

James Halkett Hendrie: a notable local figure

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For a number of years, the annual joint meeting of the Tweeddale Society and the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society has been designated as the **Halkett Hendrie Memorial Lecture**.

So who was Halkett Hendrie? According to their website, *'Halkett Hendrie was a keen supporter of the Tweeddale Society both in his working life and after his retiral to Peebles. After his death, their Council at the time resolved that in each session there should be a Memorial Lecture to perpetuate his name and long association with the society'*. Their webpage goes on to proclaim that Hendrie *'was a farmer at Mossfennan to the west of Broughton'*, and that, as a farmer, *'he was a lover of the landscape and a tireless commentator on how Man over the aeons of time had shaped and influenced the landscape'*.

Using the Tweeddale Society's brief sketch as a starting point, my aim in compiling this short article was mainly to fill out his biography – and in particular, to highlight his contributions to archaeology both locally and further afield.

While there is no reason to doubt Hendrie's eventual familiarity with and intimate knowledge of the Upper Tweed, it turned out that he was not a native of the county and in fact most of his working life was spent very far from Peeblesshire! The key to unlocking a more detailed picture of his life story

was provided by mentions in archaeological publications which referred to him as J. H. Hendrie, M.I.M.E. - indicating that he was a Member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. A brief exchange of emails with that Institution's very helpful archivists shed light in the form of copies of his applications for Associate Membership in 1933 and for his eventual transference to full Membership in 1948.

James Halkett Hendrie was born on 29th March 1900 in Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire - one of the Hillfoots, the series of villages and small towns strung out along the base of the southern face of the Ochils in Central Scotland. However, the Hendries originally came from Ayrshire and by the time he was of school age the family appear to have returned to the Newmilns/Galston area just to the east of Kilmarnock.

In 1917 he commenced a mechanical engineering apprenticeship in the Caledonia Works, Kilmarnock. This was interrupted for a time in 1918 when he enlisted in the RAF as an engineer but less than a year later he resumed his apprenticeship, which he completed in 1922. That autumn he took up a job in the firm's Drawing Office but by the following spring he was en route to India, having taken up a post as an Assistant Technical Sales Manager with Parry's Engineering Ltd. This firm was part of Parry's of Madras, a major manufacturing and trading company first established in the 18th century. Hendrie was to remain with Parry's for the rest of his career, rising to become Managing Director and ultimately Chairman by the time of his return to the UK in the early 1950s.



The Upper Tweed Valley looking towards Menzion. © Colin McLean

It was on his return from the East that he moved to the Menzion estate in Upper Tweeddale (not Mossfennan as stated in the website). It was here, in an area rich in traces of the past, that we may assume that Hendrie developed his love for the Borders landscape - and in particular a passion for its archaeology. In the words of the Tweeddale Society's website, it seems clear he became "an enthusiastic and informed amateur archaeologist".



Menzion Farm, near Tweedsmuir. © Colin McLean

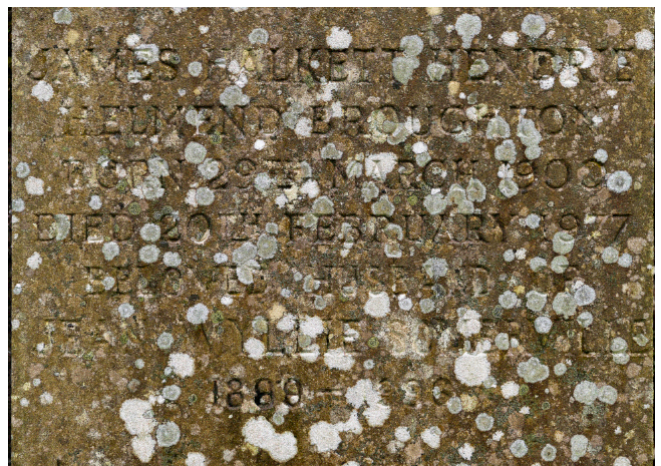
By a happy coincidence, the 1950s-1960s saw the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland involved in the extensive fieldwork in Peeblesshire which was to culminate in the publication of the two-volume Peeblesshire Inventory in 1967. Hendrie clearly engaged well with the Commission's staff - especially Kenneth Steer, Richard Feachem and Alastair Maclaren - and his name crops up in various reports over that timeframe. In particular, in a paper reviewing unenclosed platform settlements, Dick Feachem credits Hendrie with the recognition of this class of site in upper Tweeddale. Indeed, Hendrie's help during the survey programme was later to be singled out for acknowledgement in the Inventory itself.

A few years later, Hendrie was also credited, along with Peebles historian Ian Lawson, for drawing the attention of Kenneth Steer to an important but previously unrecorded Early Christian gravestone which was at that time built into a wall in Old Town and is now in the Peebles Museum. Probably originally associated with the Cross Kirk (Canmore ID 51521), the stone had apparently eluded the RCAHMS investigators during their original survey work because it had been concealed by a vigorous cotoneaster shrub!

Hendrie was clearly also drawn to excavation. He was one of the participants in the Commission's excavation of the small dun at Stanhope (Canmore ID 49790) a few kilometres to the north of Menzion, and published shortly afterwards by Alastair MacLaren in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Further afield, his assistance is acknowledged in the report on excavations carried out by Kenneth Steer in 1958 & 1960 at the large Roman fort at Mumrills, to the east of Falkirk (Canmore ID 47870). Hendrie was also directly involved in rescue excavations carried out in 1960 on the line of the Antonine Wall (Canmore ID 82858) - in particular at Polmont Park where much of the initial work was carried out by machine, a technique we are familiar with today but a novelty then.

As Geoffrey Hamilton & John Rogers have noted in their excellent history of the Tweeddale Society, Halkett Hendrie was a moving force behind its post-War relaunch in 1967 and he went on to serve as its President from then until 1975. In the early 1970s, he also served as a member of the Council of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, having originally been elected a Fellow in 1956 - back in those early days of his long acquaintance with the professional archaeologists who clearly did so much to shape and encourage his interest in the past.

He died in 1977, having spent his final years living at Helmend, Broughton.



Halkett Hendrie's headstone, Broughton Kirkyard: detail of inscription. © Colin McLean

Acknowledgements

The writer is very grateful to Lucy Bonner, Archivist, Institution of Mechanical Engineers; Sandy Welsh, Mossfennan, and Strat Halliday for providing information incorporated in the article, and to Colin McLean for the excellent photographs which accompany it. For details of specific sites mentioned in the text see Canmore, the online catalogue to Scotland's archaeology (accessible at <https://canmore.org.uk/>).

This is a revised version of an article which originally appeared in the Peeblesshire Archaeological Society's Newsletter for December 2024.



Tweedsmuir Parish Kirk, which Halkett Hendrie would have known. © Colin McLean