

Friends of Loudoun Kirk

Spring 2005

Many of you may be aware of one of the Kirk's more unfortunate grave markers, known locally as the Witch's Stone. This common misnomer is derived from the stones prominent mortality symbols, depicting a skull and cross bones. Far from being the grave of a witch, this is the stone of a tailor, marked by an iron and needle. It is the only visible stone with such symbols remaining in the Kirk, and as such it has always been the centre of local speculation.



I call it unfortunate, due to the events which have occurred over the last 10 years, since the founding of FOLK. Back in 1995, this stone was still upright and in its original position. By 1997 the stone had been toppled broken in two. This left it prone to the destructive force of the council where in addition to being weakened by weedkiller, it was chipped by bumps from the lawnmower, and a large chunk was removed by a strimmer. Luckily the stone still had all its writing and symbols intact. During an event at the Kirk last year, it



was noted that the stone had vanished without a trace. Searches of the local undergrowth and fields proved fruitless and the stone was thought lost. At a recent talk I even joked, if anyone had seen it decorating someone's garden, please could we have it returned. Little did I realise that the stone would miraculously reappear. On a recent trip, to assess the damage to the burn wall at the Kirk entrance, we noted the stone had been returned back to its original position. Who knows what adventures a 250lb grave stone might have had?

Forthcoming events

- ❖ **3rd May FOLK A.G.M. - Riverside Inn, Newmilns, 7pm.**
- ❖ **14th May Silent Auction – Galston Community Centre**
Bidding starts 10am and event ends 1pm

Older and Wiser?

The major repair work on the Kirk has now been completed. Viewing the project with hindsight, there were several pitfalls encountered, which had we known about them in advance, would probably have discouraged us from undertaking this project in the first place.

A bunch of amateurs?

One definite pitfall was the fact we had no-one with any experience of managing restoration projects, or dealing with the relevant government bodies, on the committee. In the early days when the decision to repair the roof was made, the original costing of around £50,000 seemed almost unachievable. It was at this point that we discovered the complexity of the maze of grant giving organisations.

Lost in the maze!

Historic Scotland are the Government's watchdog for historic buildings and offer grant aid for repair and restoration work. However, as we discovered, this is only given to help with the *extra* costs involved in the specialist works required in using the traditional methods required for restoration projects. They also only offer up to 50% of the eligible costs which meant we had to look elsewhere for the rest.

Out of time!

After many appeals to grant giving organisations we were offered £1000 from the Manifold Trust, but with a time limit of a year on the grant, which left us only 12 months in which to raise the other monies. Unfortunately, we could not raise the additional cash to meet that deadline and so we had to forego our first offer of help.

Whose Kirk is it anyway?

At this point in time, The Millennium Fund was in its embryo stages and we were hopeful our application would be accepted by them. However, this brings us to our next pitfall, ownership of the Kirk. The Kirk was in private family trust and The Millennium Fund did not allow public money to be spent on private property.

So it looked as if we would run out of time to raise the funds and so would lose our indicative offer of funds from Historic Scotland. After many months of discussion with Historic Scotland this deadline was generously extended.

After much deliberation, it was decided that a preservation trust be established, and the Kirk would be handed over to their care. As soon as the Loudoun Kirk Preservation Trust was set up and registered as a Scottish Recognised Charity, we were able to lodge an application to The Millennium Fund, which by this time had become The Heritage Lottery Fund.

Time passes.....

The application form and its accompanying support documentation, which took around 6 months to prepare, filled an entire lever arch file. The original, along with three copies, were sent off for consideration. At first, all went reasonably well, however we encountered two more pitfalls come in at this stage. Firstly, the length of time funding applications take to be processed before an offer of grant can be made. The second problem was that during this time, the roof continued to deteriorate. This meant, by the time the funding

application had been lodged with The Heritage Fund, our estimated costs had escalated to £130,000, as rather than patchwork repairs to the roof, the entire roof and all the slates now needed to be replaced.

In addition, the grants offered did not total 100% of the costs, so The Friends of Loudoun Kirk also had to contribute a significant sum from fund-raising activities.

Cash flow problems

Although we had been officially awarded grants, we did not receive any monies as that is not how the funding system works. We could not receive any money until after we had paid the contractors following completion of the various stages of the project. Only at this point could we claim the money back. It should only have been a one month turnaround for receiving these funds, but that proved to be far from the case.

