*Southern helps to bring family together*

**The Southern Reporter, 10 March 2009**

**A STORY which appeared in The Southern earlier this year has resulted in the worldwide descendants of a Borders family being reunited with precious old family photographs.**

**Back in January, we reported how Donna Thompson, a native of Bonchester Bridge who now lives in Stirling, wanted to track down any living relatives of the people pictured in a collection of more than 50 old photographs.**

**It was in the mid-1990s, while cleaning out her grandparents’ house in Biggar, that Donna had discovered the pictures, which dated from late 1800s until around 1910 and which had all been sent from New Zealand to a Miss Agnes Spottiswoode, care of the Melrose Post Office.**

**Ms Spottiswoode had a cousin Joseph (Joe) Hopkirk, who lived in Hawera in New Zealand.**

**Donna’s online detective work turned up information about the districts of Taranaki, Hawke’s Bay and Wellington, and about an engineer by the name of Joseph Hopkirk, who worked for an engineers and blacksmith’s business in Hawera.**

**A delighted Donna has now been in touch with us to say she has at last found a home for the photographs, thanks to the great response she received from around the world to the story in The Southern.**

**She explained: “The fantastic response has meant we have traced relatives all over the world from California to New Zealand and, locally, Mr Peter Lyal, the grandson of Agnes Spottiswood, who is based in Galashiels.**

**“The response from around the world led to a day of scanning all the photos and information that I had gathered with the fantastic help of Joyce Campbell. “More than 90 copies of the photos were made in the end to enable them to be posted to John Samuel Hopkirk, aged 86, in Hastings, New Zealand, and also to John Hopkirk in San Carlos, California.**

**“I am also delighted to say that I was able to meet up with Peter Lyal at his home in Galashiels in February and returned the original photographs to him.**

**“He had a good collection of photos too, and, indeed, a couple of replicas of the ones I passed on. He had done a great amount to trace his family roots and had a good record of the family tree, all done manually over the years and by searching old census records.**

**“It was a pleasure to see the original photos going to Mr Lyal, who had a genuine interest in his family history. “I know by the communications I have received from John in California that this will keep them busy for a long time.”**

**Donna told us that the elderly gentleman featured in the photograph which appeared in the January article is Alexander Hopkirk, who was the master at Gattonside School.**

**He married Mr Lyal’s great-great aunt, Agnes Spottiswoode, (1836-1870) who was the helper at the school.**

**When she passed away in 1870, Alexander and his seven children, six of whom were boys, left for New Zealand in July, 1873.**

**One of the sons, Joe Hopkirk, kept in touch with his cousin back in Scotland, also Agnes Spottiswoode (1872-1963), who is the grandmother of Mr Peter Lyal. This Agnes Spottiswoode was the addressee of the letters and postcards, and she was married to Thomas Carter Grieve (1870-1920) and they lived in Donna’s grandmother’s house in Biggar in the early 1900s.**

**Donna explained that the 86-year-old John Samuel Hopkirk from Hastings in New Zealand, who wrote to her, is the grandson of John Brown Hopkirk (son of Alexander), who was aged three when he departed for New Zealand.**

**Donna continued: “I know that Joe Hopkirk, who wrote to his cousin Agnes, did not marry and was well known among his many nieces and nephews as a great fixit man and a keen photographer.**

**“John Samuel is the proud grandfather of 15 grandchildren which has kept the Hopkirk name well established in New Zealand.**

**“I would very much like to thank The Southern for its assistance with the article and enabling me to return these photographs to a very appreciative home.**

**“The outcome has certainly exceeded any expectations I would have hoped for.”**