



News from the Past

New Theory about Niche in the Old Tower

Markinch's oldest building still has many secrets to reveal. Some time ago, Mhari-Claire Semple of Glasgow University surveyed the church for a Phd thesis. She was puzzled with an oval shaped niche right at the top of the tower (lower photo).

She has now compared it with several other early medieval towers in Scotland and has concluded that this is all that's left of a "safe deposit box" for the early church's most sacred object. Whether this was something like a bell, a book or the bones of a saint we will never know.

Her theory is that on special feast days this object was brought out of its place of safekeeping and ceremoniously displayed from a balcony high up above the church. The arch leading to the balcony is still almost intact, hidden above the ceiling of the present building.

Markinch was on the pilgrim route to St Andrews and the ceremony may have been a local attraction either on St Drostan's day (15th December) or the day of John the



Baptist (24th June). Perhaps modern day pilgrims may be encouraged to visit the town and spend some much needed cash in the town's shops, pubs and cafes. It will however require some local lobbying as Falkland is already making a case.

Facelift reveals Markinch Telegraph Office

A recent facelift to offices at the foot of Commercial Street revealed some old lettering that reads :-

GROCER & WINE
MERCHANT

ALEXANDER M.
CRAIK

STAMP AND
TELEGRAPH OFFICE

It is known that Craik was Provost of Markinch between the Wars and one of the photographs in Bill Fiet's book shows the Provost's lamp (the stump still remains on the building).

It is thought that the shop was previously occupied by Thomas Gibson, Postmaster.

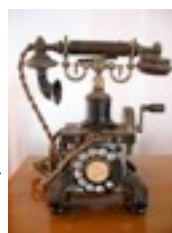
Could this once have been Markinch Post Office?



WHO WAS FIRST TO HAVE THE TELEPHONE IN MARKINCH?

Still with a communications theme, we turn to some of Markinch's old telephone directories to find that it was once a lot easier to remember telephone numbers. We also get a clue as to which people in Markinch were the technological pioneers of their day.

It seems that only businesses are currently online but more information on private



subscribers will be available later this year. Low number subscribers from the pre-War era include :-

The factor of Balbirnie Estate (1), John Haig (4), Police Office (8), R. Aitken Electrical Engineers (15), D. Richie Plumbers (17), Shepherd & Ogilvy Solicitors (19), A. Gordon doctor (26), Ferguson & Philip chemist (29).



FAMOUS FOLK JUST PASSING THROUGH OR STAYING A WHILE

A newspaper cutting handed to me recently by Harry Smith reminds us that not all notable Markinch folk were actually born or brought up in the town. Some were passing through and others, like the poet Alan Bold, came here to retire or to write.



Alan Bold was the author of the article and he begins by reminding us that Star was the setting for Annie Swan's "Gates of Eden" (1887). He had heard of Markinch from the lips of Hugh MacDiarmid who hobnobbed with the folk of Markinch from the Balfours to the barmaids.

Bold was installed initially in the Writer's Cottage (East Lodge) courtesy of the Scottish Arts Council. It is no coincidence therefore that one of his first poems on arrival was about the Stob Cross :-

*"Outside that lodge in the starlight,
Stands a cross like a sentry of stone,*

*And it waits with a human message,
No-one survives alone"*

His pen moves on to earlier literary figures passing through

the town - to the Reverend Thomas Somerville (father in law of the world's first woman scientist). He spent the summer of 1760 in the manse at that time occupied by the Rev. Pinkerton (he of the stocking of death). Somerville describes one of the young Miss Balfours of the time "a great beauty and the most frank and cheerful young lady I had before seen".

He mentions Thomas Clunie, the schoolmaster of Markinch who was a friend of Robert Burns, sending him the original version of "Ca' the ewes to the knowes". His thoughts turn to famous literary figures of more recent times including Duncan Glen who married the stationmaster's daughter. Walks around Markinch were often the subject matter of his atmospheric poems.

'Late at nicht we come ower the
Cuinin Hill, through the trees closin
in, and oot by the tinkers' camp,
wi daurk bulbous tents and tethered
horses. We walk very quaitly close
thegither but fast at the soond o
their howlin and wailin that's mebbe
singin. And the stirrin o horses.

