



Newsletter of the

Tayside and Fife Archaeological
Committee

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Gravestones in Fife

Ann Watters has contributed the following article on Fife gravestones. The editor would welcome similar items from Corresponding Members or, indeed, anyone who may wish to contribute. Ed.

Gravestones as a part of Archaeology in Fife

Gravestones within graveyards and burial-grounds can tell us much about natural history, including geology, but they contain a wealth of social history information. Fife graveyards are a rich source of stories: there are the graves of Archbishop Sharp, murdered on Magus Muir, and Michael Brown, who was murdered in East Wemyss in 1909. Other events documented include



The grave of four Covenanters at Magus Muir, Fife.

the 17th century Covenanters and the Tay Bridge Disaster of 1879.



The earliest burials in graveyards are generally anonymous, even the heavily decorated hogback stones (above), but a number of important wealthy people were buried within churches with graves that were richly decorated or embellished. Robert the Bruce lies buried in Dunfermline Abbey although his heart is buried in Melrose Abbey, but all over Fife there are fine examples of 'Knight' stones, which graphically represent in three dimensions the form of 12th to 14th century nobles.

The earliest headstones in Scottish churchyards date to the first half of the 17th century. Many are inscribed in Latin and are, therefore, not easily translated by most people. Most burials were made in churchyards or in a private burial-ground such as the Feuars cemetery in Kirkcaldy, which goes back to the 17th century. Most graveyards were walled and often planted with yew trees – a throwback to the time when yew wood was required for making long bows. It is also thought that Yew, because its leaves are poisonous, was use as a deterrent to wandering stock.



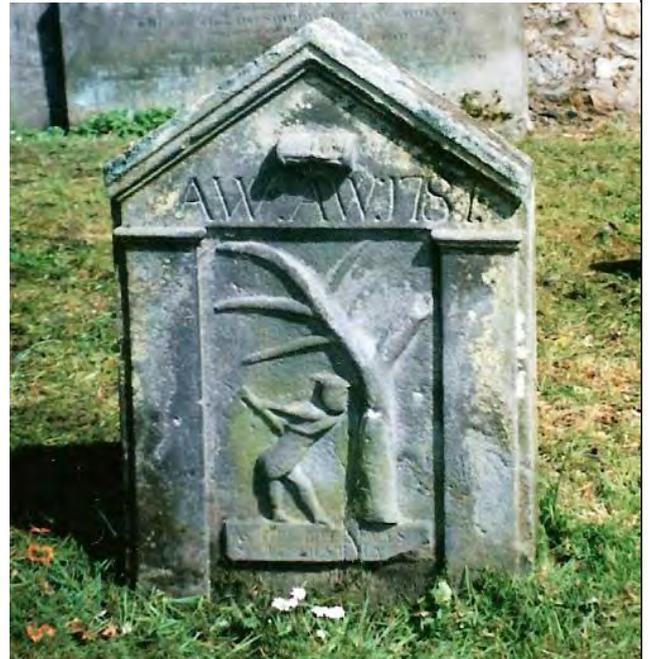
Monument to Archbishop Sharp killed at Magus Muir, Fife.

Many 18th century stones were elaborately carved some with symbols relating to trade. Some of the best examples may be seen in the old Tulliallan churchyard, Kincardine, Fife (below and right). These have been perfectly re-erected and restored by Bill Wolsey and William Anderson.



Ship owners grave with skull and hourglass.

When churchyards became full, a method of prolonging their life was to import soil so that additional layers of burials could be laid down. This was especially important at times of multiple deaths, such as during epidemics. In the first half of the 19th century, many towns and cities saw large cemeteries established on their edges, -- a reflection of the rapid growth of urban centres during the Industrial Revolution.



Woodcutter cutting down the tree of life.



The crown and hammer is a symbol of a member of the Hammermen's Guild (Metal workers). Kingskettle.

The early 19th century was also the era of the grave-robber, when 'fresh' bodies were often removed from graves and sold to the medical profession. Anywhere within reach of a medical school was a prime target for the lucrative trade of body-snatching.

