

Transcript of Deaf Kilmarnock, Their Story

A film by Scott Campbell

A map of the UK zooms into Kilmarnock in West Scotland, followed by shots of the streets of Kilmarnock, the football club and a group of deer. A sign saying "Ayrshire Society for the Deaf" on the outside of a building cuts to a group of about 15 people stand outside the Ayrshire Society for the Deaf Building. At the front stands a woman with white hair and glasses wearing a dark floral patterned dress, this is Margaret. She signs to the camera in BSL.

Margaret: Welcome to Ayrshire Society to the Deaf.

All: cheering in BSL

Margaret is sitting at the end of a church pew inside a church.

Margaret: This is Ayrshire Society for the Deaf. It was established on 23rd February 1881. It was founded by a man called James Paul. He bought this building, and his home was downstairs. Upstairs, over there where I'll show you around later, is the deaf club. James Paul was deaf, but he wasn't born deaf. He was hearing until he was roughly five years old where he caught an illness, scarlet fever. He was then sent to a school for the deaf and when he was older worked with books, printing, but wasn't happy, so he decided to become a missionary then afterwards he decided to buy this building.

He worked here, but there is little about his life before this because he was a private man. I don't know how many children he had but I do know he had one son who emigrated to Victoria, Australia. He was the same as his father, a missionary. That's all I know; I tried to find more information but there is very little about his life, he was a private person and kept to himself. However, I am still trying to research him to find out more information.

Margaret is in a basement area at the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Margaret: Remember I told you about downstairs? There was a spiral staircase but I don't know exactly where it was, maybe over there, maybe here, or up there.

Margaret is now inside on the first floor of the building

Margaret: Remember I showed you outside where the spiral staircase was? It took you upstairs to somewhere behind me here.

The camera pans over an old black and white photograph of a man, it is in a frame on a wall. Margaret is standing underneath it.

Margaret: I was talking about who James Paul was...that's him there.

Margaret: Rev. James Kirker (this is his sign name) in the photograph, he first started in the army during the war, then joined the police service before studying to become a vicar and coming to work here for forty years. He was really good at helping deaf people get jobs and solving other issues, he was really great. Every week he consulted with the CBS, the Church Benevolent Service, a funding group. He would give out a tuppence, one penny in modern money once a year to his congregation after saving up. He also supported deaf people when something was needing fixed at the club – he would ask a deaf person he knew worked as a painter to come and help and when it was finished he would pay them two shillings and six pence, roughly 25-50p now. It was great how he kept money in various pockets to pay people, money in a pocket to pay for work done, money in another to pay for other things.

He worked here for 40 years and retired around 1966, and any deaf person who wanted to be married asked him to come and officiate as a minister of the church. He married many deaf couples.

A man and a woman are sitting in chairs next to each other looking towards the camera. They are both wearing jeans and blue t-shirts, the man has grey hair and glasses, the woman has short dark grey hair. They are in a large open room in the building, there is wood panelling around the bottom of the walls and behind them are doors with stained glass windows.

James: My name is James Tait and this is Helen Tait, my wife of 52 years. Yes, 52 years. It will be 53 years this coming October. We're doing good.

I was 16 when I started to come with my father. I had never been so he brought me here. When I went in I was a bit intimidated by all these men

puffing on their pipes and signing away. I could sign but not to strangers like them. One came up to me and asked if I was deaf. I hid behind my father, who coaxed me out to respond to the man. I was a bit scared and the minister asked me to sign to him, so I said, yes, I'm deaf. He asked where I was from and I told him I was from Kilmarnock and the man beside me was my father. He then asked what school I attended and I told him it was Maryhill School, I didn't finger-spell it, just signed 'Maryhill'. He said he went to Donaldson's, (school for the Deaf) I didn't know about Donaldson's, he told me it was in Edinburgh. It was in Edinburgh, Donaldson's? I didn't know that. And I've been coming along ever since.

James uses deafblind manual to ask Helen when did you start club when you were younger?

Helen: I grew up and stayed around the deaf club because my mother and father were deaf. My father always came here to the deaf club to play billiards. My mother cooked at the deaf club. I came here, grew up here and played here. It was great! And then I found a boy; him, James Tait. We were married in the Deaf club and we are now married for 53 years. I'm happy now. A long time ago my father was a billiards champion and my mother looked after us three children. My father also played cricket and football in the past – he was a deaf manager of the football club and would come here for food afterwards. It was great! There was also swimming, I swam, bowled and played badminton but now that's finished. Now I'm retired and happy. OK, thank you.

James: That's the church behind us where we married.

*James points to the doors with stained glass behind them.
The shot fades out to cut and the same shot fades back in.*

James: Reverend Kirker – I'm talking about when we married in the church.