Bold recalls writers in residence at Balbirnie such as Tom Scott (The Tree 1977). Douglas Eadie's film The Garden Beyond (1977) was filmed in Balbirnie House and the Writer's House was also home to actors Henry Stamper and John Bett.

In Bold's own novel, *East is West*, one of the characters wintered in a town named "Skurl", based loosely, according to the writer, around Markinch as it was in 1987.

*"Having spent her weekend
walking in the woods of Skurl,
Belinda Capaldi thought she would
spend Saturday evening in the*

*village itself. [...] Belinda was
astonished when she entered the bar.
All the customers were done up in
cowboy gear, as was the barman.
They wore stetsons, cowboy boots,
jeans, waistcoats and carried
facsimile six-shooters in holsters".*

The events took place in the Titanic Hotel (a fictitious merging of the Wayfarer's and the Galloway Inn). The other references paint the picture of the town as Bold saw it in the dark years after the closure of Haig's.

Records of famous temporary residents crop up in the most unlikely source material, like the chemist's book from the late 19th century. This shows that a prescription was delivered to the Countess of March who was presumably visiting one of the big houses in the area.

Of course we could claim to have hundreds of famous people passing through Markinch, including royalty, if we include those traveling by train!

There was a rather poignant news article of 1878 in the Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser. Apparently the dignitaries of Markinch had heard that the Prince of Wales was on a train heading down from Aberdeen. They quickly made up a presentation of the town's best flowers, fruit and vegetables and waited at the station (no doubt in top hat and tails) for the train to stop. Of course it didn't, steaming right through at full speed and leaving the embarrassed officials to pack the presentation away.

I wonder what Alan Bold would have made of the scene.

B. M.



SNIPPETS FROM THE SALEROOMS

The following item came up for auction recently -

A 9CT GOLD AND GOLD MAIL PURSE with chain handle, engraved MRS JOHN D DIXON MARKINCH NOVEMBER 1917, kid lined. It was sold along with a reprinted article from the Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette, 13 December 1917, recording the presentation by the Town Council of a silver rose bowl to provost John Dixon and the present of a gold purse to Mrs Dixon "who had always proved herself



a willing assistant in every good cause (applause)"
Co-incidentally, the BBC has recently published an online database of pictures including one of Provost Dickson himself (above).



PLACE-NAME EXPLAINED BY FLOODS



Recent flooding around Balbirnie reminds us of the origins of the name "Balbirnie". According to the book "The Place-names of Fife, Vol. 2" , Simon Taylor and Gilbert Märkus reckon it is from the Gaelic words *baile braon* meaning "**Farm of the damp place**" in English.

In correspondence, Simon says that if you want to get an idea what medieval Fife was like, "just add water".

B. M.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF OLD MARKINCH NOW ONLINE

John Beare has drawn our attention to some very detailed late 19th century photographs of Markinch now available for online viewing from the George Washington Wilson Collection of Aberdeen University. Click the link below and then type in "Markinch".

<http://digitool.abdn.ac.uk/R/P4PGYNERX7NGPD3M65MYVF7UVD89KK4JR8RMRIM7MS9S275YP9-02734>



RECENT RESEARCH ON MARKINCH PARISH CHURCH

Markinch Heritage Group will be providing the historical background to a proposed archaeological project designed to throw light on the Church's age and possibly even help identify its builder. As a contribution towards the research Maureen Brand has been examining old parish registers.

Different ideas have been put forward regarding the dates when the the main church building was enlarged and heightened. We know that there were major pre-Reformation works by Prior Hepburn around 1520 before written records were kept. However, examining the session minutes, it certainly seems as if something major was also going on between 1685 and 1687. In amongst all the payments recorded to poor people, "highland men" and the occasional "supplicant gentlewoman" we find the following :-

1685

Mending the church seats		1/8
Buying trees and deals for ?	£18	5/1
mending the kirk		9/4
mending the kirk windows	£4	

1686

Buying lime stones		8/-
lime stones		8/-
slaters pointing and mending kirk	£8	
lime stones		12/-
mending and ? the clock		6/-
upholding the kirk windows		4/-

1687

carrying slates	£1	10/-
mending the bell	£12	13/-
timber for the loft	£3	13/-
bringing lime stones	£2	8/-
carrying lime and sand	£1	18/-
lime stones		16/-



Roof lines (raggles) showing different building phases from inside the loft

slater		£3
deals, trees for the loft		£15
the slater for pointing the steeple	£19	
the wright		£6
mason for laying the kirk floor		£4
mending the loft		£4

Whether this was a major refurbishment or an actual rebuilding will have to await further research. In particular there is no evidence yet of stonemasons being called in other than for floor laying.

