employment, although with five young children, who knows where she might have found the time.

Perhaps Annie read the news that the Trade Boards Act 1909 had been passed which meant the boards it created could set minimum wage criteria that was legally enforceable. Michaels wages at that time are unknown but miners were paid pitifully low wages and this news might improve things.

Around 1911 the family moved to the Niddrie area of Edinburgh to live in another mining cottage at 19 Jewel Cottages, Newcraighall. Annie's father and the rest of her siblings were scattered; father Thomas, brother James – 16 and sister Alice – 11 lived at 32 Dalhousie Cottages and both Thomas and James were miners whilst Alice was at school. Patrick may have joined up but details are unsubstantiated whilst Martin was lodging with the Murphy's at Newcraighall and second youngest, Julia aged 14, was in domestic service in Edinburgh.

The 'Jewel' Cottages were built in the period of 1880-1900 by the Niddrie and Benhard Coal Company and were designed for miners working the local pits. The 160 or so houses created a 'company village', known as the *Jewel Village* and named after the Jewel coal seam nearby.



The 'Jewel Cottages', Niddrie – from the front, and rear – Courtesy Maroon Panda

The homes were lined up either side of the Niddrie Road, were brick built, and still had outside toilets. Steps at the rear of the row allowed access to the upper-level homes. As a boy I remember visiting the houses and being in awe of the outside toilets. Who I visited there has been lost in my memories.

It's likely Michael worked in a local pit but life as a Coal Hower, was not for the faint hearted.

In 1911, a Hower was responsible for cutting or hewing coal from the coal face, the exposed seam of coal in the mine, typically using hand tools like crowbars, pickaxes, sledgehammers, shovels and hand drills. With the men working in teams in temperatures of 70 – 80 degrees Fahrenheit, cave-ins and gas leaks were always a concern but Davy Lamps were standard

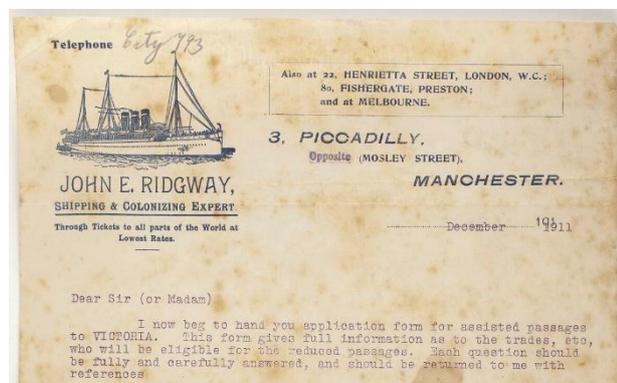
issue and great care was taken at all times. The still-in-use timber props creaked regularly and to the uninitiated, foretold of impending danger but luckily this was not always the case.

Hewers operated in tight and confined spaces within the mines, making their work physically demanding and often uncomfortable with coal dust and sweat vying for supremacy in their eyes, ears and mouth; not even their sandwiches were safe. Long-term health effects were not fully understood at the turn of the century and many miners suffered in later years with pneumoconiosis and silicosis. Pneumoconiosis or CWP was commonly called black lung.

The national news in 1911 told of how eleven thousand workers at the Singer sewing machine factory on Clydebank went on strike with twelve female colleagues who were protesting against work process reorganisation when they saw four hundred alleged ringleaders dismissed. In Edinburgh eleven people died in a fire at the Empire Palace [now The Festival] Theatre.

I imagine the Murphy children were no different to others when they played games. Hopscotch was a favourite and sections of pavement around the Jewel houses were given up to chalk drawn numbered rectangles or triangles. When there were sufficient number, hide and seek could be played at the back of the houses although the children were undoubtedly told NOT to play on the railway sidings, or near the local Fever Hospital but instead to use the fields leading west towards the Niddrie Burn. No doubt playing in those dangerous areas still happened and those who complained were called stick-in-the-muds, or some such name. Games of chap-door-run were frowned upon as many miners worked shifts and were asleep when the children played but, children do love a challenge...