One of the responses to the threat was the mort-safe – a wrought iron frame that was securely placed over the grave (often with a large slab on top) until such time as the body would no longer be of interest to the 'dissectors'. Another response was the mort-house, a small building on the edge of the cemetery used to accommodate a watchman, whose job it was to guard fresh graves.

The story that grave-robbers used to offer the night-watchman a bottle of whisky so that they could raid graves while he was in a drunken sleep is probably apocryphal.



A rare Green Man, the tiger-face with a shuttle in its mouth. Kennoway old cemetery

In Crail in 1826 a mortuary was erected in which bodies were placed until such time that they were no longer of potential use to the medical profession and they could be safely buried. When the Act of Anatomy was passed in 1833, a plentiful and legal supply of fresh bodies made the trade in illegally obtained bodies no longer profitable.

Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th gravestones continued to tell stories of personal tragedy and sadness. All over Scotland there are gravestones that remind us of how much medicine has advanced in a little over a hundred years. Diphtheria, cholera, smallpox, all took their toll as children especially succumbed, their short lives recorded only in the inscriptions on family grave markers.



This stone at Kingskettle, Fife, records the deaths of three children aged 6-8 years, who died within a period of 5 days in 1894.



This stone, at West Wemyss records the death of four young children -- one dying on the 31st April 1878!.

Unusual milestone

In the Barnhill area of Perth the editor has recorded a milestone that is quite unlike any others he so far encountered near Perth. The sandstone pillar stands at the rear of the pavement in front of number 86 Dundee Road and it is set into the outside face of the garden wall. Two angled faces look out onto the road. Each has a shallow rectangular recess cut into it, which once housed a cast iron information plate. According to OS maps, the marker indicated the distance of 1 mile to Perth and 21 miles to Dundee. Both plates, however, have been smashed, most likely about 1940, when the government ordered the removal of all forms of roadside information (milestones, guide-posts, way-markers, etc) that might prove useful to invading enemy forces.



View of the SE face of the milestone.

Unfortunately, the method by which the information plates were secured to the stone counted the marker being re-established after the war. A lug at each of the four corners of the rear of the plates was secured in a socket using molten lead. This meant that once each plate was in

place, flush with the face of the stone, there was no way they could be removed without breaking the plate.

Kinnettles field-walking

Two dates have been agreed for fieldwalking in Kinnettles parish this coming spring. Weather allowing, walks will take place on Sunday 27 February and Sunday 13 March 2011. There will be two walks each day, one starting about 10am and lasting a couple of hours, the other, at the same location, from 1pm to 3pm.

Anyone interested in taking part in the walks should contact the local organiser, Dr David Walsh, The Whirlies, Kinnettles, Forfar, DD8 1XF.

Telephone: 01307 820367

Or email him at dbwal@tiscali.co.uk.



Image: JR Sherriff

Above, a leaf-shaped flint pint from last year's walk at Douglstown. Almost certainly Neolithic in date this artefact has added to the growing list of locations within Kinnettles that have yielded evidence of a Neolithic presence. The other flints found were mainly waste material and not particularly diagnostic, though probably falling within a Mesolithic to Bronze Age date range.

There is also a possibility of a fieldwalk being organised in Monikie parish – probably after the Kinnettles walks. Anyone interested should contact the editor at the address provided at the end of this Newsletter.

2010 Conference

This year's conference was held in St Andrews on the 6th November. It was attended by approximately 83 delegates (excluding speakers and Committee members), which was a disappointing number compared with previous meetings there and elsewhere. The main cause for the low turnout appears to have been the holding of the SRP (Scotland's Rural Past project in Crieff the previous weekend and the Perth 800 conference in September, which meant that tickets sales in the Perth, Pitlochry and Crieff areas for TAFAC were poor.

That said, the Committee still managed to arrange a varied and interesting programme within an excellent venue.

Summary of papers

David Strachan gave a resume of the discovery, conservation and building of a reproduction of the Carpow logboat, now visible as part of the Oakbank Crannog complex. Of particular interest was the use of replica bronze age tools and the amount of information that has been gained about the fabrication of the vessel.



Image: Birlinn.co.uk

Gordon Barclay talked about the WW2 anti-tank stop line that ran through Fife and Eastern Perthshire, setting it in the context of the very real fear of German

invasion in 1940. Go of several sites across the area, stressing just how much of the defences there are still surviving.

