



Did you watch a Bilbo Baggins film during lockdown? ...

BILBO BAGGINS' AYRSHIRE CONNECTIONS

The actor Sir Ian Holm who died on 19th June 2020 was best known to many, perhaps, for his portrayal of Bilbo Baggins in the Lord of the Rings films, though he was a master of film, small screen and stage acting, with an especial affinity for the works of Harold Pinter. Holm had Scottish ancestry, and I thought it might be worth investigating this further.[\[i\]](#)

Ian Holm was his stage name; his birth name was Ian Holm Cuthbert. He was born at Goodmayes, then in Essex, now absorbed into Greater London, on 12th September 1931. His parents were James Harvey Cuthbert and his wife, Jean Wilson Holm. They had been married in Dennistoun, Glasgow, in 1920. James Harvey Cuthbert (c.1883-1955) was born in Belize, British Honduras; he can be found in the 1901 and 1911 Censuses in Edinburgh. On the first occasion he is an apprentice architect, but in the intervening years obviously underwent a career change, for in 1911 he is a medical student. Cuthbert prospered in this profession, becoming a noted psychiatrist. At the time of his son's birth, he was the medical superintendent of Goodmayes Hospital.[\[ii\]](#) By his own account, Holm 'was a normal, healthy baby, whose birth occurred in a mental asylum'.[\[iii\]](#) Cuthbert is noted as an early exponent of electric shock treatment. His wife, Jean Wilson Holm (1890-1963), was a nurse, and also worked at the hospital.[\[iv\]](#) In retirement the couple lived in Worthing, Sussex, where they both died; he in November 1955, and she in July 1963.

Ian Holm's grandparents were James Martin Cuthbert, Agnes Harvey Morton, Andrew Hair Holm, and Jessie Wilson.

James Martin Cuthbert (1849-1890) was born in Edinburgh in 1849. His parents were Alexander Cuthbert and Margaret Martin. This branch of the Cuthbert family seems to have a long association with Belize, the chief town of what was then British Honduras, where they were general merchants.^[V] Fortunately, James M Cuthbert married and died in Edinburgh. He was married, in 1875, to Agnes Harvey Morton (see below), and died in 1890. It was the Cuthbert name that had first suggested to me that there may be links to Ayrshire, especially to Newton on Ayr, where the Cuthberts were well-known in the early 19th Century as shipmasters and publicans.

Agnes Harvey Morton, later Cuthbert (c1852-1895) was born in Greenock. Her father, Andrew Morton (1818-1887), was a minister in the United Presbyterian church, at that time with a charge in Greenock, but subsequently at churches in Edinburgh. Shortly after her husband's death she is living at Woodvale Cottage, Innerleithen, with her three children, James Harvey (8), Evelyne (3) and Sydney L. (2), all born in Belize. She died in 1895, and her death, aged 44, is registered in Troon.

Andrew Hair Holm (1859-1934) was born in the Anderston district of Glasgow in 1859; his father John Holm was a tax official, and had been born in Port Glasgow, as had his wife, Isabella. Andrew H. Holm played football in his youth, turning out for Queens Park, and played three times for Scotland, twice against Wales, and once against England. Scotland won all three games: those were the days. He trained as a clerk, but must have shown substantial business acumen. In 1887 he married, in Kilmarnock, Jessie Wilson. In 1889 Holm became a partner in Mackie & Co., the partnership behind the Lagavullin distillery. The other partner, Sir Peter Jeffrey Mackie, lived for many years at Corraith House, Symington, where he died in 1924. Their company had, by then, transformed into White Horse. Andrew Holm lived in a series of houses around the south side of Glasgow, in Cathcart, Eastwood, and finally at Dunavon, Giffnock, where he died in January 1934. The funeral was to Troon, and I assume he is buried in Troon Cemetery.

Jessie Wilson, later Holm (1860-1939), Ian Holm's maternal grandmother, was born in Kilmarnock. She was one of the large family of Hugh Wilson (1822-1896), carpet manufacturer, and his second wife, Jessie Wilson. At the time of Jessie's birth the family lived at Springvale, Dundonald Road, but later moved to Bellsbrae House, Titchfield Street, and finally to Huendon, 79 London Road. Jessie and Andrew Holm had 6 children, of whom Jean Wilson was the 3rd child and 3rd daughter. After her husband's death, Jessie Holm moved to the Southwood area of Troon, where she died, aged 79, in 1939.

Thus, to sum up, of Sir Ian Holm's grandparents, one (James M Cuthbert) seems to have no link with Ayrshire, though his widow died in Troon. Holm's maternal grandparents have stronger links with Ayrshire, especially his grandmother, directly related to the Wilsons of Kilmarnock, an important family in the development of carpet manufacture in the town. Both she and her husband (international footballer and distiller) are, I assume, buried in Troon Cemetery.

It may be possible, when things ease, to flesh out this story more, but for now I offer it for what it is: the result of a day's head-buzzing in front of the computer, and another addition to Ayrshire's hall of fame.

Rob Close

22 June 2020.

[i] Substantial use has been made of the websites British Newspaper Archive, Find my Past and Scotland's People, all accessed 21st June 2020. Specific references have not been given, but all dates, &c., should be easily searched for.

[ii] Built as West Ham Borough Asylum, 1901. See ezitis.myzen.co.uk/goodmayes.html , accessed 22nd June 2020.

[iii] Ian Holm, with Steve Jacobi, *Acting: My Life*, London, Bantam, 2004, p.14

[iv] Mrs Cuthbert proved difficult to track. She is called 'Jeanie' at the registration of her birth, Jane in the 1891 Census, Jessie in 1911, and Jean at the registration of her marriage. Luckily Holm is a relatively uncommon surname, and her middle name, Wilson, proved consistent.

[v] Sydney Cuthbert, probably James M Cuthbert's brother, seems to have been an influential businessman in Belize. His name led to rioting mahogany loggers, a revolver-totting store manager, and an unofficial postal service whose stamps command high prices. Alas, none of these led to Ayrshire.