Annie's sister Mary dropped a bombshell in 1912 when she announced that she was emigrating to Australia and had booked a passage on the ship *Orsova*. What possibly drove her to emigrate? Her job as a carpet factory worker was less than glamorous but Australia was perhaps a more attractive option and transit was often subsidised. She would later marry Sidney Herbert Claude Winter before having two babies, moving to New Zealand, and having three more before he left her for another woman. Annie's brother Patrick, Pat to his friends, had worked as a coal drawer before joining the military about 1913. He was also a decent



Courtesy - Victoria Museums Collection

boxer who won medals, one of which appeared embedded in my father's coffee table as late as 1970.



*Annie's brother Patrick 'Pat' McCann 26th
May 1913 – Private Collection*

Annie and Michael both read with dread of the wars in the Balkan's, which had been going on since 1912. Militaries all around them, including Britain, were being modernized, and there was a general atmosphere of military preparedness. Nations everywhere seemed to be competing for finite resources and alliances, including between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, were becoming commonplace. Baby Alice was born on 24th March 1914 and in August, Britain declared war on Germany after the German's invaded Belgium.

Thankfully none of the children were of an age to be able to serve in the military and as a miner, and married man, Michael was exempt, for now, but Annie's brother Pat was not.

During the initial months of World War I, there was an optimistic belief in a quick resolution.

As a result, countries did not immediately

implement comprehensive rationing systems but some items were becoming more difficult to get, including sugar and butter.

Coal became critical as Britain needed more fuel so even the family's fortnightly delivery from the coalfield, might have been reduced.

As the war dragged on and it became apparent that it would be a protracted conflict with increased demands on resources, rationing measures were eventually introduced and conscription was announced and included married men. No information indicating that Michael served in the military has surfaced.

Annie had the couples seventh child, Helen, on 22nd March 1916.

World War I had a profound impact on Scotland, affecting various aspects of its society, economy, and demographics. Like the rest of the United Kingdom, the country suffered significant human losses during the war but at this point it is not known whether any of Michael's or Annie's siblings died. Known service and/ or trade during the period were;

Patrick Murphy	-	Coal miner
John Murphy	-	died in Veteran Sailors & Soldiers home Nov 1918
James Murphy	-	Coal miner

Michael	-	Coal miner
Martin Murphy	-	Coal miner
Thomas Murphy	-	Coal miner
Patrick McCann	-	Served in France 1916
Charles McCann	-	Coal miner
Martin McCann	-	Coal miner
James McCann	-	2nd Battalion Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)

(James would later die of cerebral malaria during service at Hinaidi, Bagdad, Iraq on 4th August 1923)

One positive aspect of the war was that the demand for munitions and war-related industries led to increased employment, particularly in shipbuilding, engineering, and munitions factories. It is unlikely, even towards the end of the war, that Annie took up this or any other type of employment as she still had very young children, but she may have contributed in other ways.

When the war eventually ended in 1918 there had been many changes in the families including; Annie's brother Charles had married Janet McQuillan in 1917 and her sister Mary married Sidney Winter in Perth Australia. Michael's brother John died and Annie's younger sister Julia left for sunnier shores aboard the *Essex* to join her sister Mary.

In 1918 both Annie and Michael were in reasonable health, Michael was employed, as were children Julia, Michael and Thomas whilst Mary and Annie were at school with Alice about to start, just leaving toddler Helen to take up most of Annie's time. The house was busy.

Annie was thirty-nine in the Winter of 1919 when her brother Patrick announced he was to marry. On the 11th October that year he wed Jane McLaren at 53 George IV Bridge in the St Giles District of Edinburgh. Today the building is the George IV bar just a few steps away from the National Library of Scotland.

Not long after daughter Helen started school, Annie's father Thomas died. Aged sixty-nine on 21st March 1921, his last days after retiring as a Pit Fireman were spent living on the west side of Bonnyrigg, in the town where he had lived all of his adult life.