Edwina Proudfoot detailed the recently launched three-year project in Angus to record redundant churches. Edwina set this project in context by explaining the background to the existing redundant churches project. Her illustrated talk

provided examples of aspects of church heritage that would be recorded, including external detail of the architecture and internal features such as windows and window glass, wall decorations, furniture, floor tiles, door hinges and locks, etc. Edwina stressed the importance of projects such as these being community-based, with local people carrying out the recording.

Alan Saville gave a short but detailed account of the discovery near Dun in Angus of a fascinating assemblage of artefacts made from quartzite cobbles that occur naturally in the local till. Superficially similar to Palaeolithic tools from further south in Britain and abroad, the crude scrapers, choppers and axes are probably no earlier in date than the 2nd millennium BC.

Tom Dawson, Director of the SCAPE Trust (Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion), gave a very a interesting talk on the work of the trust, providing richly illustrated detail of several projects recently undertaken in throughout Scotland.



Image: Bill Cotton

Of particular interest was the laser scanning project that has been carried out at the mid-18th century lime kiln at Boddin, south of Montrose (above). Like Edwina, Tom stressed how important it was to involve local communities in archaeological projects.

Lindsay Farquharson gave an up-date of her initial talk on this subject at last year's conference in Perth. She provided a background to the project before detailing some of the work undertaken in the past year. This included undertaking repairs to

the fabric of bridges and she explained some of the difficulties encountered in working on soffits, parapets, etc.

Trevor Cowie began his talk by giving an account of a 19th century excavation of a burial cairn near Lochore in Fife by a local landowner called Constable. The finds from the excavation included a Food Vessel that was illustrated in a contemporary Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland but subsequently went missing. Trevor then explained how a volunteer (an ex-police sergeant) working in a Borders museum identified one of their pots that was in storage as the missing vessel.

Derek Hall Derek started his talk by explaining that the excavation he has been undertaking on putative deer parks is part of a broader project based at Stirling University. He gave accounts of trenches dug across the earthworks at three sites – Buzzart Dykes in Perth and Kinross, Durward's Dyke in Angus and at Fettercairn in Aberdeenshire. Derek illustrated the varying nature of the earthworks before and after excavation and raised questions regarding previous interpretations of them, the purposes that they actually served and their methods of construction.

He pointed out that dating evidence is forthcoming, but stressed that very much more survey and excavation of many examples throughout Scotland needs to be undertaken for any real understanding of this type of monument is to be understood.

John Sherriff This talk gave a brief update of the survey by RCAHMS of the timber-laced fort on Castle Law above Forgandenny, which was completed in April 2010. The complexity and superb quality of the surviving remains was stressed as was the potential of the site to provide a framework in terms of dating, artefact assemblage and timber round-house construction for much of the first millennium BC. Two personal projects were also mentioned – the recording of Fife milestones in Fife and fieldwalking at Kinnettles in Angus. With regard to the former, about half of the 250 or so milestones that are known to have existed have been visited to date with the remainder due to be visited during 2011. Regarding the latter, the walks that take place in February and March each year are helping to gradually build up a picture of the Mesolithic, Neolithic and bronze age presence in the parish. The highlight of last year was the discovery of a beautiful bi-facially worked leaf-shaped point.

David Bowler, Director of Alder Archaeology, detailed the work his company has so far undertaken for the National Trust on a composite building at Cottown constructed of various materials including clay. David pointed out (using an old photograph of the building when it was still roofed) that in vernacular buildings there is often little in the way of clues about how complex a structure might actually be. Detailed survey and excavation of the ruin has shown a depth of chronology that was previously unsuspected. David also pointed out the difficulties that can be encountered when attempts are made to conserve or preserve structures, which are essentially made and will dissolve in the rain.

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A reminder to those who may wish to but have not yet obtained a copy of the latest TAFAJ. They may be had by contacting the editor at: 21 Burleigh Crescent, Inverkeithing, Fife, KY11 1 DQ – Price £13 + £3p+p Cheques payable to 'TAFAC' or use the book order form on the website tafac.org.uk