We had no funding to cover this magnitude of cash flow, although we were offered a loan from the Architectural Heritage Society at an attractively low rate of interest. The snag was that the Kirk was not seen as a viable asset for security, as it had no commercial value. Therefore a guarantor would be needed. Our bank, The Royal Bank of Scotland, were approached, but they were found to be less than helpful. East Ayrshire Council were also approached but were reluctant to help as nobody was willing to take the responsibility of such a decision. After many gloomy months, we discovered to our surprise that the Clydesdale Bank were willing to offer us a loan. Although having them act as guarantor was costly, it was affordable as it was only for a 15 week period.

Monumental confusion?

Just as work finally got underway, Historic Scotland's architect was replaced. When the new architect arrived on site, he decided that some of the work was unnecessary. The costing was then reduced to around £97,000. This meant contracts had to be re-written, but, finally, many weeks later, work started.

Then the architect revisited the site and decided we needed more repair work done than he had first thought – bizarrely the same work proposed by the original architect. Once again work stopped. Contracts were re-written. Eventually work re-started - many months later.

Frizbees!

Now that work was underway, all was looking rosy. It was at this point, however, that another pitfall was discovered - vandalism. The plan was to put new roof tiles on one side of the Kirk roof and use the intact, original tiles on the other. The combination of scaffolding and a deserted building site was, it seems, too much of a temptation to vandals! As a result, 75% of our tiles were destroyed, which delayed the work yet again as we waiting for more stone to be supplied.

The next pitfall we encountered was the apparent disorganisation of our two funding bodies when changes are made to contracts. Over the course of this project, we have had several different case managers from both Historic Scotland and The Heritage Lottery Fund. This resulted in a loss of continuity as the new personnel seemed to have no clue about even the basic facets of the project.

Ever increasing interest.

As a result, following the building works, we did not receive the final payments. It took several months to convince each of the bodies that there was in fact money outstanding. The consequence of all these delays was the ever increasing interest charges on the by now overdue loans from the bank. Fortunately we have we have been able to raise money to pay these unforeseen charges and finalise the present project.

The Friends of Loudoun Kirk was established in 1994, and as a result of 10 years of fundraising, membership subscriptions and donations, we have been able to contribute a total of £9,000 to the project so far. As a proviso for obtaining public funding, we agree to care and maintain the building and provide public access for at least 10 years. Our achievements so far are not only the repair and partial restoration of the Kirk, but thanks to Score and the late Lady Barbara's family, we have also repaired the gate piers, provided new gates and rebuilt the bridge parapet. The job certainly isn't over yet. In the future we hope to rebuild the burn wall and repair and stabilise some of the older gravestones in the kirkyard.

Agnes M Wilson

Venison Pie

This "secret" recipe has been reluctantly donated by the FOLK Webmaster Aaron Pawson.

Ingredients

Olive oil
1lb Venison cubed
2 Onions, sliced
2 Cloves garlic, chopped
8oz Smoked bacon cut into 1 inch pieces
2 Bay leaves
1 tsp oregano
8oz Chestnut mushrooms, halved
½ bottle Red wine
8oz Puff pastry
1 ½ oz Plain flour
1 egg, beaten

- Heat oil, brown venison, put aside
- Reheat oil, add the onions until they start to soften
- Add the garlic & bacon, cook for 2-3 mins
- Add the venison, bay leaves, oregano & flour
- Season well & cook for about 2 mins
- Add enough wine (approx ½ bottle) to cover the meat & onions
- Now add mushrooms, bring to the boil, cover & simmer for 45 mins
- Heat the oven to 200°C / 400°F / Gas 6
- Put the mixture in a pie dish - any left over liquid makes wonderful gravy.
- Roll out the pastry to make a lid, glaze with a beaten egg
- Bake for 20-25 mins until the pastry is golden brown.

Mysterious building

The brick structure pictured opposite is found inside the kirkyard, built against the north side of the outer wall. There are various theories about what it is, but nobody knows for certain what it's original purpose was.

A Mort-house?

The Resurrectionists:

The Anatomy Act of 1832 allowed unclaimed bodies to be used for medical experimentation, and teaching. This was, however, found to be a good way of earning money for the more unscrupulous as we know from the trials of Burke and Hare, probably the most famous of the body snatchers.