The census of 1921, taken on 19th June that year, notes the family had moved again but this time a very short distance between 19 and 127 Jewel Cottages. Perhaps it was a larger house or was ground floor, or maybe they needed more or less room? Present on the document were; Michael at 42 and a miner/hewer, Annie – 41, Julia 19 and working in domestic service, Michael 18 and also a miner/drawer, Thomas – 17 and a miner/oncost, Mary, 15 and working as a waitress at Sharps Restaurant in Portobello, Annie – eleven, Alice seven and Helen – five, all at school.

There was more devastating news in October that year when little Alice died from

Meningitis. The family would be broken-hearted to lose anyone but particularly someone so young. Alice was just seven when she died and would be terribly missed.

Annie's lodger, her brother Martin, also flew Annie's nest on Christmas Eve in 1921 when he married Christina Bathgate, nee Davidson, a divorcee from Edinburgh. The couple would go on to have at least one child, George.

The 1920's, often referred to as the 'Roaring Twenties,' was a significant decade in Britain, marked by various social, political, and economic changes. In the aftermath of the World War, Britain faced the task of rebuilding its economy and society after the devastating impact it had left. Britain was broken, and high unemployment and inflation were the norm. Maybe it was because people were poorer or perhaps an outlet was needed for people to enjoy their selves because the 1920s were also characterized by a cultural shift. It was a decade of jazz, flapper fashion, and new forms of entertainment. The influence of the United States, particularly the jazz culture from the Harlem Renaissance, had a significant impact on British society.

Separately, both Michael and Annie could only watch and wonder what their parents and relatives back home in Ireland must have thought when the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 was signed, leading to the establishment of the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, marking a momentous step toward Irish independence.

On 16th April 1923 at St John's RC Church in Portobello, son Michael married Amelia Wilson Garvie from 2 Ramsay Place in Portobello. Research has yet to confirm whether Amelia was employed or not but her father was a pottery kilnman. Michael's sister Julia was a witness and Julia herself married two years later on 14th September 1925. Again, the ceremony was at St John's Roman Catholic church in Portobello. Her husband, Bernard Connelly – 23, was an up-and-coming grocer's assistant from a family of twelve at 6 Ramsay



(blind) Auntie Jeanie, Maggie Buchanan, Annie McCann – At the wedding of Annie's grandson Frank to Jean Buchanan September 1954 – Private Collection

Place, Portobello. With only a few doors between Amelia and Bernard in Ramsay Place, perhaps Julia met Bernard at brother Michael's wedding?

In response to wage cuts and poor working conditions, trade unions organized a general strike in 1926. It lasted for nine days and involved workers from various industries demanding better pay and working conditions. The government's response and the subsequent impact on industrial relations were

significant. Although miners were on strike, evidence has yet to be found detailing names of strikers etc. so members of Annie and Michael's extended families may have been involved. Annie's son-in-law Bernard would later be involved in industrial relations almost all his working life.

The 1920s saw advancements in technology too, including the widespread adoption of radios. This was a new way to stay in touch with events, almost as they happened. Perhaps Annie bought or had access to one to listen to news, introduced of course, by the on-the-hour pips.

Although there were many key events in the 1930's, little is actually known about Annie's life in particular. Britain faced significant economic and social challenges including the Great Depression where Britain, like much of the world, was deeply affected. Beginning with the Wall Street Crash of 1929, it was followed by widespread unemployment, poverty, and economic hardship throughout the decade. Unemployment soared to unprecedented levels of almost 20% of the British workforce by 1932. This caused immense social distress and led to protests and unrest. Demonstrations and strikes became more common including the notable 1936 Jarrow March, where unemployed shipyard workers marched to London to petition the government for assistance.

Of course, there were key family events happening, including births. Daughter Julia and husband Bernard already had two boys, James born in 1926 and Michael Joseph in 1928. In February 1930 they had another son, my father, Bernard Francis Connelly, followed two years later by Leonard Vincent and then Thomas Anthony in 1932 and 33 respectively. The couple's first of two daughters, Anne Margaret Rosemary Patricia, was delivered into the world in August 1937, and the second, Kathleen Mary Theresa Helena, arrived at the end of 1939. It would be a further two years until their last child, a son - Brian Norman, arrived, on Christmas Day 1941.