However, the most expensive item bought during these three years (for a whopping £140 6/-) was the new mortcloth with velvet, fringes and lining.

NEW RESEARCH PAPER PUBLISHED ON THE MARKINCH RIOTS OF 1797



The latest Markinch Heritage Group Research Paper will be available shortly. Written by Maureen Brand and entitled "Markinch Volunteer Militia 1799-1802, A Brief Outline" the report describes the unexpected outcome of a Government call up campaign in the late 18th century. Please send all Newsletter articles to bruce.manson@btinternet.com or markinchhg@yahoo.co.uk



SCOTTISH VALUATION ROLLS GO ONLINE

The National Records of Scotland is delighted to announce that the Valuation Rolls for 1905 and 1915 are now available via ScotlandsPeople online and in the ScotlandsPeople Centre in Edinburgh.

Valuation Rolls are annual lists of virtually every property in Scotland who owned it and who lived in it. Often it will give the occupation of the tenant.

The online series for 1905 alone contains over 2.4 million indexed names and over 74,000 digital images. They cover every kind of building, structure or property in Scotland which were assessed as having a rateable value.

alogists, historians and other researchers can now discover fresh insights into their ancestors' lives through viewing these records. As the 1905 rolls appear between census years, they will be invaluable for genealogists who are trying to fill in gaps about their ancestors.

Currently only two years are available online, 1905 and 1915.

There are, of course, valuation rolls for every year from 1855 – 1989 which can be consulted in the Historical Search Room of the National Records of Scotland Princes Street, Edinburgh. This is a free service, but you will need to get a readers' ticket. See the web-

House No.	Description	Address	Name & Occupation	Name & Occupation
238	Land	Woodside		R. Gilles & Co., Buchanary
239	Houses & gardens	do	John Henderson, Paper Maker, Woodside	
240	House & garden	do	Heirs of Mr Wood, Hornston	John Bell, Wright
241	Houses & gardens	do	David Balhune, Labourer, Woodside	
242	Houses & gardens	do	George Braid, Waterston Hoop Mill	
243	Houses & gardens	do	David Bell, Wright, Foodtown	
244	Houses & gardens	do	Richard Craig, Mason, Buchanary High	
245	Houses & gardens	do	John Goodall, Woodside	
246	Houses & gardens	do	David Mill, Smith, Stanton Kirk	
247	House & garden	do	Pearson & Jackson, Stripes Kirk	Alex. Ritchie, Publican
248	Houses & gardens	do	David Bell, Wright, Foodtown	

VR101/6/275 - Fife valuation roll 1860 showing people living in Woodside. .

The rolls also reveal much about the changing social fabric of Scotland at this time - such as the growth in women owning property and running businesses, the rise in sports and recreation clubs, the development of music halls and theatres, and the expansion of railway hotels. As the rolls include details about rents and the value of property, they will also help researchers to learn more about the cost of living during this period.

Fully-searchable by name and address, the records list the names of owners, tenants and occupiers of each property - so gene-

site listed below for details:

<http://www.nas.gov.uk/searchRooms/preparing.asp>

However, before you travel to Edinburgh, you might be interested to know the local Fife Council archive (which is of course in Markinch) holds a set from 1872 onwards. Call first on 01592 583352

Valuation Rolls can be used for a number of different purposes:

If you are interested in the history of your house, you can use the rolls to see who lived in your property in a particular year or years.



