

News from the Past

Project to Reveal Stonemasons' Secrets Begins



MHG volunteers have begun to record marks on the church tower that may help to reveal how the workmen went about their tasks nine hundred years ago. The group began work last week and we are already beginning to shed light on the workmen and their techniques. The marks are almost as crisp

and clear as the day they were cut and there are occasional pieces of graffiti that give us some insights into the construction techniques used on one of the oldest buildings in Scotland. It is also one of the finest and may have more marks than any other. One of the secrets of the stonemasons(see p.3)

Markinch's Witch tracked down

Whilst researching old Markinch Parish records Maureen Brand has come across an entry relating to Markinch's very own witch. It seems to be the only mention of witchcraft in the town but that may well be the result of poor record keeping. The entry in the parish register for 1643 reads :-

Compeared Janet Brown, and being posed if she used charms, she confessed that she did charm two several persons—Viz., James Hullock and Janet Scott, but no more. The words of the charm are these:

(continued top of page 3)

SCHOOLCHILDREN AND QUEEN'S REPRESENTATIVE VISIT MARKINCH CHURCH

Since the archaeology work at the church hit the headlines last year guided tours of the church have become more popular. In recent weeks we have hosted visits from both Milton and Markinch Primary Schools. The question and answer sessions were



particularly lively.

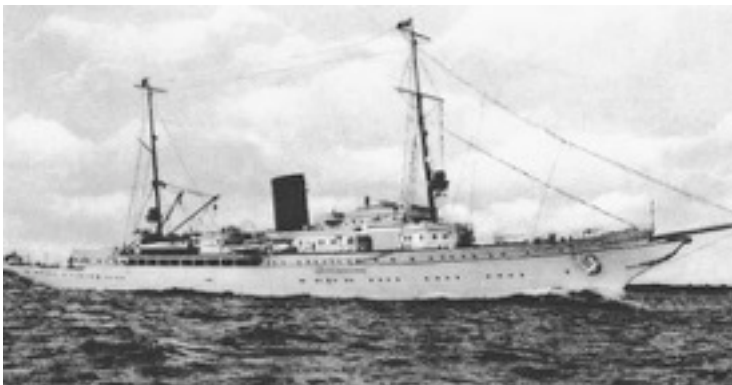
The Queen's personal representative to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also paid a visit recently. The Rt. Honourable Lord Hope of Craighead was welcomed by the new Lord (continued page 6)

Memories of VE Day

There are always times in your life when you can always remember exactly what you were doing and where you were when momentous announcements are made, even if you can't remember the date.

As the 70th Anniversary of Victory in Europe Day approaches vivid memories take me back to that day. A child of about six years who along with my brother, three cousins, Mother, Aunt and Uncle were standing on a gun emplacement overlooking the Firth of Forth at North Queensferry. Alongside us was a soldier on guard duty, in hindsight and with adult eyes I think he must have been very upset at being in guard duty when his fellow soldiers were probably out celebrating.

We children were all very excited, making quite a noise although no one had told us why we were there or what we could expect to see. Then serenely sailing down the Forth came, what I now know, to be a fishing boat. The mast,



nets and sides of the boat was covered in lit white electric light bulbs. In fact I am sure it can be said that the boat was covered overall in light, crewmen waving to us as they sailed by. To children whose life had been governed by air raid warnings and all clear sirens, blackouts, not getting what you wanted but what was available, not being allowed on beaches not to mention making do and mends, this was quite an awesome sight. I can remember we were skipping and jumping about. Then I had to ask "What was that?" The duty guardsman very quickly answered with two words that burned even deeper into my memory "Hitler's Yacht". I have no recollections of the rest of the evening,

When my Aunt and Uncle went to Germany with the Occupation Troops; Mother, my Brother and I returned to Sunderland. The prized possession of children there was shrapnel, the bigger the piece the better the prize. Of course I had no pieces of shrapnel, nor did I know where it came from, but I could brag (oh and I did) that I had seen Hitler's Yacht.

Fast forward about fifty years to when I was taking an English course and one of the tasks was to write about an incident remembered from childhood. Nothing immediately came to mind apart from long summer holidays when it never rained and we almost lived at the seaside, Girl Guide camps, long cycle rides with jam sandwiches and a bottle of water.... boring.

Then I remembered seeing Hitler's Yacht. Yes I still believed that was what I saw until I was half way through the exercise and realised that those two words were pure sarcasm from a man tired of five children making an awful lot of noise. I finished the task, but then began to doubt that it had ever happened, handed the work in anyway.

A year ago I thought I would ask my brother if he remembered VE Day, he just looked at me and said "Hitler's Yacht".

I wonder if those fisherman sailing down the Forth on their trawler ever knew how much pleasure they gave to those children standing on a gun emplacement in North Queensferry, and what they would say if they could be told that the memories they created were still as fresh seventy years on. One thing still puzzles me, where did they get all of those light bulbs?