During the 30's the British government implemented various measures to address the economic crisis, including public works programs, social welfare reforms, and monetary policy adjustments. However, these efforts were often insufficient to lighten the suffering of the population.

Both Michael and Annie, along with much of the rest of the world, likely looked on with anxiety at the rise of fascism and authoritarianism in Europe and the emergence of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in particular. Towards the end of the decade things got even worse when the growing threat of war in Europe was highlighted and the British Government began re-armament efforts.

The Murphy family had moved home too, in 1935 to be exact. According to the electoral register of that year, they now resided at 2 Wauchope Square, in the Craigmillar district of Edinburgh. The house was to be the family home for the next twenty years and was smaller than those lived in previously. Of their six living children, Julia had married and established her own home, as had Michael. Thomas, who was thirty-five, had left for Canada at some point, Mary was a state registered nurse whilst Annie was a midwife and lived elsewhere in the city. Youngest, Helen, also became a nurse but by the age of twenty-three in 1939, may

have moved out to share a flat or house with her sister Mary in the Granton area of the town. The house at Wauchope may have been much quieter than Annie was used to but then again, there were lots of grandchildren who could visit.

When war broke out in 1939 Annie was fifty-nine and Michael sixty-two. Although Michael was too old to serve in the armed forces, he was also still in a reserved occupation. In a newspaper article published in 1970⁴, he was noted as a 'coal contractor' This may have



Michael Murphy and wife Annie McCann c1940 – Private Collection

meant he had his own business but might also indicate, as a miner, he was self-employed.

War broke out when Germany, led by Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, invaded Poland in September 1939.

The United Kingdom took a leading role throughout the conflict, supported by other nations like France, China, and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union initially had a non-aggression pact with Germany but joined the Allies after Germany invaded in June 1941. America also joined the Allies in December 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese fleet.

The Axis Powers, comprising Germany, Italy, and Japan, began military campaigns to expand their territories and influence. Germany, led by Hitler, used blitzkrieg tactics to conquer neighbouring nations like Poland and France. Italy, under Mussolini, aimed to revive the Roman Empire by annexing areas in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Japan expanded in East Asia and the Pacific, invading China, Southeast Asia, and attacking the US at Pearl Harbor.

Annie may have read or heard on the radio about how the Axis Powers were perpetrating widespread war crimes and atrocities against civilian populations and prisoners of war, and also targeting ethnic and religious groups. The Holocaust, the systematic genocide of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, stands as one of the most infamous atrocities of World War II.

The allies fought back and key battles, including those of Stalingrad, El Alamein and the

Bulge, turned the tide. The Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, Operation Overlord or D-Day, marked the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi occupation.

Annie and Michael, along with the rest of Britain's civilian population had to put up with much during those years: Many British cities were subjected to sustained bombing campaigns by the German Luftwaffe, although there were few hits around Edinburgh. Some of the couples' grandchildren, including my father, were evacuated away from the city but most returned after just a few weeks. To cope with wartime shortages and ensure equitable distribution of essential goods, the British government had implemented rationing policies. Rationing affected food, clothing, fuel, and other necessities, requiring Annie to make do with limited supplies and adapt to a frugal lifestyle.

Perhaps Annie was formally employed during the war? Many women worked in industries supporting the military and war production and played a vital role in the workforce, filling positions traditionally held by men who were serving in the armed forces.

Despite the hardships, the British civilian population demonstrated remarkable resilience, courage, and solidarity throughout the war. Communities came together to support each other, and acts of bravery and kindness were commonplace amid the adversity of wartime conditions. Undoubtedly the war shaped Annie, it certainly had a profound and lasting impact on the British civilian population, influencing their experiences, attitudes, and collective memory of the conflict.

The war also transformed the family. Mary, Annie and Helen all served in the Armed Forces and all were commissioned into the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) during the conflict. Between them they served in all the theatres of operations where British troops were deployed but each would go separate ways after the war with Annie remaining in nursing in rural Perthshire but Mary and Helen emigrating to New Zealand. Julia had a family of eight children to contend with whilst son Michael and his wife Amelia had their own brood of four.