Post Office	12	do.	David Simpson, The Bangalow, Lundin Links	H. M. Postmaster-General
House and Garden	14	do.	do.	do.
do.	16	do.	do.	Rev. Samson M. Walker
do.	18	do.	do.	H. M. Postmaster-General; David J. Hutchison (I.O.)
do.	20	do.	do.	Elizabeth Hutchison
do.	20	do.	do.	Mrs Christina Davidson
Public Institute		do.	Tallis, Russell, & Co., Ltd., p. John Black, secy.	Proprietors
House		do.	do.	David Campbell (I.O.)
House and Garden	30	do.	Robert Ballingall, per Nicoll & Mackenzie, solicitors, Leven	James M. Thomson
do.	32	do.	Marie Baillie, per Andrew Robertson, 9 Park Place, Dunfermline	John Duncan
do.	36	do.	do.	Alexander Speed, miner
do.	34	do.	do.	Frank Lawson, millworker
do.	38	do.	do.	Arthur Ferrester, insurance agent
Limeyard		do.	do.	John Mackie, mason
Bowling Green and Pavilion		do.	Markinch Bowling Club, per Andrew C. Sinclair, Cadham Terrace, Markinch	Proprietors

Above :- VR101/84/452 - Part of Betson Street in 1938

You can find out who owned the property and who actually lived in it.

Other research areas that valuation rolls can be used for include: the history of buildings, occupations and communities. Shops, churches, lighthouses, schools, hospitals and railway stations are just some of the many buildings which are all detailed and provide an excellent insight into the lives of our ancestors.

Although they are not a detailed census, at times valuation rolls may still prove to be useful to genealogists. There are four reasons for this:

Firstly, they are annual so if a researcher is following the history of somebody who disappears between censuses they might use a valuation roll to see when they disappear.

Secondly, they list non-residential property such as cinemas and shops, so if you are look-

ing at the layout of the street your ancestors lived in the valuation roll may be more helpful than a census.

Thirdly, partly because of the limited personal information, the valuation rolls do not fall under data protection legislation. As you know the census in Scotland is closed for 100 years. Not so the valuation rolls. If a researcher wanted to know where their grandfather was living in 1939 or who owned the factory in a particular street in 1956 they can use a valuation roll.

Fourthly, the valuation roll, unlike the census, lists the owners of property. Family historians may be interested in the owner of the property an ancestor rented because this might also prove to be his employer. This is particularly common in mining and agricultural communities, two groups common in Fife

Pete Wadley

MARKINCH MAN WHO WENT ON TO BRILLIANT CHURCH AND ACADEMIC CAREER



Shortly after the last Newsletter was published the death was announced of the Very Reverend Professor Robert Davidson. A plumber's son who grew up in Victoria Terrace, Davidson moved on through a brilliant academic career to

occupy one of the highest offices in the land.

Not only was he Moderator but he had the distinction of teaching in all four ancient Scottish Universities.



A FRESH LOOK AT THE STOB CROSS

The earliest reference to the Stob Cross that I can find is from the Reverend Thomson's First Statistical Account written in the 1790s. He says *"The publick road from Markinch passes the west end of [Markinch Hill] and, on a rising ground, stands a broad stone about 7 feet high called the Stobb Cross. It is a very coarse piece of work, without any sculpture or characters on it... [....] Vulgar tradition says that it was erected to the memory of a gentleman who fell at this spot in a mortal encounter with one of his neighbours. [....] The present Earl of Leven has caused it to be secured by facing up the earth with a wall of stone and lime."*



The second statistical account made no mention of the feature but the historian Alexander Laing devoted six pages to it in his 1876 book on Newburgh and Lindores Abbey.

Laing introduced the idea of the cross being a "girth cross" marking the boundaries of an ecclesiastical sanctuary. His theory was that the word "stob"

signifying "post" referred to one of four post crosses around Markinch, three of which he thought were lost. He backs this theory up with reference to *"the name Holy Ground which still attaches to a spot within the precincts of Markinch Stob Cross"*.

Unfortunately no other crosses (other than a small wayside cross) have been found around the town to substantiate the theory. Also, the Holy Ground seems also to have been some distance from Stob Cross nearer to Northhall.

Cunningham, writing in 1907 supports Laing's theory and adds some detail about the role of sanctuary crosses elsewhere in Scotland. However, he produces no additional evidence other than mistakenly assuming that Laing's reference to the Holy Ground meant that it was "in the shadow of the cross", a statement not borne out by other evidence. The sanctuary idea is repeated in the 3rd Statistical Account of 1952.