Maureen Brand

Editor's note. Recent research shows that Hitler's yacht, the Aviso Grille (see picture) actually was in Rosyth on VE Day. As a prize of war it was on its way from Norway to Hartlepool.

Maureen, the soldier on guard duty was telling the truth after all !!

Markinch Witch (continued)

"Our Lord forth raide,
His foal's foot slade:
Our Lord down lighted,
His foal's foot righted;
Saying: Flesh to flesh, blood to blood, and bane to bane,
In our Lord his name."

Being posed who learned her the foresaid charm, answered, ane man in the parish of Strathmiglo.'



It appears that the kirk session were fairly lenient on Janet, although the case, held on the last day of the year, may well have spoiled Janet's New Year celebrations. Neighbouring parishes were much more brutal in their approach. In Kirkcaldy matters took a serious turn with the burning of Alison Dick and William Coke a few years earlier. The records show that the execution was a joint exercise between the town and the kirk with expenses carefully set out as the following extract shows.

*The townne and sessiounis extraordinar debursments for Wm Coke and Alisone Dick witches Imprimis to Mr James Miller when he went to Prestowne for a man to try them 47s
Item to the man of Culros when he went away the first tyme 12s
Item for coalls for the witches 24s
Item in purchasing the commission 9lib.. 3s
Item for one to goe to Finmonth for the laird 6s [probably David Brown of Vicars-Grange]
Item for harden [coarse cloth] to be jups [smocks] to them 3lib 10s
Item for makeing of them 3s
Summa 16lib 18s for the kirks part*

*The townnes part of expenses debursit extraordinarilie upon William Coke and Alison Dick Imprimis for ten loads of coalls to burne them 5 merks
Item for tarr barrells 14s
Item for towes 6s
Item to him that brought the executioner 58s
Item to the executioner for his paines 8lib 14s
Item for his expenses heir 16s 4d*

Source :- Kirkcaldy Old Parish Registers, 1614-45 [CH2/636/34]

There seems to have been a powerful financial incentive for some people in the 17th century to identify and prosecute witches. BM

(cnd. from page 1)has been revealed high up on the ground floor wall. It looks like a sketch demonstrating how stones should be laid in the newly introduced Norman manner. Local masons would have been used to a random pattern of building where stones were fitted in to the wall as it progressed. The technique used at Markinch was much more efficient with blocks of standard shape and size being cut in advance and placed in a particular way so that they locked together like bricks in a modern wall. This may owe something to the military building techniques developed for post-Conquest castles as well as cathedrals such as Durham.

The survey will be looking for more of these graffiti marks as well as documenting the many marks that were simply applied to the blocks in order to secure piecework rates for the individual builders or teams. Another aspect will be to further understand how the tower was built. The axle slots of the great wheel-winch have already been located along with what seems to be a sketch of the crane itself. So far the recording task is only partially complete. Archaeologist Moira Greig reckons that the tower has over a thousand marks and has so far picked up the marks of up to 32 masons! BM

Medieval Markinch

Dynastic Ambition and Eternal Damnation in the 11th century

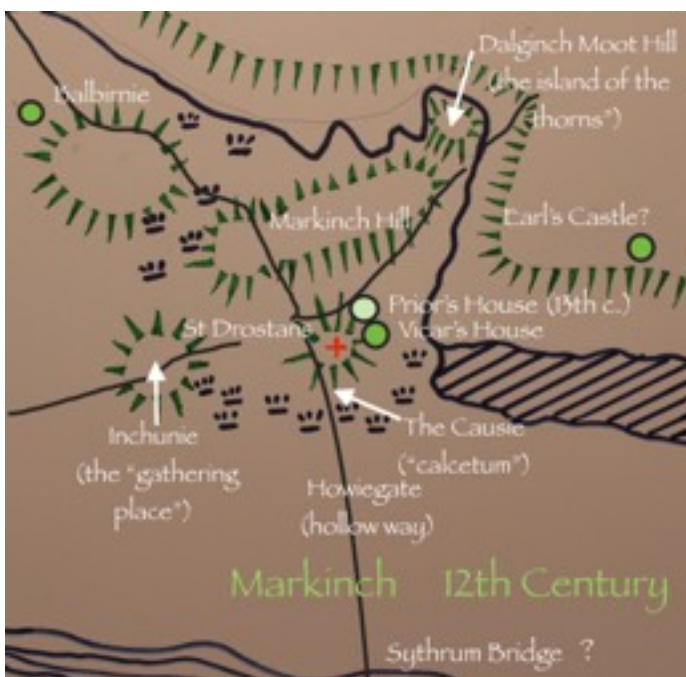
Up until around 1050 the history of Markinch is buried deep in what we used to call the Dark Ages and now we call the Early Medieval Period. Only the archaeologists, if they're lucky, will be able to salvage the town's history from this period before the written word. However, around 1050 we have preserved a copy of the first church charter that refers to Markinch. It is amongst the earliest in Scotland and refers to a grant of the church and all its land to the Cul-dee monks of Loch Leven. This may well have been part of a series of gifts from MacBeth and his ecclesiastical entourage that went on pilgrimage to Rome around that time. It would have been in return for the monks prayers for a safe journey and their everlasting prayers for their souls should they not return alive. It was this certainty of the church's role in ensuring safe passage through to eternal life that drove much of medieval thinking. Some chroniclers tell us that the reign of MacBeth was a remarkably fruitful one with good crop yields - a period of warmth and relative plenty that descended into the later medieval period marked by war, famine, cold and hunger.