Britain had embarked on a massive program of post-war reconstruction to rebuild infrastructure, housing, and industries damaged during the conflict. This included the construction of new homes - including pre-fabricated bungalows, factories, and public amenities to address wartime destruction and shortages. The Labour government, elected in 1945, implemented sweeping social reforms aimed at creating a more equitable society. The establishment of the welfare state included the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948, providing universal healthcare access to all citizens regardless of income. By 1950, the NHS was spending an estimated £460 million a year, which by 2020 had increased to over 340 times as much – around £158.4 billion annually.

Key industries such as coal, railways, and utilities were nationalised under the Labour Government but despite victory in the war, Britain faced economic challenges, including food and fuel shortages, so rationing continued for several years.

Post war, family marriages came quickly with firstly Annie's sister Alice marrying Willie Gearty who was born at 35 Milton Street in the cities Canongate area and worked as a general labourer. The couple had married at St Theresa Roman Catholic Church at Craigmillar, only a-stones-throw from Annie's house. Then her daughter Mary married Edward Cullinan, a New Zealander she had met whilst working at the Hawera Hospital in Taranaki, New Zealand, and finally, daughter Helen emigrated to Toronto marrying Northumberland born Anthony Munley in the process.



The wedding of Annie's grandson Frank to Jean Buchanan on 11th September 1954.

Back L to R – Willie Gearty, James Connelly, Anne Connelly, Hermione Connelly, Michael Murphy, Alice Gearty (Nee McCann), Julia Connelly (nee Murphy), Frank Connelly, Bernard Connelly, Jean Connelly (Nee Buchanan), Thomas Connelly, Margaret Buchanan, Isa Birch (Nee Buchanan), Harold Williams, Duncan Buchanan.

Front L to R – Brian Connelly, Annie Murphy, Annie Murphy (Nee McCann), Margaret – Meg – Buchanan (Nee Smith Clinkscales Taylor)

Kneeling – Kenny and Mike Birch

When the 1950's came along, both Michael and Annie were in their seventies and conceivably wondered where the years had gone?

They were still able and visited relatives when they could. It's not clear whether either could drive but there was usually a son, daughter or grandchild who could give them a lift to and from friends and family including Michael and Annie's grandson, my father Frank, (who was actually born Bernard Francis but that's another story).

The photograph below shows Michael and Annie outside Frank & Jean's first house, a prefab

at 26 Northfield Drive, Edinburgh. In the photograph, taken after the couple moved in during October 1954, Michael looks frail and would live less than a year before succumbing to a combination of Mitral valve heart disease and Bronchitis on 4th October 1955.

Just seven months after her beloved husband died, Annie too, passed away.



From left to right: Daughter Julia, Michael, Annie, Jean and Frank – Julia's son and daughter-in-law, daughter Annie and wearing a kilt, Julia's youngest son Brian. The group are posed at the front of Frank & Jean's prefab house.

Annie was not at home when she died but instead, staying with her youngest daughter Helen and her husband Anthony at the Old Mill Cottage in Carstairs in Lanarkshire. Her death certificate lists Hypertension, Senility and Coronary Thrombosis as the cause of death but at seventy-six, perhaps she was just worn-out.

I was just three months old when Annie, my great grandmother, died. I don't know if she ever held me or indeed knew I existed although I like to think so.

