THE TOLL HOUSE.

Most of you will know the ruined cottage on the A70 (usually referred to as “The Lang Whang”) on the border of Lanarkshire(now South Lanarkshire) and Midlothian(now West Lothian). This little house used to be where travellers in the olden days had to stop & pay a toll charge to pass from one region to the other. There were 2 large rooms at either side & a small boxroom in the middle, & stables underneath at the rear so that travellers could change horses if required. My Grandmother & her family – she had 10 children – lived there in the early 1900’s & the stables became a wash-house with a large boiler with a fire beneath it to heat the water. There was no water or electricity in the house, so water had to be carried from the spring at the side of the house. This spring was called “The Maidens Well” & the house was called “ Maidenswell Brow”. In 1914 at the start of WW1 her eldest son, William Kennedy, was working on the railway & jumped on a train, lied about his age & enlisted. He fought at Ypres, was awarded a medal for bravery & happily survived the war. To my shame I can’t remember what medal or even his regiment but several years ago my uncle who had care of the medal consulted the family & we decided to give it to the regimental museum at Edinburgh Castle, & I remember going to see it there.

My Grandmother was the local midwife & walked down across the fields to Tarbrax when she got a message that she was needed. My Mum would get her instructions who to visit & check up on as she went to school at Tarbrax. I recall her telling me that her saddest visit was to a lady whose baby had died & she wanted to give it a cuddle. When she left school my Mum was hired as a maidservant to Peter Robertson at Greenfield Farm & she had to help in the house, do milking which was by hand then, & even work in the fields eg. Shawing turnips, & at haytime & harvest. They got paid every 6 months then & when Mr Robertson asked my Grandmother what wage she was asking for my Mum she replied:” You will pay me what she’s worth after 6 months”. When that time came my Mum was bought a new pair of working boots & a length of material from Woolworths to make herself a dress. My Mum & Dad did some of their courting in the washhouse keeping the boiler fire going for the washing, & on June 14th 1933 they were married at the Toll house. I could go on but that will do for now – I just wanted to record some of its history before it falls down & fades from living memory.

Grace.