Helen: Yes, we got married there.

James: Kirker, the minister, chose to retire the year before

Helen: That's the church there

James: We were going to look for another minister, but it was better to get Kirker, because he was brilliant at signing.

Helen: I need a drink, I'm thirsty.

James: So we chose him and he agreed and we then got married by Rev. Kirker.

Helen: A long time ago it was a good time here. This is a very good club but now that time's finished.

The shot fades out to cut a new shot of black and white photos spread on a table, the camera pans over them showing photos of people and activities in the club. The shot fades and returns to James and Helen.

James: A long time ago...

Helen: I grew up here.

James: A long time ago when I was younger it was really busy here. I hung around with other youths playing football, I came here regularly. She went swimming with the other girls then would come back here to hang around.

Helen: Downstairs had a small room where we sewed long ago...

The shot fades out to cut and the same shot fades back in.

Helen: But that's finished now. There used to be sewing downstairs. There was also the badminton club, it was a great club, a very good club,

James: We played football right here in this hall, running about and training whenever it rained. This room also had badminton with the net set up right in the middle. There was no room! There'd be deaf people peering over watching the badminton being played. That's gone now.

The shot fades out to cut and the same shot fades back in.

James: Before I was on the committee. There were a lot of us on the committee, about ten or twelve with the elders. It was great and so busy with people then, but as time went on the numbers started to dwindle and

the elders left. The committee had a hearing chairman, James McDonald, worked in welfare here and managed the funds. Eventually he retired and deaf committee took over, sorting out our funds and appointing a chairman, secretary and treasurer. Now all the deaf people have retired and the elders have gone.

James: The church behind us had their elders. We were the committee, separate from them but we worked together. That's gone now, the committee has dwindled but we are carrying on.

I've been on the committee for forty years up until now. I still support deaf people here for the future and I'm trying to encourage young people to come along. These days it's mostly just the OAPs who come here, not so much the youths. I hope they will come. The board of directors take in shares and still obtain grants for us to spend on Christmas, tours and other things. They're still spending and taking in money. They don't hold onto the funds, they spend it for the enjoyment of the deaf community.

A long time ago when I was young and playing football, I joined the amateur hearing league and did some training. I was told the game was off after I arrived and didn't know why. I had to ask someone with a car for a lift and when I arrived was told that the Saturday was off. There were no mobile phones then, nothing. I kept going along to be told games were off. I never claimed anything from them, (they were probably relieved!) Then I came the deaf club and they told me that they had a game in 2 weeks. It was a bit last minute and I had to get myself ready for it. Nowadays it's much better. There's FaceTime, texting, which has made communication easier, it's fantastic. You don't have to travel now.

Nowadays the OAPs still come here, and youths have come here to the club too. Eventually they stopped coming and went elsewhere. I was really disappointed, however, the OAPs are still coming here.

It was better before, as time has gone on things have changed here and dwindled, but at least the OAPs still come here to chat and play bingo. It was really better before, we had a great time.

James uses deafblind manual to ask Helen he's asking you if before or now is best?

Helen: It was better before at Ayr Deaf Club, better before. Loads of deaf people came, and now numbers are dwindling, many have passed away.

A black and white photo of 2 long banqueting tables, full of people seated. They are wearing smart clothes and hats.

Helen: There were loads before, so it was better. When I went to Ayr beach swimming and after I finished I'd go to the deaf club, eat and catch up with everyone. We all enjoyed ourselves until it was time to go home. It was better before.

James: Yes, one daughter. Two grandsons.

Before, I asked Kilmarnock and Loudoun council and eventually they gave me flashing light alarm for the baby. They didn't give us a flashing clock alarm or flashing light for our bed, just the flashing monitor for the baby. As time went on my mum was a bit worried as we didn't speak and the baby was hearing. We discussed it and agreed to move near my mum so we could pass the baby to her to look after every now and then. She grew up around family and used sign language too.

The shot fades out and a new shot begins, Margaret is sitting in front of a fireplace in the building.

Margaret: My name's Margaret McLean. Really, the deaf club was where I grew up because my parents were both deaf themselves. They'd come to the deaf club regularly and when I was maybe six or seven years old, it was full of people who used to sit along the walls. I'd see men smoking pipes with their caps and jackets on. But now, talking of that, wearing a cap indoors is bad manners but back then they kept them on anyway.

Upstairs was where all the women went, also wearing their jackets and hats with their handbags to the side. My eyes were drawn to the women's bloomers in shades of pink and blue. I stared then asked my mum what was going on with their bloomers. My mum told me to be quiet as I kept asking her. I kept looking around until eventually one deaf person came up to me and asked what my name was. I fingerspelled my name M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T which gained praises, I was told I was clever and they gave me five pence. I was happy to get the money.