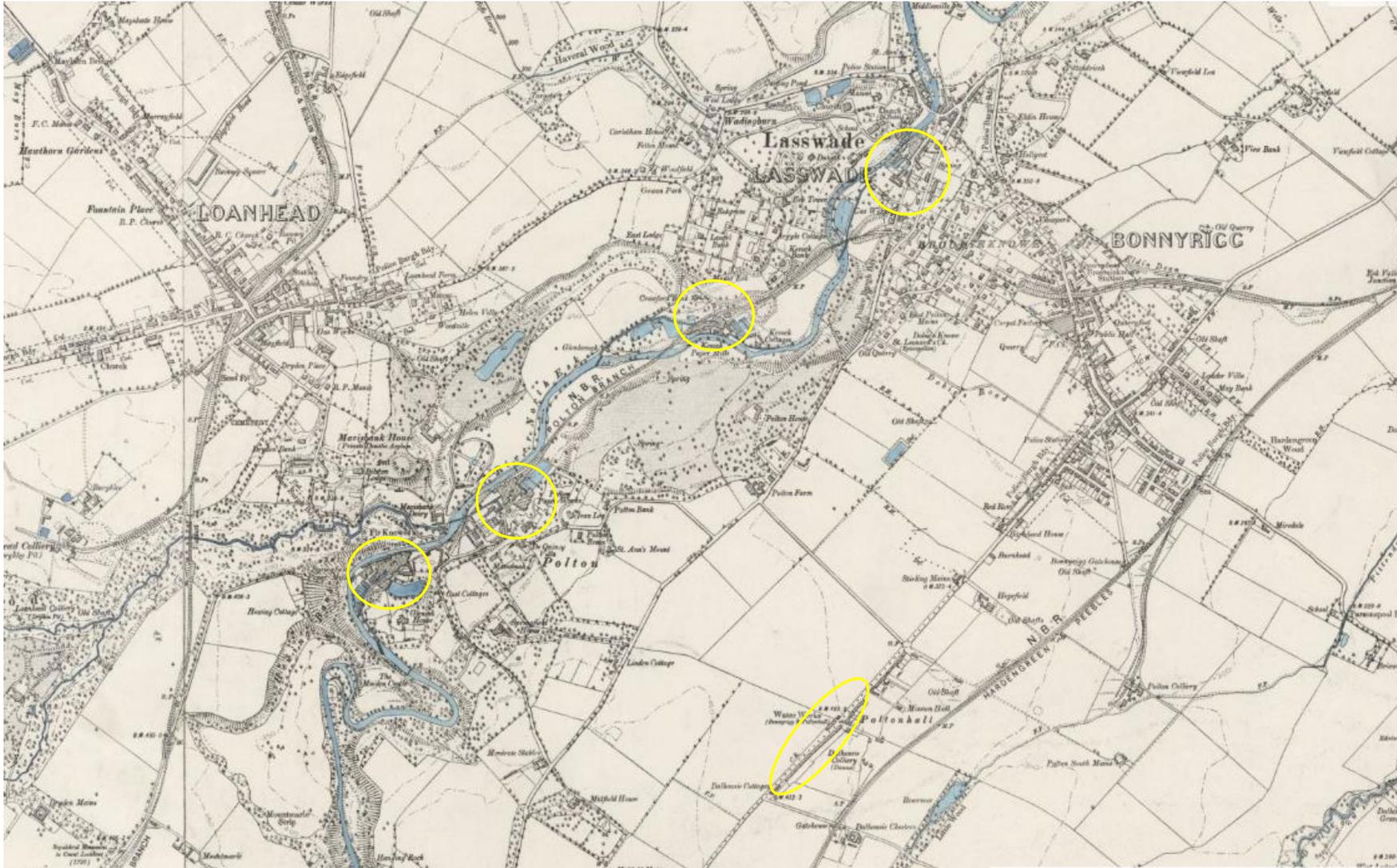
Annie was buried next to her husband Michael in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Mount Vernon in Edinburgh.