To protect a family's deceased loved one from the body snatchers, mort safes were used, these varied in design, but all had the same purpose to prevent digging up or theft of the bodies. More complex versions took the form of an iron-grille that was placed over the grave, or a cast-iron 'over-coffin' or cage, into which the wooden coffin was placed, and then buried. This could then be retrieved after a suitable period of time had elapsed. An excellent example can be seen in the burial grounds of the Auld Kirk in Ayr.

Mort safes proved to be heavy and cumbersome, placing them over the coffin, then removing it when the body had decomposed sufficiently. Mort houses were built where cadavers were stored until deterioration had rendered them useless for medical experimentation. They provided more secure storage and protection until they burial in the normal way could take place.

Grave-robbing came to end soon after an Act of Parliament, which allowed people to leave their bodies to medical science. After that many of the Mort-houses and watch towers became stores.

Although similar in style to some mort-houses, the building in Loudoun kirkyard would seem to be more modern.

A Watch House?

The watch tower/house is an early form of neighbourhood watch. For the same reason Mort Houses and Mort Safes were used, watch towers or houses were built. Near the gates and entrances of churchyards, small cramped buildings were provided and either the relatives of the deceased, or someone who was paid by them, kept watch on their behalf.

An Air-raid Shelter?

Ian Jones of Girvan, an amateur geologist, has been making a study of bricks/tiles and brick/tile works and based on photographs, he felt the bricks were “blae” bricks, made at a local brickwork from coal bing waste and dated from perhaps around mid 20th century. He was also mentioned that the construction of the building was not made of arch brick making it a weak construction. This may indicate that the building was not built to be permanent.

A Tool Shed?



David Farrant collects information on anything to do with WWII and has a substantial collection of photographs of bunkers and air raid shelters etc. The photos were sent to him, asking if he had other records of similar buildings and this is his reply:- *“ I have been in dozens of air raid shelters and this is similar to a domestic air raid shelter in some ways, but it does not quite fit. Buildings covered in turf and earth for protection were usually placed in the hole dug to obtain the earth and turf, for added protection. The building is weak, a single layer of masonry. It is currently collapsing under its own weight. This seems to rule out*

being explosion proof or carrying a heavy earth covering.

So, what else could it have been used for? One thing that springs to mind is a Home Guard weapon store. Such things still exist and were often small brick structures in odd places. They were often associated with a defensive position to protect an important road or rail junction, or the approach to an important installation such as an airfield. I am not familiar with what might have been in your area, perhaps some local enquiries of people old enough to have been or to remember Home Guard personnel, or such activities in the area might give some clues. The doorway is rather wide and the walls not bonded in so the structure is inherently weak. Could it have simply been a tool store, for a mower or tools for the kirkyard? Maybe a local builder might have some clues. Someone built it after all”.



Why do we want to know?

As a mort-house, an air raid shelter or a Home Guard weapon store, this little building may be worth preserving. It is already in a state of collapse but unfortunately it has little historic value as a tool store.....unless anyone else knows better?

A Note from our Treasurer

Over the years you have been a valued supporter of Friends of Loudoun Kirk. I am now endeavouring to maximise that value through tax repayments from the Inland Revenue. Enclosed is a Gift Aid declaration notice.

All taxpayers are entitled to give to charity net of tax relief. The recipient charity can then recover that tax from the Revenue. In recent years Gift Aid has developed into a straightforward mechanism for both donors and donees alike. One declaration can cover all gifts made from 6 April 2000, and extend to all future donations. This can cover annual membership fees as well as other donations.

By obtaining tax relief we can increase the level of funding provided. For example a payment of say £10 can qualify for a tax refund to us of £2.82. If you are a higher rate taxpayer you may be entitled to further relief which would reduce the net cost to you of providing us with funds totalling £12.82, to only £7.69.

I would appreciate if you could help me pursue the tax repayment element for FOLK by signing and returning the enclosed declaration, if appropriate to the following address **Peelhill Cottage, Drumclog, Lanarkshire, ML10 6RQ.**

Yours sincerely,

Gillian M Hutcheson
Treasurer

P.S. You may also wish to note that you can now mandate all or part of any tax repayment due to you, to be paid directly to FOLK, with further relief under Gift Aid. If this is of interest the charity code for FOLK which needs to be entered on your tax return form is YAR22KG

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Gift Aid Declaration

Charity Friends of Loudoun Kirk YAR22KG

Donor Title Forename(s) Surname

Address

Postcode

I want the charity to treat all donations I have made since 6 April 2000, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

Signed

Date