Yes, I was about seventeen when I joined the committee. I helped out on the committee until I got married then left that for maybe five or six years, then I returned. I became secretary then the treasurer died so I've been doing secretarial/treasurer duties which I still do to this day.

The shot fades out to cut and the same shot fades back in.

Margaret: I feel that I preferred it in the past because there were plenty of deaf people around and nowadays the numbers have dwindled significantly. It's really quite sad. It's interesting, back then deaf people didn't use their first names like Margaret. They insisted on being called Mr or Mrs Smith, for example. It was a must back then. If there were two with the same surname they'd be called, for example, Mr J Smith and Mr S Smith. That was the way things were done back then. In the past for Deaf people fingerspelling was very dominant. Few people signed.

Oh, shortened forms, like J-T for James T, or I'd say YOU KNOW YOU KNOW ARMSTRONG signing ARM and STRONG for the name Armstrong. We didn't fingerspell that but some deaf people thought it was rude, that it was bad, but it really wasn't, it was just their name.

Back then there were different activities, plenty to do, like football, snooker, badminton, drama, lots of different activities. But now? I try to encourage deaf people to come along but they say they can't be bothered. They'd say it's alright, I'll stay at home because I can text or communicate through FaceTime. The deaf way of life has been damaged by technology. When there wasn't technology around, everyone would come to the deaf club to talk and meet. I think it has been damaging, that's what I feel, yes. Because some deaf people can't be bothered now.

But interestingly, in the past Deaf people would come, they didn't have a bus pass or DLA/PIP, Deaf people didn't have those before. Nowadays everyone has it but they still make excuses even though they have free bus passes and DLA or PIP, but now? I don't get it. Thinking back to the past there was nothing and deaf people still came from afar by bus.

Yes, of course. I was really interested to see the development of baby monitor alarms because my mother was deaf. She had to reach from her bed to feel if I was awake and crying so she could comfort me. I had a baby boy and the technology I used was rubbish, sometimes I'd sleep through

the alarm and wake up suddenly to see the baby crying. It was difficult. My sister had hers later and had the same issue. Now with my granddaughter the technology has gotten a great deal better – I would be woken up immediately because of the more powerful vibrations. It's much better now. At the same time I look back and think what a shame it was for my mum and dad because if something had happened to me like, for example, my bus or train broke down or was late they'd sit there worrying about me getting home on time. Now I can just send a text – it really is great. I'd be able to text when I was getting home and if there were any problems, so they would know and be satisfied. But back then we didn't have that.

The shot fades out and a new shot begins, a man George and a woman Janet Calder are sitting in chairs next to each other in a room in the building. George is wearing a blue checked shirt, he has grey hair and glasses. Janet is wearing a green cardigan with a white blouse, she has short grey hair and glasses.

Janet: We met in the shoe Cobblers.

George: Aye that's right, we met there. She was signing at the time and I met her in Saxones and talked to her outside at lunch. Inside I had a wee fancy for her but unfortunately she had a boyfriend, so I stepped back. He was a hearing boyfriend and they went away together. The next day I saw them together again. Her boyfriend didn't want her to sign, and said he couldn't marry her because she was deaf. They broke up, which made me happy, I asked her for a date which she was happy to do. We went out to the pictures, out and about and it was great, we had a good time on a boat. We then married quite quickly. I was 21 and then we moved to England to Coventry.

Both: It was better in the past.

James: It was a great time, we played snooker, tennis, bowling, football and all that. It was very exciting. As old age came on I retired from the football team at 39. I was in a hearing football team, the amateur football at Dreghorn, then they closed down. My brother took me to Larkhall Thistles football, a hearing team who played in the Junior league. I went along and played a game for them and when it finished the manager said "sorry, we can't take you because you're deaf." I accepted that, they did pay for my travel, and that was it.

The shot fades out to cut and the same shot fades back in.

Janet: Before I got married I regularly went to Glasgow. I went with my brother who was also deaf, then we'd go home late. After I met George he would take me to the deaf club. Eventually we got married.

George: When we got married, we married in the church upstairs.

Janet: Yes, upstairs.

George: It was a quiet one, my wedding was quiet. I'm saying nothing more.

The shot fades out to cut and the end credits are shown alongside old photographs of the club.

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The credits end and a shot of Margaret fades in sitting in front of the fireplace.

Margaret: I just remembered, someone told me at the deaf club we played Bingo every Saturday, fortnightly, weekly, whatever it was. There was a licensed bar and after the bingo, the deaf people would drink until they got rather drunk and would go home in their cars. They never got caught by the police but after this went on for a while the deaf club eventually bought a minibus which the drunk deaf people would board and the driver would put up with them. He'd drop them all off at their homes.

The shot fades and the film ends.