The other driving force of the 11th century was dynastic ambition between the competing Gaelic kinship groups. The MacDuffs of Fife had been defeated and their chief exiled to England. When Malcolm Canmore returned to reclaim the throne for his dynasty MacDuff was one of his chief supporters and was given an elite position close to the Royal household. Dalginch, according to the law book known as the Regiam Majestatem, was his chief place of justice, and recent research has suggested that it was located on the mound that is now Northhall cemetery. Markinch was the religious centre that sat alongside the Earl's legal hosting place.

Markinch may also have been a military hosting place given its central position within Fife. The area of the Balbirnie caravan site and part of Dixon Park was once known as Inchunie or Inchawnie, the gathering place and we can imagine it as a sea of tents when the Fife army was mustered by their traditional leader MacDuff of MacDuff.

Earning a Living in the 12th century

The economy of Medieval Markinch is difficult to outline but we have some clues based mainly on place-names and a little archaeology. We know that pigs and dairy cattle were kept because of a charter of around 1150 referring to the church revenue of one Markinch pig and 20 "bolls of cheese. Beef cattle were probably also kept by the lord on the higher ground as we once had a farm called Bow (cattle) House where Dalginch Farm is now located. The herding of sheep is implied by the place-name Auchmuty, literally "the river crossing



place of the castrated rams”.



There was also at least one fulling mill between Balfarg and Balbirnie where woollen cloths were pounded by hammers driven by a water mill. This has been excavated and produced some pottery imported from as far away as London along with a coin of King John of England and so the town was not completely isolated from southern culture.

It is also more than likely that coal was extracted using simple open cast methods or bell pits. The edge of a coal seam ran right through the town from south to north through the caravan park, up Northhall Road and round the back of the cemetery before looping across to Black Law on the golf course. We have one possible and another definite reference to its mining within the parish in the medieval period. When the MacDuffs transferred their focus from Markinch to Falkland in the 1160s there is some evidence that they secured their coal interests in

Markinch. If this interpretation of the Pittenhaggles charter is correct then it is the earliest indication of coal mining in Scotland. Northhall was once known as Prickhilly, a place where coal was “pricked” from the ground. Of course, iron mining would have existed alongside coal mining, particularly at Balgonie, the “farm of the smiths” as it is in Gaelic. The building of the church in the first half of the 1100s would have opened up at least one big quarry at Northhall and possibly another at Sythrum. The title deeds of people at Northhall still make reference to Hole Acre next to where the quarry was sited. The time when the church was built would have seen many different trades converging on Markinch - tilers, plumbers, wrights, rope-makers as well as masons and quarrymen.

“Tourism”

Nor should we overlook the importance of the passing pilgrim trade to the local economy. At least two of the routes to St Andrews converged upon Markinch and we probably had at one time a very beautiful church building containing perhaps a relic of St Drostan as an added attraction to the devotees on their way to the shrine of St Andrew or the black cross of St Margaret.

Fun & Games

Did the good people of Markinch ever enjoy them-

selves? Well, although work



was hard they had more saints days or holidays than we have today. There is no written evidence but the so-called Playfields on the other side of Markinch Hill may well have been a place of recreation, either for religious miracle plays or for team games similar to shinty, hurling or football. The burn ran closer to Markinch Hill in the medieval period and there would have been adequate dry land surrounded by a natural amphitheatre to host many sorts of games, perhaps in conjunction with the regular legal proceedings at Northhall.