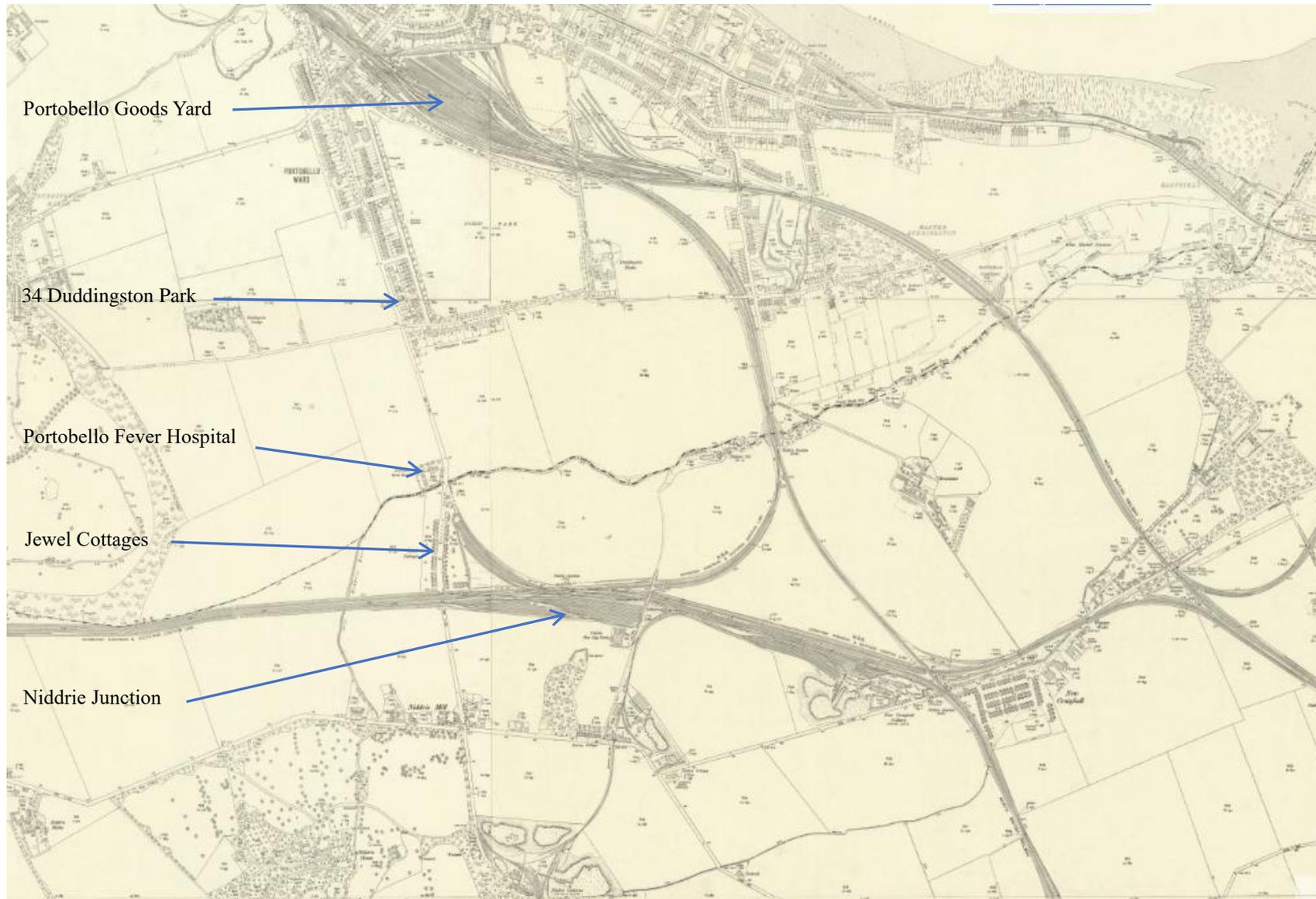


Annie's daughter Ann Murphy at her parents - Michael Murphy & Annie McCann's grave, Mount Vernon Cemetery, Edinburgh – Private Collection

IN
LOVING MEMORY OF
MICHAEL MURPHY
DIED 4TH OCT. 1955
AGED 78 YEARS.
ALSO HIS BELOVED WIFE
ANNE MCGANN
DIED 14TH MAY 1956
AGED 76 YEARS.

