

In local history, Simon of ESCHELES appeared in 1305, as a juror at an Inquisition at Peebles. In 1329 Robert the Bruce granted a Charter of ESHIELS to William of Douglas and by 1351 it was in the hands of Sir James Douglas, passing to his grandson James Douglas in 1420. Archibald, Earl of Angus, held the land in 1564 and it passed to William Douglas of Lochleven in 1588, and the property was conveyed to his brother George Douglas of Helenhill, the following year. By 1614 the barony of ESHELLS belonged to John Douglas of Kilbucho, who mortgaged the property for £10,000 to Sir Gideon Murray of Elibank, from whom it passed to John Logan in Leith, and from there to Mr John Hay in 1617.

In 1650 Sir James Hay granted a wadset over the lands of ESHIELS, to Patrick Hepburn, an apothecary and that wadset (mortgage) was transferred in 1655 to Mr John Drummond of Lenocho. In the late 1700s the land was still the property of the Hay family, who resided at King's Meadows and Sir John Hay had added greatly to the beauty and amenity of his farms. ESHIELS in particular, was laid out with exquisite taste and was pronounced the finest picture of a farm, with farm-steading in the county. It included the site of the Hospice and Chapel of SS. Leonard and Laurence, where pilgrims found food and rest on their way to the annual Festivals of the Holy Rood at Peebles, about 1470. ESHIELS and adjoining Spittlehope, remained part of the Haystoun Estate until 1920, at which time they were acquired by the Board of Agriculture.

Under the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act, 1919, the Board of Agriculture acquired Eshiels and Soonhope from the proprietor of Haystoun Estate. This Act was passed mainly for the benefit of the ex-Service men, of whom considerable numbers wished to settle on the land. Under the 1919 Act, the Board, seeking to form small colonies of ex-Servicemen all over Scotland, looked for a suitable place in Peeblesshire and after negotiations acquired the two farms, Eshiels and Soonhope.

Eshiels was a large farm on either side of the main road, with some good haughland between the road and the River Tweed, with poorer land on the other side, rising to some steep slopes on the ridge, above which were the woodlands partly known as Glentress Forest.

Eshiels Farm house was sold by the Board, in 1921 to William Cairns. The cottages near the farm house at Eshiels, were worked into the scheme, as were some of the smaller holdings attached to them. The lie of the land and the various tastes and capabilities of the applicants, determined the distribution of the land. About fourteen holdings of different sizes were formed, some containing as much as fifty or sixty acres and others only a few acres. The haughland was parcelled out into fair sized holdings and fairly large holdings were formed out of the high-lying land, the steeper slopes having some lower ground attached to them. Some of the higher "parks" had not been ploughed up for a number of years, but as each new occupier of a largish holding had to have a pair of horses, it was inevitable that more land should be broken up than when Eshiels was a single farm. Some of the larger holdings carried on as small dairy farms and a

certain number of sheep were also kept. The smaller holdings were used chiefly for poultry keeping and a few pigs were also fed, with one holder running a market garden on which tomatoes were grown.

On the whole, the cottage accomodation was not up to a high standard and the farm worker of the time seemed aware of this. He had achieved certain other demands, such as a Saturday half-holiday and a nine hours' day, from stable door to stable door, both these being the rule in Peeblesshire. The average wage, which was considered high, for a shepherd or ploughman was 40s a week, which was not below the level current in the Lothians and in addition they usually received allowances of food or fuel

The settlement was much criticised at the outset by those who were more concerned at seeing a large farm broken up to form the subject of a curious and doubtful experiment, than mindful of the claims of the soldiers, especially when the houses and steadings too, were built at a time when building materials were dear. Possibly Eshiels attracted more attention than other settlements, because it was a well known farm and situated on an important main road.