Names from the Past

Do we have any names coming down to us from the charters of these days? Well, of course there were the names of the big landowners. We have already mentioned the MacDuff Earls of Fife who were the principal landowners but when their focus of interest turned to Falkland and Culross and the sheriff court moved to Cupar other knights held the land in exchange for feudal service. We have reference to John of Balbirnie and his kinsman MacDuff of Balbir-

nie, probably clan chief and equal in status to the Earl. There is Aviel of Strathleven, the old name for the shire of Markinch, and John of Balfour and Adam of Cameron. Mentioned several times as a witness is Hugh of Markinch, the Earl's clerk. He would no doubt have been responsible for keeping a record of legal cases along with another possible clerk known simply as Ness of Dalginch. It is likely that all the legal papers were stripped from the Markinch archives when Edward I passed though in 1296. There are four important women mentioned in the charters - Joanna of Balfarg who reclaimed her dowry in front of the guardians of Scotland, Margaret de Valognes and her daughter Mary who were instrumental in gifting the glebe to the church.

Serfs, Slaves and Villeins

But what of the common people? Only two names remarkably survive of the naifs and serfs of the medieval period. A legal dispute preserves the name of Alwin



Cameron who would have been buried at Markinch in the late 1200s. His name is interesting because it is partly of english origin and partly gaelic demonstrating the slow transition from one language to another over this period. Of course the nobility spoke a mixture of Norman French, English and Gaelic with Latin being the language of the clergy. In Markinch a few Gaelic place-names survive such as Balgonie, Balbirnie, Sythrum, Auchmuty and Ballenkirk but

by the time of Bannockburn the population would almost exclusively be english speaking with a few pockets of gaelic speaking families in the country districts. Alwin Cameron's son farmed on Tullybreck and was called Maurice Sutherlin, a name that has its roots entirely in the english language or scots as it was by then confusingly known.

War, Famine & Pestilence

The later medieval period saw a steady decline in Markinch's fortunes with weather deteriorating, plague rampant and incessant wars. To add to that, the Macduffs and the Earls transferred their attentions to other parts of Scotland and Fife before the true line ended with Countess Isabella. This period is in many ways even more obscure than the period that preceded it.

Bruce Manson 2015

(continued from page 1)

Lieutenant of Fife, Robert Balfour. The group inspected recent archaeological discoveries.

The party also heard short talks from Bruce Manson of Markinch Heritage Group about the history of the church and the ongoing archaeological projects, and Amanda McFarlane from Fife Coast & Countryside Trust spoke about the Fife Pilgrim Way and the links to Markinch.

After a light lunch, kindly provided by Jessica Balfour, the party were given a tour of the church, the tower and the churchyard.

Photo shows L-R Bruce Manson, Amanda McFarlane, Robert Balfour, Lord and Lady Hope, John Wood and Rev Alistair McLeod.

Photo & text by Ken Wilkie

VISIT BY LORD HIGH COMMISSIONER



Exhibition throws light on History of Markinch Community Council

As part of its community-engagement programme, Markinch Community Council held an Open Day in May that promoted the work they undertake and explained some of their plans for the future, including supporting the Pilgrim's Way.

A central part of the Open Day was a display explaining the history of the Community Council and the preceding bodies that fulfilled the 'town council' role for the residents of Markinch.

Community Councillors spent several happy hours of preparation in the Fife Council Archives, which is of course currently housed in Markinch. They consulted (and photographed) many of the surviving minute books and reproduced a selection of the most interesting stories for the Open Day display panels. These included instructions in 1954 requiring the Council to write to the 'Military Authorities' suggesting that part of Markinch should be used for flamethrower practice!

As well as the historical display, the Community Council was also delighted to be able to display the original Provost's Chain at the event. This valuable item is normally housed in the Kirkcaldy Museum where its condition can be monitored. However, with a representative from the Museum standing guard, this rarely seen artefact formed a centre point to the historical exhibition.

Pete Wadley



Image: Members of the Community Council with the Provost's chain on loan from Fife Cultural and Leisure Trust.

THIS EDITION'S MYSTERY PHOTOS - HAVE YOU ANY INFORMATION?
WHO? WHERE? WHEN?



This is a long shot but may stir some interest or someone just may have similar ones in their family album. The pictures are from Kate McCombie. Kate was 96 recently. She would like to find out who is in the pictures, where they were taken and when.

Background Info:

Kate thinks the wedding is in 1920s and reckons it is at the church, but I'm not sure about that. Her sister-in law was a pianist and played at dances etc so maybe this was 'her' band without her, but Kate does not know. It could also have been taken in the 1920s.

Could the wedding have been taken at the manse, because on the right of the photo is a sash window? In those days it was quite common for weddings to be conducted in the manse or even at the bride's home and not in church. None of the women have hats and they would not have gone into church without a hat. The old minister is Rev Brydon, minister of St Drostan's until 1930, so unless he was a guest the ceremony must have taken place before that. The dresses look early 1920s after the war when skirts became shorter.

Also, Alison Taylor would like to know who painted this plate (left)? It was bought by Nancy Schofield (nee Lawson) as an anniversary present for her Uncle John and Aunt Chris from Cadham.

Responses please to rm.magna@btinternet.com or bruce.manson@btinternet.com (editor).

Mima Magna