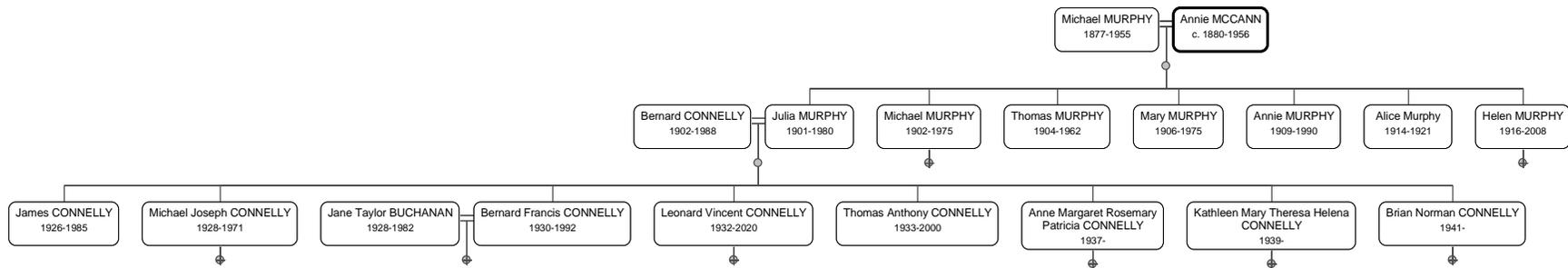
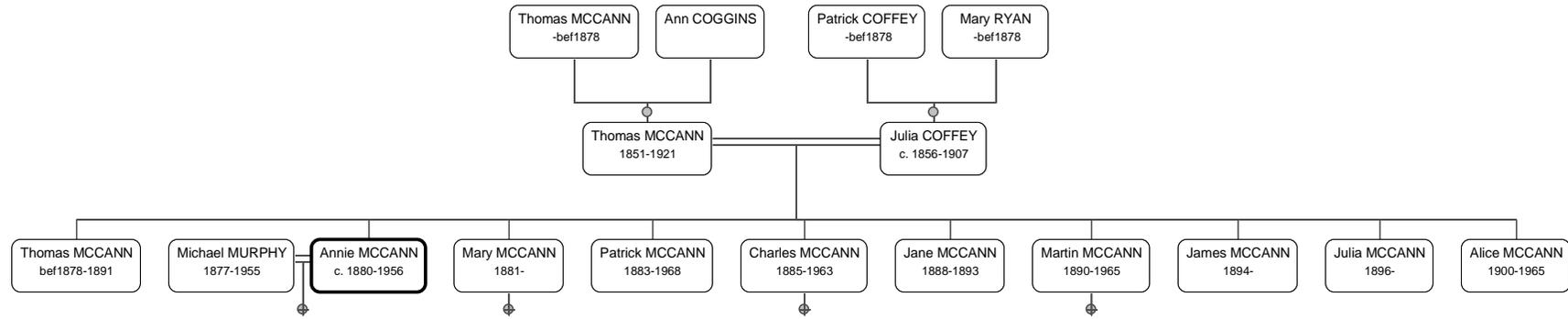
Appendix 1 - Ordnance Survey - Edinburghshire VIII.SW, surveyed: 1893, Published: 1895 showing Dalhousie Cottages (lower right), then left to right - The Springfield Paper Mills, Polton Paper Works, Kevock Paper Mills and St Leonard's Paper Mill (in 2024 this is 100 Metres upriver from the Papermill Restaurant and The Laird and Dog Inn. – National Library of Scotland





Appendix 2 - Ordnance Survey 25 inches to 1 mile Edinburgh 1914 – National Library of Scotland. NB 34 Duddingston Park is noted as a reference point and is the 2024 home of David & Alison Connelly, Great Grandson of Annie.

Appendix 3 - Annie McCann ancestors, siblings and descendants



References

¹ St Vincent's Church - A Short History A concise synopsis of an original manuscript by E. M. Cummings

² Reference GB 1694 DC 077; Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections; Stoddard International plc Henry Widnell & Stewart Ltd James Templeton & Co.

³ Wages and Prices in United States and Abroad Volume III prepared for the US Senate

⁴ The People Journal; series of articles over a number of weeks featuring Annie Murphy, daughter of Michael and Annie

<https://bonnyrigglasswadelocalhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/History-of-Carpetmaking.pdf>

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Midlothian Council download; pdf 'Memories of Springfield Mill and Polton'.