Perhaps because of its distance from the church, the idea has grown up in recent years that the cross was once removed from the church precincts and transplanted to its present location. There was even a recent attempt to erect it at the top of Commercial Street as part of a civic improvement scheme.

However, there is no evidence for this, other than the mistaken belief that it is inserted into a modern base. What seems

like a base looking from below is in fact the retaining wall built by the Earl of Leven in the 18th century. In fact the cross's location close to ancient estate boundaries indicates that it has always stood where it is now.

To examine the stone properly you have to get up close. At the back, on the western side (left hand picture), is the much weathered outline of an elegant tapering cross whilst on the side facing the road (below) is a cross that appears to be more crudely executed. When seen in the correct light, the east facing sculpture even has the traces of two sets of chisel marks, one narrow and the other broad, gouging out the stone to form the shape of the cross. The work was evidently unfinished because the background stonework has



not been removed. This gives us a clue as to what has happened at the top of the cross where two chunks of stone to the right and left of the main pillar of the cross appear to have been removed in an effort to create a simple freestanding cross following the shape of the one at the back. However, the work at the front has not the draughtsmanship of



the work at the back and is a partial, clumsy replica.

The western facing cross is similar to a category of Pictish cross known until recently as Type III except that it has no decoration and no Irish style wheel connecting the arms. In fact the only recognisable marking is some graffiti, the letter "R" and what looks like the date 1652. (This was a year when Cromwellian troops consolidated their defences around Scotland).

None of the recent writers who have attempted to date the cross have made any sense of it as it does not seem to fall into any known category.

It may, however, give us clues to two separate and very distinct periods in Markinch's history - the Pictish period and the Reformation. Here is one theory of why the cross looks the way it does.

The stone might once have been an elaborately decorated Pictish cross slab perhaps with a cross on the western side resembling that on the Aberlemno stone (above centre). Its cross also faces west along with several other *in situ* cross-slabs (eg the Maiden Stone).

On the other side may have been a lively scene depicting a battle as was common with these types of monument (this may even have been the origin of the local folktale that it represented the spot where one neighbour killed another).

Perhaps, fired with religious zeal, a group of stonemasons (either local lads or detached



from a passing army) took it upon themselves to make a political and religious statement by removing any idolatrous decoration from the village cross. Their aim would be to simplify and purify an existing Christian monument which in their eyes was connected to the old religious order. How did they do it?

They may have begun by chiseling off the Pictish decoration around the existing cross on the western side., leaving the broad outline of the original cross intact. This would explain why this side has a cross with a finer outline than the other side.

Next, they may have decided to erase the images on the eastern side and to carve a replica cross matching the one at the back, hence the chisel marks.

To complete the project, and create the simplest possible form of freestanding cross, they may have next decided to remove entirely the stone around the cross. This could have been their undoing. Although the stone edging has been nibbled away successfully on the edge of the slab nearest to Markinch, they seem to have done the same on the other side with disastrous results.

A blow, perhaps from a chisel or hammer, seems to have removed an entire chunk of stone, defacing the base of the monument. The project may have

been abandoned, uncompleted at this point and the matter forgotten for over a century until the Earl of Leven built a retaining wall and Reverend Thomson described the monument for the first time in print.

Iconoclasm was common in the 16th and 17th century. In England (1642) Parliament created the Orwellian-sounding "Committee for the Destruction of Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry". In Scotland matters seem to have been taken in hand at a more local level. Other crosses in St Andrews and Portmoak also seem to have been "altered" in a similar way, and a group of Covenanters returning from Perth destroyed completely MacDuff's cross that once stood outside Newburgh.

Defacing cross-slabs was common in 16th and 17th century Scotland. Often they were simply reused for flooring as at Crail or broken up to mend churchyard walls. More drastic treatment was sometimes carried, an example being the magnificent Hilton of Cadboll cross slab which had its cross side completely chiseled off in 1678 and replaced by the coat of arms of the local laird.

If the theory set out above is correct then the Stob Cross could have 8th or 9th century Pictish origins with major modifications taking place around the time of the Reformation. Even if incorrect it invites us to take a closer look at a monument that we tend to take for granted and perhaps a closer look also at how our town's beliefs changed over time.

Bruce Manson